



TOURISM THROUGH THE LENS: FILM AS A TOOL FOR GLOBAL PLACE PROMOTION



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Abstract

Cinema is more than a medium of entertainment; it is a powerful cultural force that shapes perceptions, emotions and human behaviour. Through compelling narratives and visually engaging storytelling, films influence the way audiences perceive destinations, cultures and identities. One of the most significant yet relatively underexplored outcomes of this influence are film-induced tourism, that is, tourism associated with film sets and the destinations in which films are shot. This study examines the role of cinema as an agent of tourism development by analysing how films contribute to destination branding, image formation and tourism demand. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research explores three internationally recognised examples: *Lost in Translation* (Tokyo, Japan), *Sonar Kella* (Rajasthan, India) and *Borat* (Kazakhstan). These cases represent diverse dimensions of film tourism, ranging from positive destination promotion and cultural appreciation to controversial portrayals that shape international perceptions. The study investigates the mechanisms through which cinematic narratives influence travel motivations, enhance destination visibility and generate economic and socio-cultural benefits for local communities. At the same time, it critically examines the ethical implications of cinematic representation, including stereotyping, cultural commodification, authenticity and the challenges of managing tourism growth. By comparing the three cases, the research highlights the opportunities and limitations of leveraging cinema as a strategic destination marketing tool. The findings suggest that films can transform ordinary locations into globally recognised tourism brands when supported by effective destination management and sustainable tourism policies. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion on film-induced tourism by highlighting the potential of cinema not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a driver of tourism development, cultural exchange and place identity in an increasingly globalised world.

Keywords: Cinematic Representation; Narrative Landscapes; Screen Tourism; Tourism Impact; Visual Culture

Introduction

Films undoubtedly have a considerable impact on tourism. Many people are inspired to visit destinations after first seeing them on the big screen. Film-induced tourism has grown into a global industry, with cities and countries using films to boost their tourism industries. Films turn geography into mythology. They make even the most mundane places matter and endow them with special importance in the eyes and hearts of the viewers.

Cinema, as The Authors know it, emerged in the late 19th century with pivotal inventions such as the Kinetoscope and *Cinématographe*, leading to the first public screenings. Early films were relatively brief, often lasting a few minutes or less. The first motion pictures, such as *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895) by the Lumière brothers, lasted less than a minute. Notwithstanding its brevity, this film still attracts visitors; the modest railway station where it was shot has been transformed into a symbolic site of media pilgrimage that people continue to visit to this day. Visitors do not

come for the architectural grandeur or historical significance of the location; they come simply because one of the first motion pictures was shot there. Thus, even the earliest films, despite lacking narrative and being extremely short, could infuse locations with symbolic power, laying the groundwork for what would later go on to become film-induced tourism.

A few years later, the technique of film splicing emerged. It allowed filmmakers to physically cut and join multiple reels of celluloid. This development liberated cinema from the constraints of single-shot films and gave birth to an era of longer narratives, dynamic editing and scope for more complex storytelling. Splicing would go on to usher in an aesthetic revolution; by enabling the use of montage, continuity editing and cross-cutting, it introduced concepts that are now foundational to cinematic language.

As more people began to pay to see films, the industry that developed around them gradually began to spend more on production and exhibition. Large studios were built and special-purpose cinemas constructed. Now able to afford ambitious projects with exotic locations, elaborate sets and astronomically high production values, the industry enhanced cinema's power to seduce the imagination and, in turn, to reshape the geography of the heart's desire.

It is within this ecosystem of technological advancement and industrial scale that film-induced tourism found its roots. Longer running times allowed more immersive experiences. The viewer ceased to be merely a passive spectator and became an active participant in the visual world of cinema. These extended journeys made places memorable. Cinema, now global in its reach, had begun to plant seeds of wanderlust in the hearts of viewers. This gave rise to a new kind of tourist: someone who travelled with a film still etched into memory. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate how and to what degree films shape people's impressions of certain tourist destinations and how these preconceived notions impact the local tourism industry. Through case studies from different parts of the world, it examines the factors at play and the economic and social consequences of this growing trend.

Literature Review

In *The Tourist Gaze*, Urry [1] observed that "central to [the] notion of the tourist gaze is the idea that our desires to visit places and the way we experience those places are not simply individual and autonomous but are socially organized and therefore changes in tourism are related to wider transformations in society." On this basis, it can be argued that people travel to and appreciate certain natural and built landscapes because they have learnt to view them in particular ways, within specific social settings and according to distinct stylistic conventions. Urry traces mass tourism from its beginnings in English seaside resorts to its emergence as a worldwide industry.

It should be noted that Urry does not argue that tourism merely involves sightseeing or that all senses are irrelevant. Rather, the role of the visual in tourism reflects the visual world of its participants. This visual aspect is important because it is linked to the daydreaming that precedes the holiday and to the expectations created in the visual sphere [2]. This reaffirms Urry's argument that the world of tourism is wrapped up in broader cultural shifts, where "perception is mediated, desire is staged and space itself is a performative venue. What we see is not what we look at, but what we are trained to see."

Riley et al. [3] conducted an empirical study, "Movie induced tourism", that examined the effect that movies have on the number of tourists visiting a place that appears in the film. The study, which was conducted at several popular sites popularised by films such as *Field of Dreams* (Iowa), *Forrest Gump* (South Carolina) and *The Fugitive*, concluded that the tourism effect from movies could last for up to four years after the film's release. The research also expanded the concept of tourism induced by movies, proposing that not only the natural scenery but also the themes of the stories, the exciting scenes and the human relationships in the movie could have an influence on tourism. In this way, films can create lasting tourism impacts, particularly through emotional and nostalgic connections.

In his seminal book *The Experiences of Film Location Tourists*, Roesch [4] examined the on-site experiences of these tourists, drawing on a variety of disciplines, including geography, sociology and psychology. He develops a typology of film tourists, ranging from fans to non-fan, and examines their actions, expectations and satisfaction. He notes that, for many, these locations are more than a photo opportunity. In some cases, film locations invite visitors to learn about local art, history and culture, and even offer workshops and classes for visitors to learn more about the filmmaking process, thereby becoming sites of emotional pilgrimage.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of the study is to investigate and understand the often-overlooked relationship between film and tourism. It also discusses how films might influence travel behaviour and pique interest in particular places.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To study the various cinematic elements in a film that influence wanderlust;
- To understand the role of films in attracting tourists to their filming locations; and
- To identify cases where cinematic exposure has directly led to an increase in tourism.

Methodology

To comprehend the intricate link between film and tourism, this study uses a qualitative research technique based on interpretive and exploratory paradigms. Qualitative approaches provide a detailed examination of how movies affect audience behaviour, travel motivations and destination image due to the cultural and perceptual aspects of film-induced tourism. The primary approach involves case study analysis of selected films—*Sonar Kella* [5], *Lost in Translation* [6] and *Borat* [7]—to illustrate diverse thematic triggers, audience responses and place-branding outcomes across different sociocultural contexts. Secondary data sources, including scholarly literature, tourism impact reports, and cinematic analyses, are employed to contextualise these cases within broader theoretical frameworks such as Urry's "tourist gaze" [1] and Roesch's typology of film tourists [4]. The research also includes a comparative analysis through thematic categorisation—such as gaze type, audience demographics and tourist experience—to uncover patterns and contrasts in film-tourism dynamics. The data are synthesised to develop a multidimensional perspective on how cinematic narratives function as tools of global place promotion, presenting both possibilities and difficulties for the growth of sustainable tourism [8].

Film as a Promotional Tool for Tourism: Multidimensional Perspectives

Film-induced tourism has been globally recognised as an innovative promotional tool for tourism development [9, 10, 11, 12]. Films are a medium through which destinations get integrated into stories that have strong emotional appeal. In addition to enticing tourists, films have the ability to influence travel motivation and behaviour by changing perceptions about destinations. The introduction of films into tourism planning has resulted in a wide array of effects—cultural, social, economic and promotional.

Cultural Perspective

Apart from its entertainment value, film plays a significant role in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage by providing a worldwide audience with a visual depiction of local customs, festivals, languages, attire and architecture. Cinema captures unique cultural identities of destinations and also enables intercultural communication through the portrayal of compelling stories and vivid cinematography. Films such as *Eat Pray Love* (2010), which highlights the spirituality of Bali, and Bollywood films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), which introduced European landscapes to Indian audiences, are good examples of films that have enabled cross-cultural communication and understanding. However, films can also misrepresent cultures through stereotyping or romanticisation; therefore, filmmakers should respect the cultural identity of the communities they portray [13,14].

Social Perspective

The social consequences of film tourism are associated both with empowerment and possible disruption of local communities. On the one hand, through film tourism, marginalised and distant communities may become more visible and represented in the global world. This may lead to the recognition of those communities and the possibility of expressing their cultures. On the other hand, the sudden wave of tourists can be associated with gentrification and the dilution of the traditional way of life, as people in the community may have to act as if they represent a certain culture that is demanded by tourists—what is known as "staged authenticity". The way to deal with such a problem is to promote social sustainability in terms of film tourism. This means making decisions on tourism development in collaboration with the local community [14, 15, 16].

Economic Perspective

Film-induced tourism possesses considerable economic opportunities from short-term and long-term perspectives. During the process of filmmaking, movies provide immediate economic gains through job creation and expenditures on accommodation, transport and other services. Eventually, filming sites become tourist destinations that generate sustained tourism-related expenditure on accommodation, transport, tours and other associated services. Such spillover effects encourage the emergence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), local crafts and other supporting sectors and thereby form a sustainable film and tourism industry system. However, economic benefits are often unevenly distributed, and, in the absence of inclusive policies and regulations, larger actors take most of the profit while local communities are left behind. In order to achieve economic inclusivity, frameworks for participation and sharing of benefits should be introduced [17, [Error! Reference source not found.](#), 18].

Destination Marketing Perspective

Films act as a powerful tool in destination marketing because of the narrative techniques used which allow audiences to have an emotional connection with the destination depicted in the film. Films create a sense of place for viewers that enables them to develop an attachment to a particular destination and encourages them to visit the destination. In light of the significance of films in promoting destinations, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are now collaborating with production firms by providing them incentives and other logistics to promote the destination through films [20, [Error! Reference source not found.](#)]. Apart from the promotion aspect, these collaborations enable DMOs to embed themselves into popular culture. Additionally, the use of augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) technology to promote film destinations provides tech-savvy travellers with a means to preview and take virtual tours of the destination [21].

(See Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Film-Induced Tourism Case Studies

Film/Series	Destination(s)	Tourism Impact	Cultural Element	Marketing Strategy Used
<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	New Zealand	40% rise in tourism revenue (2001–2006)	Māori culture subtly referenced	“Middle earth” branding, location tours
<i>Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge</i>	Switzerland, UK	Increase in Indian outbound tourism to Europe	Indian diaspora nostalgia	Bollywood-themed packages, focused Indian campaigns
<i>Outlander</i>	Scotland	67% rise in footfall at heritage sites	Scottish Jacobite history, folklore	Themed tours, social media fan outreach
<i>Game of Thrones</i>	Croatia (Dubrovnik), Iceland	10–30% increase in visitor numbers per featured site	Medieval/fantasy architecture	AR apps, merchandise, guided location tours
<i>Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara</i>	Spain	Increase in Indian adventure tourism	Flamenco, Spanish countryside	Social media ads, Indian metro campaigns, experiential tours

Source: Collected by Author

Table 2: Challenges and Strategic Considerations

Challenge	Implication	Strategic Approach
Over-tourism	Environmental degradation, site erosion, community resentment (e.g. Maya Bay after <i>The Beach</i>)	Visitor caps, environmental restoration, alternative site promotion
Cultural Commodification	Loss of authenticity, commercialisation of traditions	Cultural sensitivity guidelines, community storytelling involvement
Short-Lived Popularity	Tourism spikes often decline after media interest wanes	Sustained branding, diversification of tourism offerings
Inequitable Economic Benefits	Profits may concentrate among large operators, excluding local communities	Local employment mandates, SME incentives, profit-sharing frameworks

Source: Collected by Author

Policy Implications and Strategic Recommendations

To enhance film tourism as an effective and inclusive promotion strategy, there needs to be a policy framework that covers several aspects. Governments and DMOs need to embed film tourism within their national tourism policies, offering inducements such as tax holidays, single-window clearance for filming and mandatory sustainability requirements to reduce the ecological footprint. A community-based development strategy needs to be adopted whereby communities are involved in developing tourism products and telling their cultural stories. Infrastructure such as transport, sanitation and hospitality facilities also needs to be improved [Error! Reference source not found.] to cope with the increasing number of tourists visiting film sites. Another strategy involves using modern technologies such as augmented and virtual reality, 360-degree video narratives and gamification to enhance immersive experiences before visiting the film locations. Finally, capacity building through training guides and local residents in the dynamics of film tourism will generate employment and enhance the tourist experience.

Film-induced tourism exemplifies the intersection of storytelling and strategic marketing. It holds transformative potential for destination development, cultural preservation, economic diversification and global visibility. However, harnessing this potential demands a multidimensional approach balancing promotional aspirations with sustainability, equity and cultural respect. With thoughtful planning, film can be more than a cinematic experience it can be a vehicle for meaningful and enduring tourism development.

A comparative analysis of these three films helps to explain how the public tends to construct and consume the cinematic space. (See Table 3)

Table 3 breaks the films down according to five major themes and assigns each film a characteristic relating to each theme.

Table 3: Differences in Themes of Selected Films

Theme	<i>Sonar Kella</i>	<i>Lost in Translation</i>	<i>Borat</i>
Tourism Trigger	Cultural nostalgia and iconography	Emotional resonance and modern alienation	Controversy, satire and global media
Type of Gaze (Urry)	Heritage gaze	Romantic and introspective gaze	Ironic and spectacular gaze
Type of Audience	Domestic, primarily Bengali	International, millennials and cinephiles	Global and meme-savvy
Location Representation	Authentic and romanticised	Intimate, urban and stylised	Fictional, misrepresented and distorted
Tourist Experience	Tribute pilgrimage	Mood-seeking and affective	Curiosity and meme-driven

Source: Collected by Author

Selected Cases from Indian and Foreign Films

Case Study 1: *Sonar Kella* and the Romanticisation of Rajasthan

Sonar Kella (*The Golden Fortress*, 1974) [5], Satyajit Ray's mystery thriller, is one of the most memorable and beautiful films of India, not just for its story and visuals but also for an unintended consequence: it influenced domestic tourism. The film, Ray's third in colour after *Kanchenjunga* (1962) and *Ashani Sanket* (1973), tells the story of the hugely popular Bengali private detective Feluda (Pradosh C. Mitter), who traverses the landscape of Rajasthan to find the solution to a mystery concerning the apparent reincarnation of a young boy and a buried treasure in an abandoned fort in Jaisalmer. As the first of Ray's two Feluda films, *Sonar Kella* has left a trail of mythologised Rajasthan for generations of Bengalis to follow and has carved out its own tourism circuit, one that is informal but driven by the film's narrative appeal.

The city of Jaisalmer, although made a district under the Jodhpur division, was later relegated to a mere desert backwater. However, this quiet town was brought into the limelight during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, when the Indian Army and Air Force established a military base there. The famous Battle of Longewala was fought in the Thar Desert during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. However, despite the strategic significance that Jaisalmer, then an insignificant town, acquired through these events, they did little to provide its people with an income. That change came a few years later, when one of Ray's popular novels was adapted into a film of the same name. The power of popular culture to help an obscure site come to life and stay in the public consciousness is exemplified by the folklore of Jaisalmer Fort [23].

Ray's fantasy adventure musical film *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* [Error! Reference source not found.] was made in 1968. Extras and camels were needed for its climax, in which a medieval war had to be recreated, and these were duly provided by the Jaisalmer royal family. On this first visit, Ray was struck by the hospitality, the desert location and, above all, the evocative architecture of Jaisalmer Fort. Built in 1156 CE by Rawal Jaisal, Jaisalmer Fort is the second-oldest fort in Rajasthan [25]. It is one of the few "living forts", with about a quarter of the city's population residing within its walls, a detail Ray omitted by depicting the fort as a ghost town. Made of yellow sandstone, the fort glows with a golden hue in sunlight, especially at sunset, giving it the appearance of a *sonar kella* (golden fortress). Short of funds, Ray shot *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* in black and white. As he confided in later interviews, he felt that he had not done justice to the glorious character of Jaisalmer Fort, and he therefore decided to make the fort itself a central character in a later film.

The forts, deserts and haunted ruins of Rajasthan had already made it a state synonymous with royalty, heritage and grandeur. Ray's lens, however, added mystique and a childlike curiosity. The film follows the young boy Mukul, who claims to have lived in a "golden fortress" in a previous life and to have died in childhood when the fort was attacked. To most of the present generation of Bengalis, the images of the interiors of Jaisalmer Fort, of the train journey through the expansive Thar Desert and of camel safaris on the burning sands were first seen not in tourist brochures or through a grave, intellectual-sounding documentary but through the eyes of Feluda and his cousin Topshe. Through Mukul's memories, Ray and his cameraman, Soumendu Roy, offer a rapid tour of the fort's spaces. The way Jaisalmer was showcased in the film, particularly the golden hue and winding alleys of the fort, made it a place imbued with both real history and personal childhood memories.

This is a particular type of tourism in which tourists are largely regional and emotionally attached to a shared language and culture. More than 50 years after the release of *Sonar Kella*, Bengalis still enjoy visiting Jaisalmer, describing the trip as their "Feluda tour" of Rajasthan, and the number of such tourists remains large. Travel agents in West Bengal still periodically advertise Rajasthan packages bearing the *Sonar Kella* name. The film was thus not only a showcase of a place on the silver screen but also a site in Bengali cultural memory.

The tourist gaze in this instance closely echoes John Urry's view of tourism as being shaped by visual culture and shared memory [1]. The appeal of *Sonar Kella* is not limited to its aesthetics; it lies in the memorable nature of the location itself. Travelling to Rajasthan becomes synonymous with remembering a film, and the act of tourism becomes a cultural re-enactment.

Interestingly, this tourism was generated by Ray's film alone. At the time, Jaisalmer was not sufficiently developed to deal with large numbers of tourists. The film's Rajasthan setting does not come across as commercialised in the way that other film locations abroad do, which is a considerable advantage. In fact, there was neither a guided *Sonar Kella* tour nor any official memorabilia, which might have boosted the sleepy city's economic turnover. The trip has thus remained personal rather than commercial and rooted in emotion. This contrasts with the film tourism models adopted in the West, such as those associated with the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* series.

Sonar Kella thus shows how regional films have tremendous power to influence travel behaviour and the scenic imagination. It demonstrates how films can leave a strong emotional impression on landscapes, turning what was previously merely a geographical coordinate into a popular cultural icon. Ray's film is a testament to the power of his sentimentalisation of Rajasthan, which shapes what the authors look at, where the authors go and why.

Case Study 2: *Lost in Translation* and the Emotional Intimacy of Tokyo

"Here are two lost souls swimming in a fishbowl." This lyric from Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" aptly describes the two protagonists, Bob Harris and Charlotte, in Sofia Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* [6].

Lost in Translation is Coppola's neon-lit, whispered study of urban isolation and ephemeral human connection. Two lost souls, played by Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson, drift through a Tokyo hotel late at night, gradually falling into conversation about their marriages, their happiness and everything else. But what exactly does the term "lost in translation" mean? The film critic Roger Ebert observes that Coppola wants to show two people who are both "lonely in vast foreign Tokyo and both are coming to the realization that their lives are stuck" [27].

Most of the authors have, at some point, felt lonely in lonesome places and yearned for companionship with a restless fervour. In most instances, the authors have eventually felt complete at some level as the restlessness and yearning faded away. The film portrays this experience accurately, and viewers continue to identify with it however many times they watch it. After all, the most satisfying art is that in which the authors recognise us.

Ebert also likens the film to Ingmar Bergman's 1974 Swedish production *Scenes from a Marriage* [28], about a couple who meet years after their divorce and spend a night wandering in a dark house somewhere in the world. "That's how Bob and Charlotte do feel to me, most of the time nobody knows where they are, or cares, and their togetherness is all that keeps both of them from being lost and alone. They go to karaoke bars and drug parties, pachinko parlors and, again and again, the hotel bar. They wander Tokyo, an alien metropolis to which they lack the key; they don't talk in the long literate sentences of the characters in *Before Sunrise*, but in the weary understatements of those who don't have the answers" [27].

The film's cinematography plays a key part in characterising the emptiness it conveys. Unlike typical cinematic images of the city, Tokyo in this film is not a place of cliché or spectacle but one of emotion. In a metropolis as busy as Tokyo, darkness and melancholy surround Charlotte as she sits on the top floor of a skyscraper. Looking down on the city from a bird's-eye view, she is separated from all the action. She is removed from the world and from herself; she is empty of herself and cannot find her way back home [29].

This is where Tokyo comes into play, since neither Bob Harris nor Charlotte would make such discoveries in an American city such as New York or Los Angeles. It had to occur in a place where they felt isolated, and Japan can be thought of as a different world from the West. For something to be found, it must first be lost; thus, the characters first had to be lost in Tokyo in order to discover themselves [30].

This image has helped shape Western tourists' attitudes towards Tokyo. As Sofia Coppola remarked in an interview: "It's very quiet in here in the hotel, and the design of it, it's so weird to have this New York bar, and this jazz singer, and the French restaurant, all in Tokyo." The Park Hyatt Tokyo—portrayed in the film as more of a luxurious prison than anything else for the two central characters—has since become a pilgrimage site for fans [31]. For travellers, having a drink in the New York Bar, the place where Bob and Charlotte meet for the first time, has become a familiar rite of passage. They visit Tokyo to experience the real meaning of the film's title: the inability to comprehend fully the language and, indeed, their own lives.

Whereas Urry's tourist gaze is typically directed towards the visual consumption of sites [1], *Lost in Translation* redirects tourists in search of an experience rather than a view. Such visitors do not come to Tokyo to see Shibuya Crossing or temple grounds; they come to experience the messiness and intimacy that the film embodies. This type of tourism is contemplative and emotional rather than driven by sightseeing.

The Tokyo tourism board reported a tremendous increase in international tourists to the city after the film's release, especially from Europe and America. Travel companies began selling tours that included visits to the Park Hyatt, karaoke clubs and Buddhist temples, under the *Lost in Translation* banner. The film also contributed substantially to a "whisky boom" in Japan, with many tourists' seeking Suntory whisky, especially the 17-year-old Hibiki blend advertised by Bob Harris in the film. This brand has become something of a cultural touchstone and viewers continue to associate the brand with the film. Much of the time, however, fans have found their own way to the locations, making their tour of the film not only a literal journey but also an emotional one, in search of the same feelings that the film so vividly captures: the mood, the quiet and the loneliness.

The key element of this case is that it subverts the typical East-versus-West theme. Coppola does not fetishise or exoticise Tokyo; rather, the city serves as a mirror for the characters' inner emptiness. Their alienation and disconnection are magnified by their unfamiliarity with Tokyo, and it is in that unfamiliar place that they experience, albeit briefly, human connection. Some critics have noted that the film's vision is somewhat limited and Western-centric; although most of the cast are Japanese, they are often relegated to the background of a Western perspective.

Case Study 3: *Borat* and the Accidental Tourism in Kazakhstan

Larry Charles's *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* [7], or simply *Borat*, is one of the most controversial, if not the most controversial, entries in the discourse on film-induced tourism. The film was shot in Romania (standing in for Kazakhstan) and the United States and was presented as a documentary; however, it made no effort to conceal that, through generous portions of absurd satire and exaggerated, offensive stereotypes, it lampooned both Kazakh culture and American ignorance of the wider world. Remarkably, *Borat* sparked worldwide interest in the real Kazakhstan, perhaps precisely because of these glaring inaccuracies.

Until *Borat* brought it into the spotlight, the “glorious” country of Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic, was seldom a talking point in international conversation. The 2006 film is presented as a documentary about American society and culture made by the Kazakh reporter Borat Sagdiyev, who is sent to the “US and A” at the request of the Ministry of Information of Kazakhstan, “Greatest Country in the World.” With his producer, Azamat Bagatov, and a pet chicken, he travels across the United States, talking to and questioning Americans who take him to be a foreigner with little or no knowledge of American culture.

At first, the government of Kazakhstan prohibited the film and strongly condemned its depiction of the country. After an infamous cameo at the 2005 MTV Europe Music Awards, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry officially threatened to take legal action against Sacha Baron Cohen, and in the same year the Kazakh government took the Kazakhstan-based website www.borat.kz offline. The authorities banned both the film and its release on DVD, considering that it portrayed Kazakhstan as a racist, sexist and primitive nation. In the film, Borat boasts of incest and rape and jokes that his country's prostitutes are the cleanest in the world. The film also angered the Romanian village that served as the setting for Borat's home, whose residents declared that they had been “humiliated” by it. They stated that they had been told the film would be a documentary but were in reality portrayed as backward people and criminals.

In a bid to repair the considerable damage to its image around the world, the country initiated a multimillion-dollar tourism promotion campaign, dubbed “Heart of Eurasia”, to offset the “*Borat* effect”. Cohen, however, in character as Borat, ridiculed the campaign in a simulated press conference outside the White House, dubbing it the “propaganda of the ‘evil nitwits’ from Uzbekistan”. In the film, Borat repeatedly names Uzbekistan as his country's arch-rival.

The film's lingering influence was evident in 2012, when its parody of the Kazakh national anthem was played during the medal ceremony for Maria Dmitriyenko, winner of the Emir of Kuwait International Shooting Grand Prix, with the words: “Kazakhstan, greatest country in the world/ All other countries are run by little girls/ Kazakhstan, number one exporter of potassium/ All other countries have inferior potassium”. The incident, which resulted from the wrong song being downloaded from the internet, served as a further reminder of the “legacy” of *Borat* [32].

In 2006, the Kazakh ambassador to the United Kingdom, Erlan Idrissov, said after watching the film that some parts of it were funny and that it had “put Kazakhstan on the map”. By 2012, the Kazakh Foreign Minister, Yerzhan Kazykhanov, credited the film with a great rise in tourism to his country, with a tenfold increase in visas issued, going so far as to say, “I am grateful to Borat for helping attract tourists to Kazakhstan.” In 2020, the national tourism agency, Kazakh Tourism, officially embraced Borat's catchphrase “very nice” in its new marketing campaign. “Kazakhstan's nature is very nice. Its food is very nice. And its citizens not to mention Borat, who said otherwise—are among the nicest in the world,” Kairat Sadvakassov, deputy head of Kazakh Tourism, stated in a press release. By embracing the film's irony, this reversal further demonstrates that this new genre of media tourism can boost the visibility of, and interest in, a destination even when the message is negative and satirical [14, 33].

The tourist gaze associated with *Borat* is complex and conflicted. Whereas the tourism inspired by *Sonar Kella* and *Lost in Translation* is based on admiration or affective resonance, that inspired by *Borat* is driven by curiosity, irony and, at times, mockery. Some tourists, driven by curiosity, went to Kazakhstan to view what the nation “really” looked like, and others went to the Romanian village of Glod, believing it to be Borat's hometown. The motivation to travel lay simply in distinguishing fact from fiction.

This kind of tourism raises questions about the ethics of filmic representation. Kazakhstan's own voice was not heard; the country became known through mockery. Nevertheless, the episode made the country more popular and attracted tourists. Furthermore, it prompted the development of self-representation, which now enables the people of Kazakhstan to take part in the international discussion and combat stereotypes. In this instance, film tourism is founded on contradictions. These places attract attention not because of their cultural or natural value but because of

their association with popular culture and moments of international sharing. The main features that attract tourists to such places are the surreal, the meme and the spectacle.

Hence, *Borat* presents an alternative model of film tourism, one in which provocation is transformed into capital and satire becomes a means of engaging with reality. The film raises numerous contentious issues of representation, responsibility and the shifting power of cinema. Although the story is fictional, its effects on real landscapes and real people are not.

Results

The comparative study of *Sonar Kella*, *Lost in Translation* and *Borat* clearly shows that there is no single, unified mechanism of film-induced tourism. Films create tourist interest in the destinations through different combinations of visual appeal, emotional ties, cultural memory, curiosity, narrative identification and destination awareness. The three films exemplify three different motivations for film-induced tourism: nostalgia tourism, affective/experiential tourism and curiosity-based tourism.

The analysis shows that the link between a film and a destination depends on the way in which the place is portrayed. In the case of *Sonar Kella*, Rajasthan turns into a landscape of childhood memories, mysteries, heritage and adventure. The film portrayed Jaisalmer and the Thar Desert in such a way that it created a powerful link between the destination and the cultural memories of Bengalis. Nostalgia and narrative identification became the major motivating factors for tourism in this case. Visitors were interested in seeing places they had first encountered in Ray's film.

Lost in Translation provides a second example of film-induced tourism. It differs from the first in that Tokyo is not portrayed as a set of landmarks but is constructed as an emotional and psychological landscape. The Park Hyatt Tokyo, the New York Bar, karaoke venues and other locations acquire significance because of their association with the characters' experiences of loneliness, intimacy, alienation and connection. The results therefore suggest that film tourism can be motivated not only by the desire to see a particular location but also by the desire to recreate an emotional atmosphere associated with a film.

Borat illustrates a different outcome. In this case, tourism interest arose partly from controversy, satire, misinformation and curiosity. The film's fabricated and intentionally exaggerated image of Kazakhstan brought international attention to the country despite its negative portrayal. The later use of the expression "very nice" in the country's tourism advertising shows how a destination may respond to the controversial representation. Thus, this example shows that distorted or negative representation can also bring awareness of a destination and generate tourism interest, albeit while raising many ethical concerns.

The comparative analysis reveals different types of audience behaviour. For *Sonar Kella*, the audience consists mostly of people who are connected to the film culturally and linguistically, especially Bengali people, whose experience of the film is strengthened by shared cultural memory. On the other hand, *Lost in Translation* reaches an international audience, such as cinephiles and travellers interested in this emotional and atmospheric presentation of Tokyo. *Borat*, in turn, reached an international, digitally connected audience, among whom humour, satire, controversy and meme culture generated interest in a particular destination.

The nature of the tourist gaze is also crucial. The analysis of the three examples shows that tourists are not travelling simply to see geography; instead, they travel in order to discover the meanings that films have created about those places. Thus, *Sonar Kella* exemplifies a heritage and nostalgic tourist gaze; *Lost in Translation*, an introspective and affective gaze; and *Borat*, an ironic, spectacular and curiosity-based gaze.

The research results also show that film-induced tourism may provide new economic opportunities but at the same time pose social and cultural problems. Economic opportunities arise for accommodation and transport providers, tour guides, local shops and craftspeople. On the other hand, uncontrolled development of tourism may cause over-tourism, commodification of culture, staging of authenticity, environmental pressures and uneven income distribution.

Overall, it may be concluded that films can turn geographical sites into symbolic and emotional destinations for tourists. This effect depends on the story told, the type of tourist, their cultural background, the representation of the destination and how the destination is managed.

Discussion

The findings of this research confirm the fundamental idea of John Urry's theory of the "tourist gaze" [1], which holds that tourism is defined by social and cultural constructs of how people see the world. As all three case studies illustrate, tourists do not experience a neutral geographical location when they visit a destination; rather, their experience is defined by stories, images, cultural memories and expectations developed before the trip.

In this respect, cinema plays a very important role as an institution that shapes the tourist gaze. A film presents its audience with a specific selection of a landscape, framed in a particular way, together with a certain story, specific characters and the emotional connotations attached to that landscape.

In particular, the case of *Sonar Kella* illustrates the importance of cinema for the development of relationships between viewers and a destination. Jaisalmer becomes something much deeper than a historical fort or geographical location for those who are familiar with this film. They associate this destination with Feluda, Mukul, the Thar Desert, mystery, childhood and the visual world created by Satyajit Ray.

This case is also significant because it extends the scope of film tourism beyond commercially packaged and planned tourism. It shows how film tourism can develop without formal tourism planning or institutional support. While a "Feluda tour" could certainly be promoted through tourism marketing campaigns, the film itself serves to market the experience.

The tourist gaze in *Lost in Translation* provides yet another aspect of the phenomenon. Although the Tokyo shown in the film is not defined by iconic landmarks, the film creates an interesting psychological space through which the protagonists experience loneliness, alienation and brief moments of intimacy. As a result, people visiting the city are likely to be interested not only in actual filming locations but also in the feelings that the film associates with them.

This is consistent with Roesch's broader definition of film location tourists [4] and with the notion that visiting a film location is a more complex experience than merely seeing the place. Film locations become meaningful through connections to characters, events, emotions and memories. For example, the attractiveness of filming locations such as the park Hyatt and the New York Bar is partly derived from their role in the emotional narrative of Bob and Charlotte.

At the same time, the case raises issues of representation. While Coppola's Tokyo is distinctive in its atmosphere and introspection, the film arguably offers only a partial picture because of its Western outlook. Japanese characters and elements of Japanese society remain in the background of the Western characters' experiences. This points to a paradox in film tourism: even a partial and incomplete representation can generate tourists' interest in the destination.

The same paradox is even more visible in the case of *Borat*. In contrast to *Sonar Kella* and *Lost in Translation*, *Borat* promoted Kazakhstan neither through admiration nor through intimacy but through distortion and satire. Nevertheless, the film made people around the world more aware of Kazakhstan and later became part of the country's tourism marketing discourse.

This example thus shows that positive representation is not a prerequisite for successful film-induced tourism. In the *Borat* case, controversy becomes the means of increasing visibility. The subsequent decision by Kazakhstan's tourism authorities to incorporate the phrase "very nice" into promotional communication can be understood as an attempt to reclaim and reinterpret a representation that was initially perceived as damaging.

However, this case also demonstrates that increased visibility cannot automatically be equated with successful destination promotion. Tourism generated by stereotypes, mockery or misinformation can reinforce problematic perceptions and may encourage visitors to consume a destination primarily as a spectacle. The case therefore highlights the ethical responsibility of filmmakers, tourism authorities and destination managers when dealing with cinematic representations.

The findings of all three case studies support the proposition that cinematic representation can create symbolic value for a destination. A destination's value lies not only in its historical, cultural and geographical importance but also in the narrative that cinema provides, through which these features can be understood.

The findings also confirm the economic potential of film-induced tourism. Not only does filmmaking bring direct economic gains through employment and demand for accommodation and transport services, but a location may also

continue to attract tourists long after filming has ended. However, the gains may not be shared equally. In the absence of planning, large tourism companies may capture most of the economic benefit while local communities suffer from pollution or cultural disruption.

The idea of staged authenticity becomes especially relevant here. Once a place becomes famous as a filming location, the local community increasingly tends to reproduce the culture that tourists expect. Cultural practices, architectural styles, food, clothing and much else can then become commercialised commodities.

It is therefore important to note that film tourism cannot be analysed merely as a marketing strategy for destinations. Rather, it should be seen as a complex cultural process encompassing representation, audience psychology, destination branding, economics, community involvement and sustainability.

Another implication of the analysis relates to changes in the media environment. The films examined here were distributed in the traditional cinematic way; today, however, screen representations of places are consumed via streaming services, social media, fan sites, short videos, reviews and geotagged content. This could accelerate the rate at which cinematic places become globally known.

Moreover, digital platforms could change the tourist gaze, since people can create their own representations of a destination in the form of recreated film scenes and share them on social media with geotags.

All three cases show that there is no single “film tourism effect”. The first example, *Sonar Kella*, shows the strength of regional cultural memory. The second, *Lost in Translation*, represents affective and experiential tourism. The third, *Borat*, shows that even satirical and controversial films can unexpectedly create visibility for destinations. Their diversity is as important as their commonality.

It follows that when destinations seek to use the film industry to promote themselves, they should consider not only their presence on screen but also how they appear, for whom the film was made, how it will be perceived and what tourism authorities and local communities will do afterwards.

Films can thus be a very effective tool for destination promotion, but the consequences of such promotion cannot be entirely predicted and are not always positive. The creation of desire should be followed by responsible destination management, cultural sensitivity, participation of local communities, infrastructure planning and sustainable development policies.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, cinema is an imagination-based medium, which becomes storytelling and yearning when geography is added to it. This study has shown how films, whether through cultural nostalgia, emotional connection or satire, have the remarkable ability to shape tourist behaviour and give locations new meanings. From the three seemingly different case studies of *Sonar Kella*, *Lost in Translation* and *Borat*, one consistent theme emerges: films do not merely represent locations; they create desire, and, more often than not, that desire transcends the screen and transforms into actual tourist practices.

In the case of *Sonar Kella*, it is the cinematic eye of Satyajit Ray that has frozen the deserts and fortresses of Rajasthan in the cultural memory of Bengal, giving rise to a bottom-up circuit of travel motivated by nostalgia rather than state-sponsored marketing campaigns. Film tourism, in this case, has been vernacular, intimate and narrative-driven. In the case of *Lost in Translation*, by contrast, Tokyo’s geography is not so much a site of tourist practice as a place where emotional detachment can occur. The film drew spectators not to iconic sites but to moods and atmospheres, creating a tourism that is affective rather than geographical. Lastly, *Borat* revealed the irony of satire and inadvertent tourism. Despite its derisive caricatures, the film put Kazakhstan on the world’s lips, ultimately compelling the nation to reclaim and redefine its national identity through tourism efforts. It is a case of serendipitous tourism, in which even mockery can bring economic and cultural interaction.

The results of this analysis are highly consistent with the ideas put forward by John Urry in his theory of the “tourist gaze”. According to Urry, seeing is socially and visually constructed in a manner that influences how the authors’ travel. As the case studies show, tourists are not merely visiting places but pursuing cinematic myths, moods and meanings. These myths can be far more powerful than any marketing campaign or brochure.

Moreover, the literature reviewed here, from Roesch and Beeton to Connell and Urry, shows that film tourism is an interdisciplinary phenomenon that cannot be described in terms of either psychology or economics alone. By means of organised or individual tours, people are becoming increasingly inclined to discover the world through the medium of cinema.

In an age of online platforms, in which the reach of cinema continues to expand, the complexity of its influence on tourism will only continue to grow. Future research could examine how digital fan culture, Instagram geotagging and perhaps even short-form television programming direct tourist flows.

In sum, films do not simply represent the world; they reinvent it. In the journey from site to screen, they entice the authors to visit places not only as points on a map but also as affective and symbolic spaces, each shot a possible itinerary, each narrative a whispered invitation to go.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no personal, professional or institutional affiliations and no financial or non-financial relationships that could reasonably be perceived as influencing the content of this manuscript.

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