



Viewpoint paper

A manifesto for mindful tourism: Managing tourist experiences through consciousness

Milica Vujičić^a, Uglješa Stankov^{b,*}  and Jana Čarkadžić^a

^a Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

^b University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Novi Sad, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Tourism has long been positioned as a driver of sustainable development, yet its implementation often clashes with market pressures, consumer contradictions, and environmental challenges. This viewpoint paper introduces a manifesto for mindful tourism that seeks to reframe the discourse by embedding consciousness at the heart of tourist experience management. Building on evidence from mindfulness studies and tourism scholarship, we argue that mindfulness, defined as purposeful, non-judgmental attention to the present moment, offers transformative potential for both consumers and providers. While tourists frequently exhibit discrepancies between pro-sustainability attitudes and actual behaviors, mindfulness provides a pathway for aligning intentions with actions. Mindful tourist experiences challenge the prevailing hedonic and distracted consumption model by fostering presence, acceptance, and deeper engagement with people, places, and services. They also hold implications for managing tourist well-being, strengthening resilience in hospitality work, and advancing sustainability agendas. Thus, this paper advocates for a theoretical framework that situates mindfulness within contemporary tourism management practice. In doing so, it offers a call to scholars and practitioners to critically examine mindfulness as both a coping mechanism for service challenges and a long-term strategy for industry viability.

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* Corresponding author

Uglješa Stankov
ugljesa.stankov@dgt.uns.ac.rs

INTRODUCTION

The proclaimed and idealistic visions of modern tourism, as a sustainable industry that contributes to economic and societal development, are often faced with serious limitations and practical issues in their implementation (Hall, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021; Vasiljević et al., 2011). Tourism, as a responsible and sustainable sector, is still a long way off, as some of the most innovative and promising efforts immediately run into the harsh realities of a highly competitive market. Consumers play a significant role in this narrative. A sizable number of customers continue to demonstrate a marked discrepancy between their stated and actual behavior. The most egregious example is the contradiction between declaring support for pro-environmental and

sustainability initiatives while acting contrary to them (Pulido-Fernández & López-Sánchez, 2016) or the present trend toward increased air travel demand is incompatible with climate-related sustainability goals (Kantenbacher et al., 2018); all adding to the collective unconsciousness of the environmental problems (Lew, 2020; Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020).

Rotating in Consciousness: A Shift to the Meta-Awareness of the Tourism Industry's Reality

There has been an increase in the number of mindful consumers, as well as mindfulness-based products and services in Western countries (Ninivaggi, 2018; Wilson, 2016), leading to a growing number of more conscious consumers (Fischer et al., 2017) and

mindfulness-based products and services that spill over into the tourist arena (Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020). Here, mindfulness is understood as a person's capability to self-regulate attention by stepping away from the stream of thoughts and adopting the role of a non-reactive, non-judging observer (an orthogonal perspective) of what is unfolding in the mind and the nearby surroundings in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Many researchers point to the transformational power of mindfulness and argue that greater present awareness can help address the (Stankov et al., 2022) socio-economic and environmental problems of global society (Goto-Jones, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020; Steidle, 2017; Wamsler et al., 2018; Wilson & Pile, 2015). Gradually, the tourism industry is becoming aware of the transformative potential of mindfulness, and commercial applications are increasingly emerging to leverage the benefits of meta-awareness in tourist experiences (Kutluk Bozkurt, 2021; McGoarty et al., 2020; Stankov, 2023).

Changing the Narrative: Mindful Tourism Experiences as a Catalyst for a New Tourism Logic

In the academic tourism literature, mindfulness has been recognized for its beneficial effects on tourist well-being and its transformative influence on tourist experiences (Chen et al., 2014, 2017; Farkic et al., 2021; Kirwin et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2019; Stankov & Filimonau, 2019), as well as for its potential impact on the industry's sustainability agenda and employee performance (Chan, 2019; Errmann et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2020; Lengyel, 2018).

In practical terms, being in a mindful state during consumption challenges prevailing notions of tourists as superficial and easily distracted consumers (Stankov, Filimonau, Gretzel, et al., 2020). It also challenges the predominantly hedonic nature of tourist experiences (Stankov & Gretzel, 2020). Here, the concept of mindfulness becomes relevant, as the main components of mindful tourist experiences, paying attention to the experience, living in the present, and cultivating non-elaborate and non-judgmental awareness, come into play. For instance, various mindfulness-based techniques can be applied to tourist activities, such as mindful walking, hiking, or dining. (Galante et al., 2021). Consumers who adopt a "living-in-the-now" mentality direct their attention to a specific emotion, object, or the entirety of the moment and its surroundings. This may encourage conscious

consumers to engage more fully with what is occurring in the present. With regard to the non-judgmental awareness associated with mindfulness, one may argue that a thoughtful customer will be more forgiving of hospitality service shortcomings. For instance, if visitors practice patience—one of the key mindfulness attitudes—delays in service delivery are less likely to contribute significantly to consumer dissatisfaction (Stankov et al., 2020; Stankov & Filimonau, 2020).

In an academic sense, this manifesto seeks to articulate the notion of mindful tourists and mindful tourist experiences, thereby reinforcing scholarly discourse on the societal importance of this emerging trend in tourist consumption. There is an urgent need to critically evaluate mindfulness, its impact on the tourist experience, and the challenges and opportunities it presents for both academics and tourism professionals. Furthermore, there is a need to construct a theoretical framework of mindful tourist experiences, grounded in existing knowledge of mindful consumer behavior and informed by the specific features of traditional tourist experiences. Thus, this manifesto views mindful tourist experiences not only as a potentially viable approach for providing immediate relief to visitors and tourism staff facing frequent stress and service challenges, but also as a long-term strategy for ensuring the industry's viability (Stankov & Filimonau, 2023).

Further research agenda

Future research should empirically examine how mindfulness influences tourists' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors across different contexts, from business to leisure travel. Investigating co-creation components such as visitor participation, and staff training could help identify the most effective practices. This stream of research would not only expand scholarly understanding but also offer practical guidance for tourism providers. Evidence-based insights could help businesses design mindful experiences that balance well-being goals with economic sustainability.

Technology-assisted mindfulness opens a promising field for tourism research (Stankov, Filimonau, Gretzel, et al., 2020). Scholars should investigate how digital mindfulness tools can reduce stress, transform fear of missing out into joy of missing out, and promote healthier technology use during travel (Brinkmann, 2019; Volo, 2021). Such studies could compare technology-supported mindfulness with digital detox approaches to assess relative benefits. Research should also evaluate how emerging technologies can measure mindfulness outcomes

more accurately and enhance co-creation processes (Sedlmeier & Theumer, 2020). By doing so, tourism can position mindfulness not as digital escapism but as a deliberate tool for meaningful engagement in technologically saturated environments.

Another important direction involves examining the limitations and potential misuses of mindfulness in tourism. Some consumers may resist or misinterpret mindful practices, while businesses may commodify mindfulness in ways that undermine authenticity (Kristensen, 2018; Purser, 2019). Future studies should critically assess whether mindfulness in tourism risks reinforcing neoliberal values, self-absorption, or inauthentic experiences (Walsh, 2016). Cross-disciplinary research can shed light on how to safeguard mindfulness from being reduced to a mere marketing trend. Ultimately, mindful tourism scholarship must remain transparent about definitions, assumptions, and philosophical stances while embracing its evolving, multifaceted nature (Ivtzan, 2016).

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