

# THE MINDFUL TOURIST

# THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

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# THE MINDFUL TOURIST

The Power of Presence  
in Tourism

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## INTRODUCTION

There has been a surge in public interest in mindfulness over the last decade, especially in Western societies, where mindfulness is not rooted in religious traditions. The original meaning of the word ‘mindful’ refers to a psychological state in which a person is conscious or aware of something. For example, in business English, there is a popular expression ‘I’m mindful of your time’ describing someone’s concern over the (limited) time which another person may have available (for a meeting, for instance). However, the term ‘mindful’ is being increasingly used nowadays to also describe how a person focuses their awareness on the present moment, particularly in the course of therapeutic medicine or meditation. A mindful person can be more aware of their inner ‘self’ in the space they occupy, their thoughts and feelings, sensations in their body, and their immediate surroundings in that particular moment in time. This meta-awareness can enable a person to see things more clearly; that is, all of the events relating to one’s mind, body, and surroundings can be observed without mental noise or without the need for further elaboration. Thus, mindfulness is increasingly regarded as a non-judgmental awareness of and attention to a present moment, involving cognition, emotion, and sensations without fixation on past or future thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness has been viewed as both a state, achieved by mindfulness practices, and a trait in terms of one’s proclivity to be mindful in daily life (Kiken, Garland, Bluth, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2015).

From a medical standpoint, the primary goal of incorporating mindfulness-based therapies into clinical practice was to alleviate patients’ stress (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Similar goals were pursued in the West to publicise and commercialise various mindfulness practices, while the traditional Eastern understandings of mindfulness were largely excluded from the clinical

practice's goal-oriented application (Wilson, 2016). To date, mindfulness techniques for stress reduction have been advocated by universities, technology suppliers, media outlets, life coaches, yoga teachers, and pseudo-science promoters, to name a few (Kabat-Zinn, 2014; Stankov & Filimonau, 2021). The capacity of mindfulness for commodification (Kristensen, 2018; Walsh, 2016) and the socio-economic pressures drive the market to transform and adopt mindfulness even more.

From a spiritual standpoint, mindfulness refers to a journey of the 'self' through consciousness and outlines a path to personal enlightenment (Lazaridou & Pentaris, 2016). Mindfulness is necessary for spiritual growth because it lays the foundation to liberation of mind from bodily and earthly concerns. Mindfulness in the spiritual sense affords openness, (re)discovery and tolerance and leads to fulfilment, kindness, compassion, and, ultimately, wisdom. Mindful individuals not only enhance their personal wellbeing but also try to create positive change in the world. As such, spiritual mindfulness involves both individual as well as social transformation.

Both mindfulness in the medical, or stress-reducing, and the spiritual, or enlightening, sense are easier to achieve when individuals stay away from the everyday distractions, whether these distractions are home or work-related. Leisure and tourism settings provide the so-called liminal spaces (Turner, Abrahams, & Harris, 1995). A break from daily routines is easier to achieve in these liminal spaces as they offer the opportunity to relax and self-reflect (Thomson, 2018). Mindfulness can therefore be more effectively learned, practiced, and shared with others in these liminal spaces. Retreats, festivals, temple-stays, spas, meditation groups, and 'workshops' are examples of gatherings where mindfulness is typically experienced in more structured ways, while being in nature, exercising, and partaking in extraordinary social experiences (such as music concerts and religious ceremonies, to mention a few) can improve an individual's awareness of the present moment. At the same time, the growing number of individuals who are trying to turn mindfulness into a regular state of being and an enduring personal capacity will want to extend their mindfulness practices beyond these specialised or extraordinary settings. These individuals will be willing to 'consume' mindfulness-enhancing opportunities wherever they go. Since people all over the world are either already incorporating mindfulness practices into their recreational and leisure activities or are actively seeking help and/or opportunities to learn and enhance their abilities to achieve mindfulness, the phenomenon of mindfulness and mindful travel has significant ramifications for the tourism domain.

## IMPORTANCE OF MINDFULNESS FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The primary drivers for incorporating mindfulness into tourism industry offerings are increased consumer demand for (more) mindful travel experiences. This is driven, in turn, by a constant rise in daily stress and more challenging working conditions (Stankov & Filimonau, 2019a), supported by the tourism industry's desire to improve its sustainability and resilience (Errmann et al., 2021; Lengyel, 2018). The trend towards mindfulness as a tourism industry (product and service) offering is reflected in the emergence of consumer segments attracted to, and increasingly actively searching for, mindfulness-themed products and services. The trend is also observed in altered consumer purchasing behaviours induced by mindful states, as well as in the increased promotion of mindfulness-related experiences by the tourism industry.

Currently, the mindfulness offerings in the tourism settings are mostly associated with spa and wellness services, nature-based tourism, meditation programs, and similar wellbeing-focussed product and service offerings (Chen, 2015; Chen et al., 2017a; McGroarty et al., 2019). Tourism operators were the first party to respond to the market's rising requirements to foster and facilitate mindfulness practices. For example, the mindfulness-based offerings designed by holiday retreat operators usually mix a central wellness theme with the addition of specialised services, sports, and relaxation programs, and special diets to make tourists feel relaxed, and achieve spiritual or lifestyle transcendence (Chen et al., 2017a). These types of goal-oriented offerings do mostly not adhere to the principles of the original meaning of mindfulness, even if they are branded as such.

Although current mindfulness programs are often integrated into luxury tourism offerings (usually as part of a spa & wellness offer), increased popularity has resulted in the appearance of mindfulness-themed offerings in rather unusual settings, such as the inflight entertainment programs of major airlines (e.g. *American Airlines*). Further, the movement toward technology-assisted mindfulness introduces a more casual version of mindfulness into the tourist domain, for example, through the use of mindfulness smartphone applications while on vacation (e.g. *Calm app*). Future mindfulness trends will likely involve mindfulness experiences that are more accessible to the conventional tourism market. As already seen in some luxury wellness hospitality brands (e.g. *Avani hotels*), it is expected that more vacation settings will use brain-sensing technology for optimising brain patterns, reducing stress, and creating mindfulness among tourists (McGroarty et al., 2019).

With the rising public appeal of mindfulness, the number of tourists looking to incorporate mindfulness into their tourist experiences is expected to continue growing (ETC, 2016), allowing the expansion of both new geographical markets and product lines (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Lengieza, Hunt, & Swim, 2019), and the evolution of existing mindfulness-based tourism offerings (Stankov, Filimonau, Gretzel, & Vujčić, 2020). To inform the development of mindfulness-based tourism experiences, this book reviews the foundational concepts and develops a managerial framework that can guide tourism stakeholders on their path towards realising mindful tourism. The book also discusses the value of (co-)creation opportunities and highlights the transformational potential of mindful tourist experiences.

#### IMPORTANCE OF MINDFULNESS FOR TOURISM RESEARCH

While tourism research has acknowledged the importance of mindfulness as a theoretical concept with significant implications for tourism practice, it has done so from a very particular perspective. As Moscardo (2009) explains, mindfulness from the applied social-psychology perspective is the dominant conceptualisation in tourism research and deals with notions such as heightened awareness, focused attention, and flow. Mindfulness from this purely cognitive stance is linked to information processing and learning, although connections to the potential for more meaningful experiences are sometimes made. As a result, the tourism literature has applied mindfulness mostly to questions related to information processing and applications in the limited number of domains of interpretation in such tourist attractions as zoos, national parks, and museums (Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008). However, this status quo is gradually changing and a growing number of more recent publications have set to promote a broader view on mindfulness as applied in the tourism context.

Apart from inner experiences or habits influenced by mindfulness (Chen et al., 2017a; Sheldon, 2020), the practice itself has multiple manifestations (Lea, Cadman, & Philo, 2015), thus necessitating various viewpoints in tourism research. These various viewpoints address socio-cultural (Farkic, Isailovic, & Taylor, 2021), economic (Govia, Robinson, Amour, Palmer, & Stubbs, 2020), technological (Stankov, et al., 2020), and even political perspectives (Leggett, 2021; Lengyel, 2015b). This book highlights these alternative views on mindfulness in its conceptual discussions and, in the end, proposes a research agenda, which will hopefully encourage more researchers to explore mindfulness and its manifold theoretical and practical implications for the tourism domain.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Mindfulness has many meanings and the chapter *Foundations of meditative mindfulness* presents the origins, philosophical and religious backgrounds behind mindfulness meditation, and other related practices that have gained in popularity among consumers. A special emphasis is placed on the commodification process of mindfulness practices, which often draw major criticism from scholars. The chapter also explores the recent trend of technology-assisted mindfulness that moved the practice away from the standardised clinical settings and applications, and made it available for wider public and a greater range of use scenarios. To avoid confusion, this part of the book distinguishes and elaborates upon similarities and differences between two approaches to mindfulness that are commonly reported in the literature – (1) meditative mindfulness, which is, in most cases, the base of mindfulness practices among consumers and the focus of this book, and (2) the socio-cognitive approach to mindfulness, which has been adopted to discuss the design, communication, and evaluation of tourist experiences from an information processing perspective.

The chapter *Mindfulness and tourism* explores the main drivers of meditative mindfulness practices. All drivers are categorised as objective drivers related to the external influences in the market and subjective drivers emerging from consumers' internal forces. Definitions and characteristics of the mindful tourist are explored in this part of the book, together with applications of meditative mindfulness practice in the tourism and hospitality domains. This section concludes by outlining the inhibitors of mindfulness practices in tourism settings.

The chapter *Exploration of the mindful tourism experience* conceptualises the tourism experience underpinned by the idea of mindfulness as a state and elaborates upon expected behaviour changes among consumers engaged in various types of mindfulness practice. The concept of value co-creation is applied to mindful tourism experiences in this part of the book to deepen the theoretical understanding of the issue in focus and develop a managerial framework.

The following chapter is the *Transformational power of mindful tourism experiences*. Here, meditative mindfulness practices are looked at both as a personal endeavour and as an agent of social change. The chapter conceptualises the global effect of mindfulness on tourism as an industry in light of sustainability and business resilience agendas and as a way towards more conscious and regenerative tourism (Cave & Dredge, 2020). By considering the socio-economic and political state of the world at the time when this

book was written, this chapter also explores the challenges and opportunities brought to tourism by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, mindfulness practices are viewed as a viable coping tactic and a promising strategy to mitigate some of the detrimental influences of the pandemic on the global tourism industry.

The final chapter summarises the main arguments presented in the book by providing three scenarios of future tourism development regarding meditative mindfulness practices and their likely impacts on tourism. Implications for research highlight directions for future understanding, designing, and evaluating mindful tourism experiences and the overall place of mindfulness within the global tourism industry.

## 2

# FOUNDATIONS OF MEDITATIVE MINDFULNESS

## KEY DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES TO MINDFULNESS

A few things are important to note upfront: neither a precise technical definition of mindfulness nor a broad consensus regarding the underlying concepts necessary to sustain mindfulness currently exist. The umbrella term ‘mindfulness’ covers a wide range of practices, activities, and personality traits. Mindfulness, as the main subject of this book, has been derived from the Eastern notion of mindfulness adapted for Western therapeutic studies (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). According to one definition, mindfulness is the ability of an individual to be fully present in the moment and pay attention to what is going on around (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Focussing one’s attention on own breath or something else (e.g. visualising white light) is a way to look at the disciplined practice of mindfulness. Early definitions of mindfulness have grown to cover a large range of concepts and acts (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

The dictionary definition of mindfulness in the standard English language is ‘a mental state achieved by concentrating on the present moment, while calmly accepting the feelings and thoughts that come to you, used as a technique to help you relax’ (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2022). This conventional definition integrates the two most prevalent perspectives on mindfulness:

- The first perspective views mindfulness as an active process of attending to and actively examining one’s connection with experience. Usually, mindfulness is seen as a two-component model (Bishop et al., 2004) which includes: self-regulation of attention so that it focusses on the immediate experience (thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment) and the adoption of a particular orientation

towards one's experiences in the present moment (an orientation that is characterised by curiosity, openness, and acceptance) (Bishop et al., 2004; Fischer et al., 2017).

- The second perspective discusses mindfulness as letting go, leading to a psychological state of relief, which relates to the goal of stress reduction or a rise in enjoyable feelings of relaxation or satisfaction (Choi, Farb, Pogrebtsova, Gruman, & Grossmann, 2021).

### MINDFULNESS AS A STATE OR TRAIT

Mindfulness has been conceptualised both as a state achieved through mindfulness meditation and as a personality trait. As a state, mindfulness can be thought of as a mode, or state-like quality, that is sustained only when deliberate attention to experience is nurtured via an active process of responding in a non-judgmental way to current thoughts, feelings, and sensations (Lau et al., 2006). One of the key goals of mindfulness meditation practices is to promote present-moment attention and awareness in combination with acceptance of this present moment. The idea of awareness relates to a process of attentional control that focusses on and sustains consciousness of a specific object, whereas acceptance refers to a non-judgmental and open attitude towards experience, whether pleasurable or challenging (Bishop et al., 2004).

As a personality trait (dispositional mindfulness or one's predisposition to be mindful in daily life), mindfulness refers to the natural ability of an individual to pay attention to and keep awareness of present-moment experiences with an open and non-judgmental attitude. Mindfulness as a trait remains relatively stable throughout time, even in the absence of mindfulness interventions (Brown & Ryan, 2003). However, through practice, the experience of mindfulness states can eventually lead to the development of a mindfulness trait (Kiken, Garland, Bluth, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2015). Thus, state change refers to transient changes in the brain and associated patterns of activity or connection, whereas trait change refers to long-term changes in personality traits (Tang & Tang, 2020).

There is growing evidence indicating that mindfulness meditation practice induces state and trait changes (Kiken et al., 2015; Tang & Tang, 2020). A higher baseline of mindfulness afforded by the mindfulness personality trait could influence better outcomes (physiological and/or cognitive) of mindfulness interventions, that is, those with a higher trait mindfulness may benefit more from the intervention (Tang & Tang, 2020).