



# TOURISM DIPLOMACY

*Insights from Economic, Environmental,  
and Socio-Cultural Perspectives*

**MAHMUT DEMIR • ŞIRVAN ŞEN DEMİR**

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# **Tourism Diplomacy: Insights from Economic, Environmental, and Socio-Cultural Perspectives**

BY

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# Preface

The intricate and multifaceted relationship between tourism and diplomacy represents a cornerstone of modern international relations, offering a profound lens through which nations, organizations, and communities engage globally. Beyond its economic significance, tourism is a profound mechanism for fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among nations. In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, shifting geopolitical environments, and an ever-deepening commitment to sustainable development, the notion of tourism diplomacy transcends its traditional boundaries, emerging as a dynamic instrument of soft power, cultural exchange, and economic strategy.

This book, encompassing 10 meticulously crafted chapters, delves into the depths of tourism diplomacy, addressing its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and the myriad challenges it faces in an interconnected world. The growing recognition of tourism diplomacy as a strategic field is grounded in its capacity to transcend traditional boundaries, creating spaces where nations, communities, and individuals engage in meaningful exchange. Each chapter brings to light the diverse dimensions of tourism as a diplomatic tool, highlighting its ability to foster mutual understanding, promote national identity, and build bridges across cultural and political divides. The topics explored within these pages provide both scholars and practitioners with invaluable insights into the evolving nature of tourism diplomacy and its potential to shape the future of international cooperation.

The opening chapter explores tourism diplomacy's definition, scope, and conceptual framework. It examines its evolution, tracing the interplay between national governments, international organizations, private sector stakeholders, and nongovernmental entities. As tourism becomes increasingly intertwined with cultural representation and identity, this chapter underscores its role in fostering bilateral relations, amplifying soft power through technology and media, and addressing geopolitical instability and sustainability concerns. This foundational discussion contextualizes the subject and paves the way for subsequent chapters. As explored in Chapter 2, soft power is at the heart of tourism diplomacy. This chapter delves into how tourism shapes global perceptions and strengthens national brands. From promoting cultural heritage and gastronomy to using digital tools, tourism emerges as a formidable soft power asset. Aligning tourism initiatives with national branding goals underscores the importance of crafting a coherent narrative that resonates across borders. At the same time, the challenges of managing perception amid crises highlight the complexity of this endeavor.

As detailed in Chapter 3, governments play a pivotal role in harnessing tourism as a diplomatic tool. Through strategic policies, investments, and diplomatic missions, governments influence the trajectory of tourism diplomacy. This chapter examines the contributions of tourism ministries, embassies, and consulates in promoting national images, fostering tourism cooperation, and addressing health and safety concerns. By emphasizing the interplay between policy and practice, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the governmental dimensions of tourism diplomacy. As Chapter 4 highlights, partnerships form the backbone of effective tourism diplomacy. Whether through government-to-government collaborations, public-private partnerships, or community-based initiatives, diverse stakeholders' collective effort drives tourism diplomacy's success. This chapter offers insights into innovative models such as technology-driven partnerships and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, showcasing how collaborative approaches can enhance tourism's impact on global cooperation.

Chapter 5 delves into the cultural dimensions of tourism diplomacy, emphasizing its role in promoting cultural values, fostering intercultural dialogue, and facilitating exchange. Tourism emerges as a vehicle for tolerance, social cohesion, and the development of global citizens, while cultural heritage and culinary experiences are powerful tools for building bridges. The ethical considerations surrounding these initiatives remind us of the need for sensitivity and inclusivity in preserving and sharing cultural identities. Chapter 6 focuses on the strategic alignment of tourism with international branding. It explores how destinations, cities, tour operators, hotel chains, and airlines contribute to national and regional branding efforts. By leveraging cultural heritage, natural attractions, and strategic alliances, tourism diplomacy enhances global competitiveness and creates compelling narratives that captivate international audiences. Case studies illustrate the tangible impact of branding strategies, offering inspiration for practitioners and policymakers alike.

Chapter 7 discusses how tourism diplomacy's resilience is tested in times of crisis. This chapter examines tourism's role in addressing and overcoming global challenges, from economic recovery and environmental restoration to health crises and postconflict reconstruction. Examples of postpandemic recovery and peacebuilding initiatives underscore tourism's capacity to unite communities, rebuild economies, and foster international solidarity. This chapter serves as a testament to tourism diplomacy's adaptability and transformative power in adversity. Chapter 8 highlights the transformative impact of technology on tourism diplomacy. Digital platforms, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and blockchain revolutionize how nations engage with global audiences. By enabling personalized and culturally sensitive experiences, these tools expand the reach of tourism diplomacy and enhance its effectiveness. However, this chapter also acknowledges the challenges of digital transformation, emphasizing the importance of ethical and sustainable innovation in navigating the complexities of the digital world.

As explored in Chapter 9, sustainability lies at the core of modern tourism diplomacy. This chapter addresses the critical issues of climate change, biodiversity conservation, pollution management, and water resource protection.

Tourism diplomacy contributes to environmental stewardship and preserving natural and cultural heritage through strategic initiatives and global cooperation. The emphasis on transboundary pollution and collaborative solutions underscores the interconnected nature of these challenges and the need for collective action. The final chapter bridges theory and practice, offering a holistic view of tourism diplomacy's objectives, strategies, and real-world applications. This chapter provides a road map for leveraging tourism for soft power, cultural exchange, economic impact, and environmental conservation by examining examples from countries, international organizations, and crisis scenarios. The forward-looking perspective on challenges and future directions ensures that this chapter serves as both a summation and a call to action.

Tourism diplomacy is a beacon of hope, offering pathways for collaboration, understanding, and shared prosperity. By synthesizing theoretical insights with practical applications, the chapters in this book illuminate tourism's transformative potential in shaping a more interconnected, harmonious, and sustainable world. For scholars, this book serves as a comprehensive resource for understanding the evolving dynamics of tourism diplomacy. For practitioners, it offers actionable strategies to harness tourism's power in advancing diplomatic objectives. And for policymakers, it provides a framework for integrating tourism into broader national and international agendas. As we navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, may this book inspire innovative approaches to tourism diplomacy and foster a renewed commitment to building bridges across cultures, nations, and communities. Let this be a testament to tourism's enduring power as a force for human good, a catalyst for peace, prosperity, and global unity.

Mahmut Demir and Şirvan Şen Demir

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction to Tourism Diplomacy

### Abstract

Tourism diplomacy has become essential for fostering international relations, cultural exchange, and economic collaboration. Rooted in a rich historical context, its evolution spans from the early practices of cultural interaction and the Grand Tours of the 17th to 19th centuries to its strategic use during the Cold War and its adaptation to the dynamics of globalization in the post-Cold War era. Modern tourism diplomacy reflects a sophisticated interplay of actors and strategies, leveraging technological advancements and media to enhance its reach and influence. Key stakeholders in tourism diplomacy include national governments, international organizations, private sector entities, and nongovernmental organizations. Each brings unique strengths to promote cultural understanding and economic benefits. Tourism serves as a platform for representing national values and identity, projecting soft power, and enhancing bilateral and multilateral relationships. Its economic aspect further underscores its potential to strengthen diplomatic ties and encourage cooperation on a global scale. Despite its considerable opportunities, tourism diplomacy faces challenges such as geopolitical tensions, environmental degradation, over-tourism, cultural erosion, and infrastructure limitations. Addressing these challenges requires innovative, sustainable approaches to ensure tourism remains an effective medium for building bridges between nations and cultures. By exploring its historical foundations, critical actors, opportunities, and challenges, the discussion underscores the transformative role of tourism diplomacy in shaping contemporary global relations and advancing sustainable international collaboration.

*Keywords:* Tourism diplomacy; cultural representation; soft power in tourism; globalization and tourism; sustainability in tourism diplomacy

### 1. Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized as more than just an economic activity; it is a platform for cultural exchange, a tool for fostering international relationships, and a means of strengthening a nation's soft power. The concept of tourism diplomacy builds on this potential, positioning tourism as a strategic component in the global arena. It is not merely about attracting visitors but also about shaping perceptions, promoting cultural understanding, and advancing economic and political objectives. Tourism diplomacy reflects the interplay between culture, economics, and politics, demonstrating how tourism can serve as a vehicle for diplomacy and cooperation.

The evolution of tourism diplomacy spans centuries, beginning with the early examples of cultural and diplomatic exchanges through travel. The rise of the Grand Tours in the 17th to 19th centuries marked a significant shift, as elites engaged in travel for leisure, cultural enrichment, and political networking. In the 20th century, tourism became a structured industry intertwined with political ideologies during periods such as the Cold War, where it was employed to foster ideological alliances. The post-Cold War era and the onset of globalization have further expanded the scope of tourism diplomacy, with modern practices integrating technology, sustainability, and inclusivity. Today, tourism diplomacy operates as a critical component of international relations, adapting to the challenges and opportunities of an interconnected world.

The effectiveness of tourism diplomacy depends heavily on the actors involved. National governments often play a central role in designing policies and initiatives to promote cultural exchange and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations. International organizations, such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), provide frameworks for collaboration and sustainable practices. The private sector, including travel agencies, airlines, and hospitality businesses, acts as a bridge between policy and practice, while nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) advocate for ethical and inclusive tourism initiatives. Together, these actors form a complex network that drives tourism diplomacy forward.

One of the most compelling aspects of tourism diplomacy lies in its ability to create opportunities for cultural representation and economic development. Tourism allows nations to showcase their cultural heritage, traditions, and values, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse populations. It also serves as a powerful economic driver, enhancing a country's soft power by demonstrating its stability, innovation, and hospitality. Additionally, tourism can amplify diplomatic efforts through technology and media, enabling countries to project their narratives to global audiences and engage in more effective cultural diplomacy.

Despite its potential, tourism diplomacy faces significant challenges. Geopolitical tensions, environmental concerns, and over-tourism risks substantially hinder its success. The delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity and catering to international markets often leads to cultural erosion, while inadequate infrastructure can hinder a destination's ability to meet growing

demand. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach prioritizing sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation in tourism practices.

Tourism diplomacy intersects cultural exchange, economic advancement, and international relations. It offers a unique opportunity to build bridges between nations, foster mutual respect, and address shared global challenges. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, tourism's strategic role in diplomacy will only grow, necessitating a deeper understanding of its evolution, critical actors, and the opportunities and challenges it presents. This chapter explores these dimensions, laying the groundwork for a more integrated and impactful approach to tourism diplomacy in the 21st century.

## **2. Conceptual Framework of Tourism Diplomacy**

Tourism diplomacy is the process by which governments, international organizations, and private entities use tourism as a diplomatic instrument to promote goodwill, improve bilateral and multilateral relationships, and enhance a nation's image globally (Demir & Alper, 2021). Unlike traditional diplomacy, which involves political negotiations and state-to-state interactions, tourism diplomacy leverages the movement of people, cultural interactions, and economic exchanges within the tourism industry to build bridges between nations. By welcoming tourists, promoting their culture abroad, and collaborating with other countries on tourism initiatives, nations engage in diplomacy in a less formal, more inclusive way.

The scope of tourism diplomacy is broad and encompasses various dimensions, such as economic, cultural, political, environmental, and crisis diplomacy (Demir, 2024):

*Economic Diplomacy:* Tourism contributes significantly to the global economy, creating jobs, fostering infrastructure development, and generating foreign exchange. By promoting tourism, countries can engage in economic diplomacy that enhances trade and investment relations.

*Cultural Diplomacy:* Tourism enables cultural exchange, allowing visitors to experience and understand the values, traditions, and lifestyles of other nations. Thus, tourism diplomacy acts as cultural diplomacy, promoting mutual respect and intercultural dialogue.

*Political Diplomacy:* Tourism diplomacy can also play a role in political relations. Countries often use tourism to strengthen political alliances, resolve conflicts, or showcase their stability and openness to the world. Major international events like the Olympics or World Expos serve as platforms for nations to engage diplomatically through tourism.

*Environmental Diplomacy:* Tourism diplomacy increasingly addresses global challenges like climate change and sustainable development. Countries can lead environmental diplomacy efforts and contribute to global environmental goals by promoting eco-friendly and sustainable tourism practices.

*Crisis Diplomacy:* During crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, or geopolitical tensions, tourism diplomacy can be a vital tool for recovery and



### ***3.1 Early Beginnings of Tourism Diplomacy***

The origins of tourism diplomacy can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where travel was a privileged activity for trade, knowledge exchange, and cultural contact (Demir, 2017). For instance, athletes, scholars, and merchants traveled extensively in ancient Greece and Rome, facilitating the early forms of diplomatic engagement. These travels were not yet categorized as tourism in the modern sense, but they laid the foundation for cross-cultural exchanges that form the backbone of tourism diplomacy today. In medieval times, pilgrimage played a significant role in tourism and diplomacy. Pilgrims traveling to religious sites created interaction networks across borders, which fostered peace and cooperation (Jalalpour & Shojaeifar, 2014; Winter, 2016). The pilgrimage routes, such as the Camino de Santiago in Spain or the Hajj to Mecca, became early examples of how tourism could promote diplomacy, albeit within a religious context.

### ***3.2 The Rise of Grand Tours (17th–19th Century)***

Tourism diplomacy began to take shape more formally in the 17th century, during the era of the Grand Tour (Baranowski et al., 2019; Jalalpour & Shojaeifar, 2014). Wealthy young Europeans, mainly from Britain, embarked on extended European journeys to gain cultural exposure and enhance their education. The Grand Tour fostered cultural diplomacy by exposing future leaders, scholars, and statesmen to different cultures, arts, and political systems (Demir, 2017). During this period, the groundwork was laid for tourism to be viewed as a tool for diplomacy and mutual understanding between nations. Simultaneously, international exhibitions and expositions emerged as platforms for nations to display their industrial, scientific, and cultural achievements. These events, such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, showcased progress and symbolized unity (Becker, 2016). These promoted peace through economic and cultural collaboration. With the advent of railways and steamships, these exhibitions also marked the beginnings of organized mass tourism, making travel more accessible and fostering a sense of global community.

### ***3.3 Tourism Diplomacy in the 20th Century***

The 20th century has marked a significant turning point in the evolution of tourism diplomacy. Following the devastation of World War I and II, there was a global recognition of the need for international cooperation to prevent future conflicts (Fan, 2010; Pack, 2006). Tourism emerged as a tool to foster peace and rebuild relations between nations. Establishing the UNWTO in 1975 was a significant milestone, institutionalizing tourism as a critical element of international diplomacy.

### **3.4 *Cold War and Tourism Diplomacy***

During the Cold War, tourism played a subtle but essential role in diplomacy, particularly in cultural exchange between the Eastern and Western blocs (Herrera & Pérez-Tapia, 2024; Pedersen & Stanoeva, 2024). While political tensions were high, tourism provided soft power for both sides. People-to-people diplomacy through travel and cultural exchange programs helped to bridge the ideological divide, with international fairs and events serving as neutral grounds for cooperation and dialogue. The Moscow International Film Festival and other cultural festivals were instrumental in maintaining diplomatic contact during this period. At the same time, sports tourism became an essential element of diplomacy, with events like the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup as platforms for nations to project their image, values, and aspirations on the global stage. The 1980 Moscow Olympics and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, both marred by boycotts, also highlighted the intersections of tourism, sports, and international relations.

### **3.5 *Post-Cold War Era and Globalization***

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, combined with rapid globalization, saw a new wave of tourism diplomacy. With the fall of ideological barriers and the rise of market economies, tourism became a significant contributor to international economic diplomacy. Countries began actively promoting themselves as tourist destinations, viewing tourism as a means to build their national image, attract investment, and foster goodwill (Baranowski et al., 2019; Yang, 2019). International fairs, exhibitions, and cultural events gained even more prominence during this time (Demir & Dalgıç, 2022). Expo 2000 in Hannover, for example, showcased global cooperation in environmental and technological innovations. Similarly, international gastronomy competitions like Bocuse d'Or and sports tournaments such as the Rugby World Cup became platforms for nations to engage diplomatically while promoting their cultural heritage. Cultural festivals, such as the Edinburgh and Cannes Film Festivals, became powerful diplomatic tools, attracting visitors and participants worldwide. These events stimulated tourism and enhanced cultural understanding and international collaboration (Demir & Dalgıç, 2022; Suntutik, 2019).

### **3.6 *Modern-Day Tourism Diplomacy***

In the 21st century, tourism diplomacy has evolved into a multifaceted tool for fostering international relations. Globalization and digital transformation have enhanced countries' interconnectedness, enabling tourism to play a more prominent role in diplomacy. Key areas of modern tourism diplomacy include cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, gastronomy diplomacy, and sustainable tourism.

Cultural diplomacy through tourism has expanded with the rise of international cultural festivals and exchange programs (Abuan, 2021; Winter, 2016). Festivals like the Venice Biennale, the Rio Carnival, and the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival attract a global audience, showcasing the cultural

richness of the host nations. These events serve as platforms for soft power, allowing countries to project their culture, values, and identity to the world. Tourism boards and governments have increasingly recognized the role of these festivals in enhancing bilateral relations, leading to collaborations between nations in organizing such events (Demir & Dalgıç, 2022). For example, joint cultural festivals between France, Japan, India, and the United States highlight how tourism diplomacy can foster greater cooperation and understanding between nations.

Sports tourism has also become a vital aspect of tourism diplomacy (Leight et al., 2011). Events like the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and Commonwealth Games have long been used as diplomatic platforms. Host nations view these events as opportunities to enhance their global image, attract investment, and promote international peace and unity.

Gastronomy has emerged as another powerful tool for tourism diplomacy in recent years (Demir & Alper, 2021). International gastronomy competitions like Bocuse d'Or, culinary festivals like the San Sebastián Gastronomika, and food tourism experiences are vital in cultural exchange and diplomacy. Countries increasingly use their culinary heritage to promote their identity and foster international relations. Gastronomy diplomacy often transcends traditional political boundaries, allowing for deeper connections based on shared culinary experiences (Demir & Alper, 2021). For example, UNESCO's recognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage, including culinary traditions like the Mediterranean diet or Mexican cuisine, has helped countries use food for diplomatic engagement.

Sustainable tourism has become a central theme in modern tourism diplomacy (Rozanah & Ishqila, 2024; Xu et al., 2020). With global concerns over climate change, countries are increasingly using tourism to promote environmental responsibility and cooperation. Initiatives like the UNWTO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place tourism at the heart of global efforts to combat climate change, reduce poverty, and promote peace.

## **4. Critical Actors in Tourism Diplomacy**

Tourism diplomacy operates at the intersection of various sectors, collaborating with multiple actors to promote tourism as a tool for international relations. Each actor plays a unique and vital role in shaping how tourism contributes to diplomatic efforts, including promoting cultural understanding, economic cooperation, and political alliances. The critical actors in tourism diplomacy (Fig. 2) range from national governments and international organizations to private sector stakeholders and NGOs.

### **4.1 National Governments**

National governments are arguably the most influential actors in tourism diplomacy. Governments set the policies and frameworks governing how tourism interacts with international relations through their ministries, foreign affairs

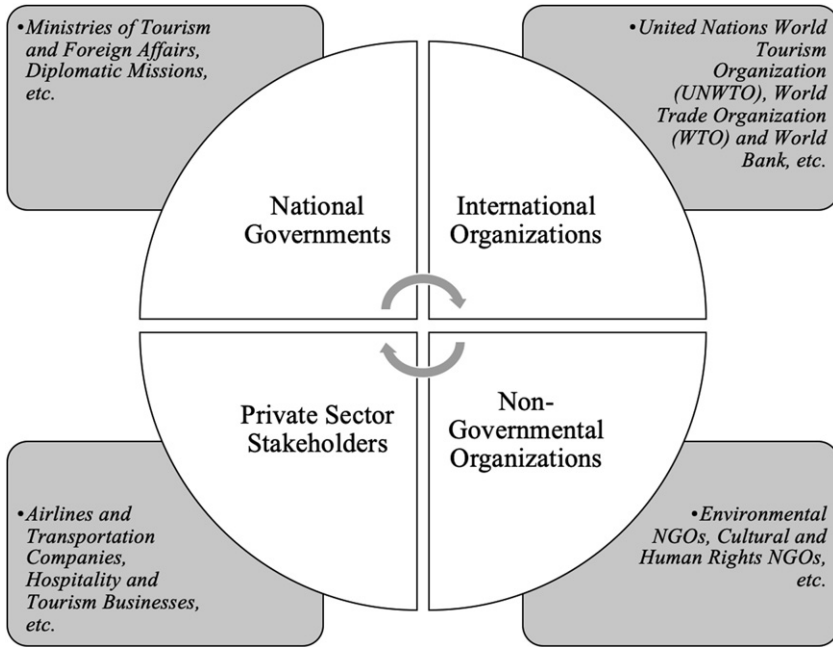


Fig. 2. The Critical Actors in Tourism Diplomacy.

departments, and diplomatic missions (Parthenis et al., 2023). Governments often view tourism as a strategic tool for promoting national interests, both economically and culturally (Zugasti, 2019). Tourism ministries are responsible for developing strategies and usually collaborate with ministries of foreign affairs to ensure that tourism aligns with broader diplomatic goals. For instance, a country might emphasize sustainable tourism to reinforce its global leadership in environmental issues or promote cultural tourism to strengthen its identity and heritage on the international stage. Countries like France, Spain, and Italy, known for their rich cultural heritages, have strategically used their tourism ministries to promote themselves as premier tourist destinations.

On the other hand, embassies and consulates are extensions of national governments abroad (Sihaloho et al., 2024) and serve as essential nodes in tourism diplomacy. They organize and support cultural events, exhibitions, and fairs that help to promote the country’s tourism potential. Diplomats often engage in bilateral or multilateral negotiations to create favorable tourist conditions, such as easing visa restrictions, establishing direct flight routes, or securing tourism-related investment from foreign partners. For example, China’s diplomatic missions have played a significant role in negotiating visa-free travel agreements with various countries, facilitating more accessible travel for Chinese tourists, and promoting outbound tourism as a diplomatic tool.