

**[Proposed Final Draft] ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism 2021:
*reinforcing cultural heritage protection and community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management***

Preamble

Profound growth and disruption in global tourism, including cultural heritage tourism, has necessitated the revision of the ICOMOS 1999 International Charter for Cultural Tourism (the Charter). In addition to the intensified tourism use of cultural heritage places and destinations, there has been a growing concern about the degradation of cultural heritage along with social, ethical, cultural, environmental and economic rights issues associated with tourism.

In this Charter, cultural heritage tourism refers to all tourism activities in heritage places and destinations, including the diversity and interdependence of their tangible, intangible, cultural and natural dimensions. This Charter recognizes heritage as a common resource, understanding that the governance and enjoyment of these commons are shared rights and responsibilities.

Participation in cultural life with access to cultural heritage is a human right. However, some evolved aspects of tourism have constituted fundamentally unsustainable uses of planetary resources, including cultural and natural heritage. This calls for a charter that advocates responsible and diversified cultural tourism development and management contributing to cultural heritage preservation; community empowerment, social resilience and wellbeing; and a healthy global environment.

Properly planned and responsibly managed cultural heritage tourism, involving participatory governance with diverse cultures, right-holders and stakeholders, can be a powerful vehicle for the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development. Responsible tourism promotes and creates cultural heritage awareness, provides opportunities for personal and community wellbeing and resilience, and builds respect for the diversity of other cultures. It can therefore contribute to intercultural dialogue and cooperation, mutual understanding, and peace-building.

The objectives of this Charter are:

Objective 1 - To place the protection of cultural heritage and community rights at the heart of cultural heritage tourism policy and projects, by providing principles that will inform responsible tourism planning and management for cultural heritage protection, community resilience and adaptation;

Objective 2 - To promote stakeholder collaboration and participatory governance in the stewardship of cultural heritage and management of tourism, applying a people-centered and rights-based approach, emphasizing access, education and enjoyment.

Objective 3 - To guide cultural heritage and tourism management in supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action policy.

Who is this Charter for?

The responsible management of tourism is a shared responsibility of governments, tour operators, tourism businesses, destination managers, marketing organizations, site management authorities, land-use planners, heritage and tourism professionals, civil society and visitors. This Charter is relevant to all of the above as cultural heritage and tourism stakeholders. It provides guidance for heritage and tourism practitioners, professionals, and decision makers within international, national and local government agencies, organizations, institutions and administrations. It aims to be a reference for educators, academics, researchers and students engaged with cultural heritage and tourism. It applies to the management of all cultural heritage properties and to the entire spectrum of their protection, conservation, interpretation, presentation and dissemination activities, since all are connected with, and influenced by, public use and visitation.

The Charter aims to align the work of cultural heritage and tourism stakeholders in the pursuit of positive transformative change, offering principles for regenerative tourism destination management that is conscious of heritage values, as well as their vulnerability and potential. It seeks the fair, ethical and equitable distribution of tourism benefits to and within host communities, contributing towards poverty alleviation. The Charter promotes the ethical governance of cultural heritage and tourism and calls for the integration of its principles into all aspects of cultural heritage tourism.

Background

Branding and marketing of cultural heritage and its unique qualities has encouraged and driven an exponential growth in tourism to heritage destinations. Tourism has significantly impacted towns and cities with historic districts and culturally distinct urban landscapes. It has also impacted historic sites and monuments, along with natural and cultural landscapes. The interest of tourists and the tourism sector in tangible and intangible heritage has contributed towards greater awareness within local communities of the value of their heritage and its critical importance to their quality of life and identity. Indigenous communities, in particular, tend to recognize the fragility of the relationship between people and the land they live on, and the need to ensure that tourism sustains rather than erodes heritage and traditions.

Capitalizing on the increasing global interest in cultural heritage, the tourism industry has developed into a significant component of global, national, regional and local economies. When responsibly planned, developed and managed through participatory governance, tourism can provide direct, indirect and induced benefits across all dimensions of sustainability. However, unmanaged growth in tourism has transformed many places throughout the world, leaving tourism-dependent communities significantly altered and less resilient.

Growing global wealth and connectivity, linked to low-cost travel, has resulted in the evolution of mass tourism in many parts of the world. It has also led to the phenomenon of 'overtourism' characterized by pervasive congestion and unacceptable degradation of tangible and intangible heritage, with associated social, cultural and economic impacts. The widespread promotion, marketing and use of cultural heritage has also caused commodification and gentrification, compromising local communities and cultural integrity, and placing irreplaceable assets at risk. Recognizing that this is not always the case, ill-considered tourism planning and development has had significant negative impacts on numerous destinations, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and host communities.

The use of heritage in the economic growth-based strategies of the tourism industry globally has been remarkably successful. However, it has often failed to deliver equitable benefit-share. Rapid

and insensitive commodification, commercialization and overuse of local culture and heritage has resulted in negative and disruptive impacts across countless destinations. It has also provoked restrictions on rights of use, access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage by local people and visitors alike.

The context within which these matters must be considered includes the climate emergency, environmental degradation, conflicts, disasters, the disruptive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, mass tourism, digital transformation and technological developments. **There is a need and opportunity to recalibrate the perpetual economic growth-based approach to tourism, recognizing and mitigating its unsustainable aspects.**

Any cultural tourism strategy must accept that social responsibility and 'sustainability' are not merely options or brand attributes, but rather necessary commitments and, in fact, a competitiveness asset. In order to remain successful and sustainable in the long term, cultural tourism proponents must put this commitment into practice and become a force that supports community resilience, responsible consumption and production, human rights, gender equality, climate action, and environmental and cultural heritage conservation.

For this reason, the Charter is formulated in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which specifically mention tourism in Targets 8.9, 12b and 14.7. Cultural tourism also has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to Target 11.4 which aims to "strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage". Working towards the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the responsible national, regional and municipal governing institutions have a duty to ensure that the SDGs and their targets are integrated into the planning, management and monitoring of cultural heritage and tourism destinations.

The Principles of the Charter

Recalling the previous Cultural Tourism Charters (1976 and 1999) and other existing doctrine developed by ICOMOS, ICCROM, IUCN, UNESCO, the UNWTO, other relevant NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, agencies and institutions;

Acknowledging that, at the broadest level, natural and cultural heritage is relevant to all people, and that rights of access and enjoyment are linked to the responsibility to respect, understand, appreciate and conserve its universal and particular values;

Affirming that cultural heritage protection and responsible cultural tourism planning and management must be informed by the systematic identification and monitoring of tourism impacts on heritage places, destinations and communities;

Understanding that the resilience and adaptive capacity of communities and equitable benefit share must be fundamental goals of cultural tourism;

Recognizing the need and opportunity to re-balance tourism, moving away from mass tourism towards a more sustainable, responsible and community-centered tourism with cultural heritage at its centre:

The principles set out below provide a framework for guidance on this subject that is not present in other documents concerning cultural heritage or tourism.

- **Principle 1:** Place cultural heritage protection and conservation at the centre of responsible cultural tourism planning and management;
- **Principle 2:** Manage tourism at cultural heritage places through management plans informed by monitoring, carrying capacity and other planning instruments;
- **Principle 3:** Enhance public awareness and visitor experience through sensitive interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage;

- **Principle 4:** Recognize and reinforce the rights of communities, Indigenous Peoples and traditional owners by including access and engagement in participatory; governance of the cultural and natural heritage commons used in tourism;
- **Principle 5:** Raise awareness of cultural heritage and reinforce cooperation for heritage conservation among all stakeholders involved in tourism;
- **Principle 6:** Increase the resilience of communities and cultural heritage through capacity development, risk assessment, strategic planning and adaptive management;
- **Principle 7:** Integrate climate action and sustainability measures in the management of cultural tourism and cultural heritage.

Principle 1: Place cultural heritage protection and conservation at the centre of responsible cultural tourism planning and management

Cultural heritage protection and management must be placed at the centre of cultural tourism policies and planning. Well-managed cultural heritage tourism enables communities to participate, while maintaining their heritage, social cohesion and cultural practices.

Visitor management needs to be integrated into heritage management plans, considering the complex and multifaceted relationships within and between communities and their heritage. Good destination planning and management involves the protection of tangible assets and intangible values of cultural heritage. Tourism planning and cultural heritage management must be coordinated across all levels of governance in order to identify, assess and avoid the adverse impacts of tourism on heritage fabric, integrity and authenticity. Heritage and Environmental Impact Assessments must inform the planning and development of tourism.

Management of cultural tourism is not limited to the legal boundaries of cultural heritage properties. Tourism development, infrastructure projects and management plans must contribute to preserving the integrity, authenticity, aesthetic, social and cultural dimensions of heritage places, including their settings, natural and cultural landscapes, host communities, biodiversity characteristics and the broader visual context. Destination management should integrate with, and inform social, political and development frameworks considering the local environmental conditions and cultural heritage protection priorities.

Revenues generated through cultural heritage tourism must contribute to the conservation of cultural heritage and provide benefit to local communities. Revenues should be collected and allocated in a transparent, fair, equitable and accountable manner. Visitors should be made aware of their contribution to cultural heritage funding and maintenance.

Principle 2: Manage tourism at cultural heritage places through management plans informed by monitoring, carrying capacity and other planning instruments

The protection of cultural heritage and resilience of host communities requires careful tourism planning and visitor management. It includes the monitoring of impacts on the natural and cultural values of the place as well as on the social, economic and cultural well-being of the host community.

Cultural heritage management plans must include tourism sustainability and visitor management strategies. These should integrate a range of measures including carrying capacity indicators in order to control, concentrate or disperse visitors as appropriate. Site specific actions can be taken to limit group sizes, time group access, restrict entry, close sensitive areas providing remote access where appropriate, restrict or increase opening hours, zone compatible activities, require advance bookings, regulate traffic and/or undertake other forms of supervision.

The identification of carrying capacity and/or limits of acceptable change is essential to avoid negative impacts on cultural tangible and intangible heritage. Carrying capacity assessment must include the following as minimum:

- Physical carrying capacity: the ability of a place to host visitors depending on its condition, fragility and conservation status while providing appropriate visitor services.
- Ecological carrying capacity: the ability of the ecosystem and host communities to accommodate visitors while maintaining sustainability, functionality and heritage values.
- Social and cultural carrying capacity: the degree to which communities can host visitors, while providing quality visitor experiences.
- Economic carrying capacity: the degree to which tourism supports economic diversity at a local, regional and/or national level.

Monitoring and carrying capacity assessments need to use a participatory process involving a broad representation of community, cultural heritage and tourism stakeholders. Carrying capacity indicators need to be specific to the nature of the place and the community under consideration and need to be monitored, benchmarked and updated on a regular basis. Visitor-related indicators are crucial to assess all the dimensions of carrying capacity and ability to host visitors, while ensuring the safety of the site, the security and experience of the visitors and the ability of the place to provide other functions.

Principle 3: Enhance public awareness and visitor experience through sensitive interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage

Interpretation and presentation provide education and life-long learning. It raises awareness and appreciation of culture and heritage, fostering intercultural tolerance and dialogue, and enhancing capacities within host communities.

Responsible tourism and cultural heritage management must provide accurate and respectful interpretation, presentation, dissemination and communication. It must offer opportunities for host communities to present their cultural heritage first hand. It must also provide a worthwhile visitor experience and opportunities for discovery, inclusive enjoyment and learning. Heritage presentation and promotion should interpret and communicate the diversity and interconnections of tangible and intangible cultural values in order to enhance the appreciation and understanding of their significance. The authenticity, value and significance of places are often complex, contested and multifaceted, and every effort should be taken to be inclusive when considering the interpretation and presentation of information. Interpretation methods should not detract from the authenticity of the place. It can use appropriate, stimulating and contemporary forms of education and training, using networks and social media. There are significant opportunities for the use of technology, including augmented reality and virtual reconstructions based on scientific research. Communication at destinations and heritage places must address conservation and community rights, issues and challenges, so that visitors and tourism operators are made aware that they must be respectful and responsible when visiting and promoting heritage.

Interpretation and presentation enhance visitor experiences of heritage places and should be accessible to all, including people with disabilities. Remote interpretation tools must be used in circumstances where visitor access may threaten heritage fabric and its integrity. It can also be used where universal access cannot be achieved, using multiple languages where feasible.

Heritage practitioners, professionals and local communities share the responsibility to interpret and communicate heritage. The interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage must be

representative and acknowledge challenging aspects of the history and memory of the place. It should be based on interdisciplinary research, including the most up-to-date science and the knowledge of local peoples and communities. It should be conducted professionally within an appropriate certification framework. Efforts should be made to improve regulation of heritage presentation, interpretation, dissemination and communication. The knowledge represented and generated in relevant disciplines (i.e art history, archaeology, anthropology and architecture) must inform and ensure the quality of interpretation and presentation of heritage places.

Principle 4: Recognize and reinforce the rights of communities, Indigenous Peoples and traditional owners by including access and engagement in participatory governance of the cultural and natural heritage commons used in tourism

Exponential growth in international tourism has exposed blind spots and lack of sensitivity towards the vulnerability of many tourism-dependent communities and those who have experienced tourist visitation imposed on them without their 'free, prior and informed consent' (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007)]. Indigenous peoples, traditional owners and host communities have a right to express their views on heritage and to manage it according to their established practices and meanings.

Cultural tourism has offered and will continue to promise economic opportunities and employment, but in the future, community engagement in tourism development must be facilitated. Tourism benefits must be equitably shared and include fair and decent tourism employment.

Growth in tourism has also caused an unintended decline in cultural and traditional contribution to local economic diversity. While individually these sectors may be economically marginal, diversity is necessary for the economic resilience of local communities.

An important principle in the responsible development and management of cultural heritage and tourism is inclusive involvement and access to economic opportunities, as well as recreation and enjoyment. Cultural heritage management authorities need to be aware of and sensitive towards communities' rights, needs and desires for more diverse heritage activities, experiences and programmes, increasing cultural heritage relevance for local people. While transition towards a more circular economy may reduce the environmental footprint of economic activities, its application must also consider less desired consequences including weakened worker rights. Use of incentives may encourage desired behaviors and outcomes.

Against the backdrop of rapid and ongoing global change and related cross-cutting issues, tourism cannot continue in an unsustainable perpetual growth paradigm. Marginal improvements will not suffice. The development of responsible cultural tourism must go beyond local stakeholder consultation and involve participatory governance and benefit share. It must embrace the fundamental recognition of human, collective, community and indigenous rights embedded in the cultural and natural heritage commons. It must also involve broad based participation with gender equality and inclusion of traditional owners, minorities and disadvantaged groups in cultural heritage stewardship and decision making, including tourism management and destination development strategies.

Principle 5: Raise awareness of cultural heritage and reinforce cooperation for heritage conservation among all stakeholders involved in tourism

Cultural heritage is a significant resource for tourism and plays a major role in the attraction of travel, but its fragility and conservation requirements are insufficiently recognized. Awareness and understanding of long-term protection and conservation requirements of heritage places is necessary in tourism planning and management. Cross sectoral collaboration, learning and

capacity development need to be encouraged and implemented in order to increase engagement, understanding and participation around cultural heritage and tourism planning.

The limitations and/or vulnerabilities of heritage need to inform and shape tourism decision making and communication. Tourists and visitors should not be considered passive observers or simply consumers; they are active participants who should be made aware of their responsibility to behave respectfully and the ways in which they can contribute towards heritage protection and local sustainability.

Cultural tourism cannot be considered an economic activity detached from the place where it occurs. Visitor activities and services must be part of and compatible with everyday life and social activity, contributing to a sustained local sense of place and pride. Cultural and tourism products and services including events and festivals have to be consistent with the identity of places and their communities. To achieve a more cooperative framework in heritage conservation and tourism development, heritage administrators need to develop their knowledge and awareness of tourism sustainability principles and dynamics. Tourism professionals and practitioners should develop their knowledge about heritage protection and administration. Heritage managers, public tourism managers, private tourism operators, entrepreneurs and people involved in cultural and creative industries need to generate and/or maintain formal and informal networks for communication and collaboration.

Participatory governance through shared ownership and stewardship of cultural and natural heritage allows for new perspectives and collaborative efforts in the reorientation of practice, and it can therefore lead towards new and more resilient pathways for sustainable development.

Principle 6: Increase the resilience of communities and cultural heritage through capacity development, risk assessment, strategic planning and adaptive management

Considering disruptions affecting tourism, ongoing systemic and pervasive global problems and emergent risks, it is necessary to enhance the resilience, adaptive and transformative capacities of communities to deal with future challenges and disruptions related to climate change, loss of biodiversity and/or societal calamities that affect cultural heritage. The massive decline in tourist activities due to the Covid 19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of many heritage places and the communities hosting cultural tourism. It has clearly demonstrated that tourism must actively contribute to recovery, resilience and heritage conservation, and that heritage places and host communities must consider adaptation options.

Resilience in relation to cultural heritage and tourism requires concerted initiatives and interdisciplinary capacity development at the local level. Capacity building should aim to increase the ability of communities to foresee and reduce risks. It should help them make informed decisions concerning cultural heritage management and tourist use of resources to minimize the negative societal and economic impacts of disruption or intensification of use. Traditional knowledge should also inform innovative and adaptive strategies for resilience and adaptation. Heritage managers should ensure they have the necessary knowledge, capacity and tools to prepare for and respond to changing contexts and developing challenges.

Any strategic planning and adaptive management of cultural tourism should include heritage impact assessment (HIAs), environmental impact assessment (EIAs), disaster risk management and other relevant risk assessments. Climate change vulnerability assessments will become increasingly important in the future. All of these require anticipatory scenarios, contingency planning, and mitigation and reduction measures considering and involving all stakeholders. Impact assessments and monitoring must be appropriate, regularly updated and easily applicable, informing development and management decision making. In order to serve as a

catalyst for community resilience, cultural tourism requires increased cooperation across sectors and vision applied to practice.

Principle 7: Integrate climate action and sustainability measures in the management of cultural tourism and cultural heritage

The climate emergency is an existential threat to the planet and the civilization as we know it. It jeopardizes cultural and natural heritage, and threatens the livelihoods and wellbeing of people across the world. Tourism dependent communities are particularly vulnerable.

All cultural tourism stakeholders must take action to mitigate, reduce and manage climate impacts. Actions should enhance the ability of communities to generate, retain and maintain sustainable benefits from cultural tourism. Tourism activities must minimize their greenhouse gas emissions. This is a shared responsibility of governments, tour operators, tourism businesses, destination managers, marketing organizations, site management authorities, land-use planners, heritage and tourism professionals, civil society and visitors. Enforcement should be ensured via incentives, bylaws, policies and guidelines that are updated as necessary.

Climate action is a personal, collective and professional responsibility beyond national commitments and the Paris Accord. Tourism and visitor management must contribute to effective carbon and greenhouse gas reduction, waste management, reuse, recycling, energy and water conservation, green transport and infrastructures that comply with international and national targets. Measures to support heritage conservation, biodiversity and natural ecosystems need to be a priority in planning, implementation and evaluation of tourism and visitor management strategies. Adaptive reuse and retrofitting of built and vernacular heritage can contribute to climate adaptation and retain a more authentic visitor experience.

Climate action strategies must consider traditional ownership, knowledge and practices. Communication, information, heritage interpretation, education and training must increase the awareness about the climate emergency and its consequences for natural and cultural heritage, especially where communities and destinations are at risk. The presentation and interpretation of heritage places open to the public must also contribute to these tasks including messages about climate impacts on preservation and the environment. This invites the consideration of innovative technologies that can be used for these purposes.

Climate change is calling for a transformational and regenerative approach to cultural tourism where the priorities focus on building resilient and adaptive communities and heritage places.

Relevant charters, recommendations and policy instruments are set out in an Annexure to this Charter accessible on the ICTC website

This charter has been drafted by the ICOMOS International Committee on Cultural Tourism through a task force composed of the following members: Celia Martínez (Coordinator), Fergus Maclaren (President), Cecilie Smith-Christensen, Margaret Gowen, Jim Donovan, Ian Kelly, Sue Millar, Sofia Fonseca, Tomeu Deyá, Ananya Bhattacharya and Carlos Alberto Hiriart.