

4 Revamped Consumer Behaviour in Tourism

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Critically evaluate how contemporary travellers' risk perceptions and motivations have evolved in response to global socio-political, environmental, and technological changes.
- Identify and analyse health-conscious travel preferences, including the drivers of wellness tourism and the behavioural patterns shaping demand for low-impact, personalised, and ethical travel experiences.
- Discuss the psychological dimensions of mental and emotional well-being in tourism and assess how these factors influence destination appeal and resilience.
- Apply principles of empathetic and human-centred design in the development of tourism experiences that respond to emotional and cultural sensitivities.
- Examine the policy and governance implications of designing resilient, health-oriented tourism systems that centre well-being and inclusivity.

Introduction

This chapter will explore the emerging paradigms that shape consumer behaviour in contemporary tourism. It will begin by examining how evolving perceptions of risk and motivation redefine the decision-making processes of travellers. This chapter will also illustrate how risk is now interpreted through subjective, cultural, and media-influenced lenses, prompting demand for greater transparency and emotional reassurance. Transitions to health-conscious travel behaviours will be acknowledged, together with noting the rise of wellness tourism as both a commercial trend and a pillar of tourism resilience. The changing preferences toward restorative, nature-based, and ethically aligned

travel choices, show how such patterns now challenge traditional segmentation models. Finally, this chapter will consider how empathy and well-being are increasingly embedded in tourism experience design. Concepts such as empathetic service, transformational travel, and emotional safety will be explored, alongside their implications for policy and governance. In doing so, this chapter will underscore the necessity of designing tourism systems that are not only economically viable but emotionally sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive to future challenges.

Traveller psychology post-pandemic: Risk perception and motivations

The study of tourist behaviour is rooted in a complex interplay of psychological, social, and environmental variables that shape decision-making, destination choices, and post-consumption satisfaction. In recent years, shifts in geopolitical dynamics, environmental crises, and global economic instability have significantly altered the psychological underpinnings of travel behaviour. Central to these transformations is a reconfiguration of risk perception and motivational structures, necessitating a further understanding of how tourists now evaluate safety, authenticity, and meaning in their travel experiences.

Understanding traveller psychology through some of the earliest frameworks still offers valuable insights for resilient tourism management. Cohen's typology of tourists (1972) categorises tourists into four roles, ranging from the organized mass tourist to the drifter (Prince, 2017), all based on their desired degree of novelty and familiarity (Figure 4.1).

Cohen's typology reveals that resilience in tourism must be adaptable to a spectrum of behavioural orientations. For example, while organised tourists tend to prioritise predictability and structured experiences, others seek immersion and authenticity, often accepting higher levels of uncertainty. Thus, recognising these preferences enables tourism planners to design layered offerings that accommodate varying thresholds of risk and comfort.

Cohen's typology reveals that resilience in tourism must be adaptable. Further to this, consumer behaviour literature underscores the role of

perceived value, information asymmetry, and social influence in shaping preferences (Moutinho, 1987; Woodside, 2017). These psychological elements are particularly prominent in an age marked by rapid digitalisation, climate awareness, and shifting normative behaviours around health, security, and cultural respect.

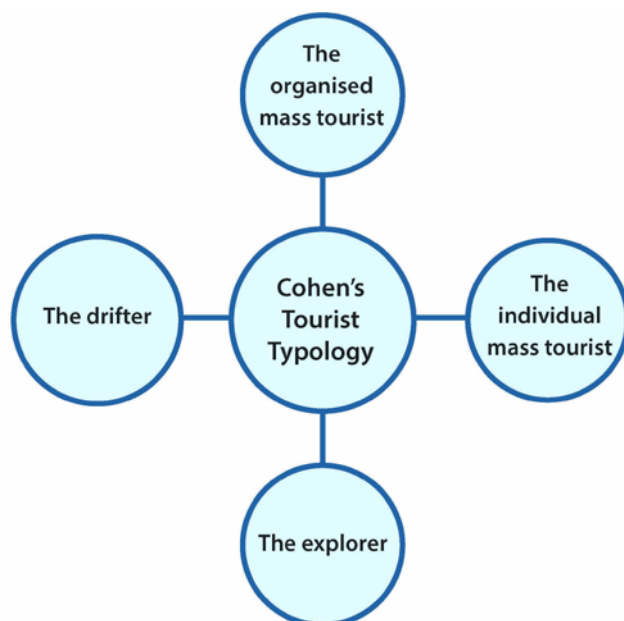


Figure 4.1: Cohen's tourist typology. Adapted from Cohen (1972)

Evolution of risk perception in tourism

Risk perception in tourism tends to be inherently subjective and shaped by a complex interplay of personal, cultural, and contextual factors (Cui et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016). Generally, it is influenced not only by an individual's outlook, such as their risk tolerance or past travel experience, but also by external forces such as media narratives, public discourse, and socio-political climates. Therefore, what constitutes a risky destination or experience can actually vary significantly across travellers and contexts.

Due to the very nature of tourism, risk is multidimensional. Physical risks, such as exposure to natural disasters or crime, according to Beirman, (2018) remains a fundamental concern. At the same time, financial risks, including trip cancellations, sudden price hikes, or currency

fluctuations, can also affect decision-making, especially in uncertain economic climates. On the other hand, psychological risks, such as the anxiety of navigating unfamiliar environments or language barriers, also influence travel behaviour (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005), particularly among novice, female or solo travellers (see Chang, 2013). Also, social risks tend to emerge when individuals fear judgement or disapproval from peers regarding their travel choices (Dolnicar, 2005), while performance risk involves the possibility that the destination may not meet expectations or deliver the promised experience (Mihalič, 2013).

It can be argued that travellers often process a combination of the above risks through a dual lens. On one hand, individuals might consider tangible information such as health advisories, insurance coverage, or weather forecasts. On the other hand, social media posts, visual branding, star ratings, or online reviews (see Chapter 3) often carry disproportionate weight in shaping perceptions and influencing decisions. This dual-processing means that even minimal threats can be amplified or mitigated depending on how they are framed and communicated.

Contemporary travellers also exhibit heightened sensitivities to broader global issues. Geopolitical instability, including terrorism or regional conflict, often deters travel even to adjacent or unrelated destinations (Garg, 2015). Similarly, environmental uncertainties, such as wildfires, floods, or water shortages, now factor prominently into destination risk assessments, particularly among sustainability-conscious tourists. For example, a study by Reiner et al. (2024) found that direct losses in tourism expenditure of \$1,629.9 million nationwide, in addition to \$112.6 million in depreciated infrastructure, were a result of the tourism shutdown from Australia's 2019-20 'Black Summer' Bushfires. Cultural risks, including concerns over ethical tourism practices or unfamiliar local norms, are also increasingly relevant, with travellers showing a greater awareness of their social impact and potential for cultural missteps.

In response, tourism providers are under growing pressure to offer clear, proactive, and honest communication. Transparency about risks and the steps being taken to manage them has already been noted as essential. This includes offering flexible booking and cancellation poli-

cies, providing real-time alerts through apps or SMS (see Chapter 3), and reassuring travellers through visible safety measures and localised guarantees. By addressing such evolving concerns directly and empathetically, destinations and providers can build trust, reduce perceived risk, and support more informed and confident travel decisions.

Health-conscious travel choices and preferences

The evolution of the wellness economy in tourism reflects a change in thinking from leisure-centric travel to well-being-centred mobility. This trend tends to be underpinned by broader societal transformations, such as growing health consciousness, preventive care movements, and holistic lifestyles, which have made a way into global consumer cultures. Wellness tourism refers to travel that enables individuals to maintain or enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Dillette et al., 2021; Smith, 2022). It encompasses a spectrum of activities, from traditional spa treatments to mindfulness retreats and fitness-based experiences.

When it comes to resilient tourism management, the rise of wellness travel should be considered more than a commercial trend. In fact, it represents a recalibration of the industry's value proposition. Destinations that invest in health-centric infrastructure, such as clean air initiatives, sustainable food systems, and stress-reducing natural environments, demonstrate not only competitiveness but also resilience in absorbing and adapting to global health concerns. More importantly, this form of tourism encourages low-impact practices, decentralisation (through rural and nature-based settings), and longer lengths of stay, all of which contribute to environmental sustainability and economic stability.

Critically, the wellness economy also disrupts traditional consumer-tourism relationships by introducing co-creation and experiential personalisation as core components (Räikkönen & Grénman, 2017). Travelers are shaping their itineraries based on personal health goals, thus demanding a more adaptive, participatory tourism ecosystem. As such, resilient tourism strategies must evolve beyond standardised packages to offer individual, health-responsive travel models that integrate both local cultural assets and contemporary wellness science.

Traveler preferences and patterns

Shifting traveller preferences reflect deeper behavioural reorientations that emphasise health literacy, self-care, and environmental sensibility. While contemporary tourists are increasingly selecting destinations and experiences that help to promote physical vitality, psychological rejuvenation, and social alignment with wellness values. Such patterns are evident in the rise of demand for nature-based experiences, plant-based culinary tourism, and activity-oriented holidays (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010; Lade et al., 2020; Richards, 2012), trends that deviate significantly from mass-tourism.

The proposed alignment between a destination's ethos and a traveller's personal wellness philosophy can influence decision-making as much as price or location. For instance, accommodation providers that integrate organic food systems, offer yoga and mindfulness programs, or provide guided nature therapy are not only desirable but seen as symbolic extensions of personal identity (see Corry et al., 2024).

Yet, from a resilience standpoint, such behavioural shifts present both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, health-conscious travellers are highly discerning and values-driven (Hallab et al., 2003), requiring destinations to invest in credibility and transparency. On the other hand, this demographic tends to engage in off-season travel, exhibit lower environmental impact, and demonstrate higher willingness to pay for ethical and health-enhancing experiences (Goodwin & Francis, 2003), all factors which contribute towards destination resilience and economic diversification.

These evolving patterns challenge traditional tourism segmentation models, demanding a more fluid approach that recognises hybrid identities. For example,

- ◆ The digital nomad who also seeks detox weekends.
- ◆ The family that blends cultural immersion with organic living at specific destinations.
- ◆ The solo traveller pursuing both solitude and guided wellness.

Thus, resilient tourism management must account for a range of flexible health-focused tourism products.

Mental and emotional wellness in travel

In an increasingly volatile world marked by social stress, mental fatigue, and psychological burnout, the emotional dimension of travel has emerged as a central motivation and outcome. Mental wellness tourism, while often nested within the broader wellness category, deserves distinct attention. Because, unlike physical health, which may be targeted through spas or fitness facilities, mental well-being tends to be cultivated through atmosphere, connection, and meaning – elements that are less tangible but deeply influential.

Tourism, by its immersive nature, provides a unique medium for psychological transformation and emotional restoration. For example, Buckley and Westaway (2022) discussed how nature tourism has the ability to provide psychological rescue and rehabilitation for women who have suffered trauma, comparable to clinical treatments. As such, nature retreats, spiritual heritage sites, or culturally immersive slow-travel experiences have been shown to help facilitate cognitive renewal, emotional regulation, and even trauma recovery (see Buckley & Westaway, 2022; Corry et al., 2024).

For destination managers, policy makers and service providers, this presents a dual obligation. First, to design spaces and services that promote calm, reflection, and emotional safety. And second, to train staff in emotional intelligence and empathy, thereby enhancing service quality in a way that aligns with wellness principles. From a resilience perspective, investing in emotional wellness infrastructure reduces the destination's dependence on physical attractions or events, thus creating experience-based value that is adaptable to shifting external conditions.

Ethical and sustainable consumerism

Health-conscious travel cannot be separated from the ethical turn in consumer behaviour, where purchasing decisions are increasingly tied to values such as sustainability, animal welfare, labour equity, and cultural respect. Tourists who prioritise their own health are also frequently concerned with the health of the planet and its people, leading to a convergence between personal well-being and collective responsibility. This convergence has spurred the growth of travel choices that are simultaneously health-promoting and ethical (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Health promoting and ethical travel choices

Travel choices	Industry example
Carbon-offset programs that align with respiratory health	Sustainable Travel International allows travellers to calculate and offset the carbon footprint of their flights, car, and boat travel in seconds using our online carbon calculator. https://sustainabletravel.org/our-work/carbon-offsets
Plant-based adaptations that address animal welfare and diet	Vegan Travel Asia by VegVoyages focuses on connecting travellers with the local way of life, allowing them to learn and engage while enjoying a variety of 100% local vegan cuisine along the way. https://vegantravelasia.com
Local farm-to-table initiatives that support nutritional transparency and community economies	Online platforms and apps, such as CrowdFarming, facilitate agro-tourism and provide tourists with information about local food sources The rise of agro-tourism CrowdFarming Blog

Critically, ethical consumerism also acts as a reputational safeguard. In times of crisis or uncertainty, destinations that are perceived as ethical, sustainable, and health-promoting retain greater consumer trust and loyalty (Yu & Hwang, 2019). Thus, the integration of ethical practices into wellness tourism is not merely a moral endeavour but a strategic imperative for long-term resilience.

Toward resilient health-oriented tourism systems

Building health-oriented resilience in tourism requires a systemic approach and at the core of this transformation is the recognition that health is not simply a market trend but a foundational pillar of tourism stability and social relevance. As health and well-being become central organizing principles of human mobility (Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014). Thus, it is obvious that destinations must respond with collaboration, policy innovation, and community integration. Some of these key components of resilient, health-oriented systems are noted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Key components of resilient, health-oriented systems

Public-private health partnerships
Collaboration between tourism authorities and health sectors can ensure the alignment of infrastructure, messaging, and emergency responsiveness. This includes not only hygiene standards but also mental health support, environmental monitoring, and crisis communication systems.
Workforce health literacy and training
Employees in tourism must be trained not only in customer service but also in basic health awareness, empathy, and wellness facilitation. Frontline workers act as health ambassadors, capable of influencing visitor perceptions and experiences.
Technology for health personalisation
Data-driven platforms that track health preferences, allergies, or fitness goals can offer highly personalised wellness journeys, enhancing both satisfaction and loyalty. Artificial intelligence, biometric feedback, and mobile health integration open new frontiers for responsive tourism.
Policy and certification frameworks
National and regional tourism strategies must institutionalise health within planning frameworks. This could involve new certifications for wellness-based destinations, zoning for green infrastructure, or investment in low-impact transportation.

Ultimately, a resilient health-oriented tourism system is one that views well-being not as an added benefit, but as a structural asset. Such systems are more likely to withstand shocks, attract future-forward consumers, and contribute meaningfully to both public health goals and regenerative economic models.

Designing experiences for empathy and well-being

As the psychological priorities of travellers evolve, there is increasing demand for emotionally resonant, health-affirming experiences that not only entertain but also nurture, restore, and connect. Within this context, designing for empathy and well-being should not only be considered a matter of service excellence, but as a strategy for resilience – essentially, enabling tourism systems to adapt to deeper human needs and social dynamics. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the conceptual grounding for empathetic design, the emergence of purpose-driven travel, and their associated implications for policy, planning, and governance.

Empathetic design in tourism

As travellers increasingly seek emotionally safe, psychologically fulfilling, and culturally sensitive encounters, according to Tussyadiah (2014) empathetic design provides a framework for creating experiences that centre human needs, vulnerabilities, and aspirations. Such a perspective attempts to align tourism development with broader paradigms in human-centred design, positive psychology, and service innovation. Thus, marking a significant shift from traditional consumer-centric models to more holistic, care-oriented practices.

Volo (2021) alludes to the importance of emotions in tourism and proposes principles for emotion-oriented tourism design. Empathetic design in tourism involves more than comfort and convenience; it is about fostering emotional resonance, inclusion, and relational depth (Tussyadiah, 2014). It requires tourism practitioners and planners to engage in deep listening, community co-design, and contextual sensitivity. For example, in designing visitor centres or guided experiences, empathetic frameworks generally would ask the following:

- ◆ How will this space make people feel?
- ◆ Will it ease anxiety?
- ◆ Will it foster connection and understanding?

By considering the affective dimensions of tourism, destinations can enhance not just satisfaction, but supporting travellers in processing experiences, cultivating well-being, and returning to their home environments with renewed clarity and purpose.

It is worth noting that this human-centred approach is particularly critical in contexts marked by historical trauma, cultural sensitivity, or vulnerable host communities. Empathy ensures that narratives are not appropriated or enhanced but shared with dignity and mutual learning. For example, in conflict tourism initiatives in Northern Ireland, empathetic design may involve working with community leaders and participants of the conflict on both sides to co-create storytelling formats that are culturally appropriate and emotionally safe, for both the hosts and the visitors.

Moreover, in environments where uncertainty affects travel choices, empathetically designed experiences can help reduce stress, increase

transparency, and support better emotional regulation among travellers. Destinations that embody these principles are more likely to foster repeat visitation, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term sustainability rooted in authentic human connection. Thus, empathetic design is not simply a soft skill or service enhancement, it is a strategic resilience asset that responds to the emotional complexity of 21st-century travel and anchors tourism in ethical, sustainable, and deeply human values.

The rise of purpose-driven and transformational travel

One of the most significant behavioural evolutions in contemporary tourism is the growth of purpose-driven and transformational travel (Nandasena et al., 2022; Pala & Cetin, 2022). These paradigms represent more than what might often be considered as niche trends; they are indicative of a broader societal shift. For example, as noted by Stankov et al. (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity for the tourism industry to embrace mindfulness and shift towards more meaningful, value-based tourism. Such transformational travel seeks to provoke internal change, whether through intercultural engagement, or active contribution to community or environmental wellbeing.

Transformational travel is guided by a desire not only to escape routine but to reconnect with personal purpose, to heal from psychological exhaustion, or to explore new ethical and spiritual dimensions of the self (Kunwar & Ulak, 2024). These experiences often take place in immersive, slow-travel formats, such as retreat-based tourism, voluntourism, artistic residencies, or heritage pilgrimages, where travellers are encouraged to reflect deeply on their identities, responsibilities, and relational roles in the world.

From the perspective of resilient tourism management, transformational travel offers a unique opportunity to create durable visitor engagement. Travelers who undergo meaningful personal shifts are more likely to develop lasting emotional attachments to destinations (Hang et al., 2020; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010), invest in local economies, and even become advocates for regenerative practices. Moreover, transformational travel naturally aligns with small-scale tourism models that are less susceptible to overtourism and better integrated with local communities and ecological contexts.

However, facilitating personal transformation, especially among vulnerable travellers, requires attention to emotional safety, narrative integrity, and reflective integration. Specific experiences that might challenge worldviews, evoke emotion, or introduce existential discomfort need to be scaffolded with supportive structures, such as trained facilitators, safe group dynamics, and post-experience reflection. Additionally, transformational travel is increasingly tied to intercultural and intergenerational ethics. Tourists are seeking to discover not as passive consumers but as active learners and respectful allies. This shift would require strong host community leadership, not just participation, and demands that tourism systems redistribute narrative authority to those who have historically been objectified or marginalised within the tourism gaze.

Implications for policy, planning, and governance

Designing tourism systems that embed empathy and well-being cannot be achieved through market mechanisms alone; it requires strategic policy frameworks, governance innovation, and cross-sectoral alignment. Governments, DMOs, and tourism associations must transition from models centred on volume and GDP contribution to ones that recognise emotional and psychological sustainability as core indicators of sectoral health, which generally is not an easy task.

One of the first implications is the need to institutionalise well-being and empathy as planning criteria. In destination master plans, tourism strategies and other strategic planning documents, well-being should be positioned not as a thematic niche but as an integrated axis, influencing mobility design, communication strategy, visitor dispersal, and capacity management. Furthermore, policy frameworks would need to support developing training programs that equip tourism workers (not only in hospitality but in guiding, transport, and administration) with skills in emotional intelligence, trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and conflict resolution.

Governance also has a role to play in protecting community well-being (see Bramwell & Lane, 2011). As destinations pursue health-conscious and empathy-driven travellers, the risk of emotional commodification and cultural exhaustion will potentially grow, if unchecked. Therefore,

policymakers must set clear boundaries for experience design, ensuring that storytelling, rituals, or community engagement are conducted on host community terms, and that emotional labour is fairly compensated and not extracted unsustainably.

At the level of metrics and evaluation, new tools are needed to assess success beyond quantitative indicators like arrival numbers or average daily spend. Instead, frameworks similar to Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index which adopts a multidimensional, equitable, plural, and policy-relevant perspective on happiness and wellbeing (OECD, 2024) can capture the affective value of tourism. Such tools help reposition tourism as a force for public health, cultural resilience, and societal coherence. Lastly, governance must enable inclusive participatory design. The creation of empathetic and wellness-oriented experiences is most effective when local voices, particularly those from traditionally excluded groups (women, Indigenous peoples, youth, informal workers), are at the table from the outset, shaping policies, narrating histories, and defining success on their own terms.

Summary

This chapter examined the shifts in consumer behaviour that are reshaping tourism in an era defined by uncertainty, health consciousness, and emotional complexity. Beginning with and by exploring the evolving risk perceptions and motivational drivers, it highlighted the growing influence of psychological and contextual factors on travel decision-making. This chapter also discussed the rise of health-conscious travel preferences, emphasising the growth of wellness tourism and its role in fostering destination resilience. While also demonstrating how travellers are now prioritising physical vitality, mental restoration, and ethical alignment in their choices, prompting a need for more adaptive, personalised, and sustainable tourism models. Finally, the discussion turned to the importance of empathy and emotional well-being in experience design. Purpose-driven and transformational travel emerged as critical forms of engagement, requiring thoughtful planning and governance. As such, destinations must respond not only to logistical needs but to the deeper emotional and psychological aspirations of travellers.

Questions for discussion

1. How has the concept of risk in tourism evolved, and what are the implications of these changes for destination marketing and management?
2. In what ways do health-conscious travel preferences challenge traditional models of tourism product design and market segmentation?
3. Explain how the rise of the wellness economy can contribute to both destination resilience and sustainable development.
4. Discuss the psychological and emotional needs that underpin transformational travel. How can tourism providers design for these needs ethically?
5. What is empathetic design in tourism, and why is it increasingly seen as a strategic asset in resilience planning?
6. Evaluate the role of ethical and sustainable consumerism in shaping modern tourism behaviour. How should destinations respond?
7. How can governance structures support emotionally sustainable tourism? Provide examples of planning or policy tools that could be applied.
8. Reflect on your own travel experiences. Can you identify examples where emotional well-being or empathy were (or were not) prioritised? What impact did this have on your overall perception?

Recommended reading

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