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GLOBAL TRENDS IN TOURIST BEHAVIOUR AND THE DIGITALISATION OF THE TOURISM SECTOR: INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR TOURISM RESEARCH

MAGHERU OTILIA[1*], MAGDIN TATJANA[1], STĂNCIOIU AURELIA-FELICIA[2], IOSIM IASMINA[1]

[1]University of Life Sciences “King Mihai I” from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania
[2]Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
*Corresponding author: otilia.magheru.iosud@usvt.ro

Abstract: *This paper synthesises the main global trends in tourist behaviour and tourism digitalisation, based on recent reports of international organisations and industry actors (WTTC, Euromonitor, Booking.com, Amadeus, Hilton). On the demand side, it identifies growing interest in authentic local experiences and gastronomy, wellness, nature-based and cooler destinations, nostalgic, slow and sustainable travel, and the influence of social media and film-induced tourism. Digitalisation – from artificial intelligence to contactless payments and virtual reality – is analysed as a cross-cutting trend that becomes the infrastructure of the tourist experience. The paper concludes that trends are not uniform and must be adapted to each destination’s resources and identity, not transferred mechanically.*

• Introduction

In 2025, international tourist arrivals reached about **1.52 billion** (+4% compared with 2024) and receipts about USD 1.9 trillion [5]. Behind these figures, the profile of demand is changing.

Destinations are dynamic systems in which demand and supply change continuously [4], and technology now supports the co-creation of the tourist experience [2].

Aim: to synthesise global trends in tourist behaviour and in tourism digitalisation and to derive benchmarks for tourism research.

• Material and method

Trend reports published in 2023–2026 by UN Tourism, WTTC, Euromonitor, Booking.com, Amadeus, Hilton, Euronews, Forbes and Revfine, plus academic literature on smart tourism. Starting from the synthesis by Tănase [4], each source was consulted in its original version. Bibliographical method and qualitative content analysis.

• Results and discussions

The sources converge on eight directions of demand (Figure 1).

Digitalisation – a cross-cutting trend. Artificial intelligence, chatbots, the Internet of Things, smart rooms, contactless payments, virtual and augmented reality and robots are integrated along the whole visitor journey, from inspiration to sharing. 41% of travellers are interested in using AI to plan trips and 66% want technology to find authentic experiences [1].

Smart tourism integrates data, connectivity and real-time services [2]: personalisation becomes a baseline expectation. Counter-trend: 44% of travellers avoid tagging lesser-known places, to protect them from crowds [1].

Figure 1. Eight convergent directions of tourist demand, with an illustrative figure for each (synthesis of the sources)

1 Authentic local experiences and gastronomy
1 in 5
leisure travellers seek new restaurants or culinary experiences [3]

2 Wellness and health
60%
of travellers are interested in longevity retreats [1]

3 Nature, cooler and darker destinations
62%
consider darker-sky destinations [1]

4 Nostalgic and slow travel
58%
of those travelling with children revisit childhood places [3]

5 Sustainable and purposeful travel
75%
intend to choose a form of sustainable travel [6]

6 Social media and film influence
40%
of Gen Z travellers use social media to plan holidays [6]

7 New travel groups
70%
of parents choose destinations by their children’s preferences [3]

8 Price sensitivity and polarisation
+19%
five-star hotel bookings in 2022: luxury stays resilient [6]

• Benchmarks for research

- destinations are dynamic systems – trends are not a static checklist [4];
- trends need contextual adaptation to each destination’s geography, history and culture;
- trends are flexible instruments, not external pressures;
- integration concerns the whole value chain, not only marketing;
- survey figures indicate direction, not representative measurements.

• Conclusions

- Demand is oriented towards authentic local experiences, wellness, nature, nostalgic and slow travel and sustainable, purposeful trips.
- Social media and audiovisual productions increasingly shape destination choice.
- Digitalisation, led by AI, has become the infrastructure of the tourist experience.
- Trends must be adapted to each destination’s resources and identity and treated in research as variables that change over time.

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