



Theoretical Framework and Empirical Preferences in Photographic Tourism: A Comparison between University Students and Amateur Photographers in Italy

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Abstract

Photographic tourism is a niche market that is mainly devoted to amateur photographers. However, this form of tourism can also be of interest to novice photographers as they can put into practice the concepts learned during photography courses. The aim of this paper is to clarify the theoretical framework of this special interest tourism and to investigate preferences, especially as concerns the features of an “ideal photography-oriented package”. The economic aspect of how much more photographers are willing to spend on a package compared to regular tourists visiting the same destination will also be considered. Obviously, there will also be differences in spending capacity based on whether the photographer is a novice or an enthusiast. To compare the preferences of these groups, two online surveys were conducted on university students with an interest in photography and on amateur photographers that regularly used a well-known photographic social media site. The results obtained from a total of 1,153 respondents showed a clear difference between the two groups, both with respect to the inclusion of a workshop in the package – an essential element of photographic tourism – and the willingness to pay more to acquire a whole range of features specific to this form of tourism.

Keywords: Photographic Tourism, Framework, Statistical Surveys, Amateur Photographers, University Students

1. Introduction

Although the relationship between tourism and photography is as old as the discovery of photography itself (Keim, 2001; Marra, 2017), over the years research on photographic tourism has been conducted without a coherent and

shared conceptual definition and with no clear theoretical grounding.

Approaching the study of photographic tourism for the first time, without having an exact idea of the specific characteristics of this particular form of tourism, one encounters a

large number of references relating to the relationship between tourism and photography. This is due to the strong relationship between the two phenomena, which has increased greatly due to mass tourism, as described by Sontag (1977). More recently, following the digital photography “revolution” (Marra, 2006), Robinson and Picard (2009, p. 1) claimed, “To be a tourist, it would seem, involves taking photographs. Whilst photography is clearly not the exclusive preserve of tourists it nonetheless is one of the markers of being a tourist”. Nowadays, however, this connection has become completely invisible. Whereas in the days of “analogue photography” a tourist was easily recognizable, following the hybridization of portable telephones and digital cameras the act of taking photographs, especially selfies, is no longer reserved only to tourists.

However, there is scant literature on this topic, particularly regarding the exact difference between a photographic tourist and a “tourist with a camera”. Therefore, there is a need for precise definitions of photographic tourists and photographic tourism.

Bibliographic research has been traced as far back as April 1903, when an article discussing the relationship between tourism and photography in the early twentieth century was published in the Italian Touring Club, a monthly magazine. In the first part of the article, the term “photographic tourism” was used explicitly for the first time (Touring Club Italiano, 1903, p. 124). More than a century later, its meaning remains similar to the international definition given to this phenomenon.

Considering both the historical context of the above-mentioned period and the transport revolution linked to the invention and diffusion of the bicycle and the automobile, the article used the term “photographic tourism” to refer to amateur photographers (not necessarily to be considered as inferior to professional photographers, as pointed out by Barthes, 2003) who visited a place exclusively to bring home “photographic memories”. For these people, the journey is made with the precise objective of taking photographs, and thus they are not simply travelling with a camera. Therefore, it is possible to state that the main difference between a

“photographic tourist” and a normal “tourist with a camera” had already been made explicit over a hundred years ago.

To correctly place photographic tourism in the era of global tourism (Bagnoli, 2018; Dell’Agnese, 2018), it is necessary to introduce the concept of *Special Interest Tourism* (SIT), which includes forms of tourism that are motivated by people’s diverse interests and passions (Weiler and Hall, 1992; Brotherton and Himmetoğlu, 1997, Novelli et al., 2022). In reality, this is not a completely original idea. Discussing travel in general, Read (1980, p. 195) defined *special interest travel* as “travel for people who are going somewhere because they have a particular interest that can be pursued in a particular region or at a particular destination. It is the hub around which the total travel experience is planned and developed”.

In the literature, SIT is differentiated from mass tourism (Trouer, 2006), as it is less “superficial” than mass tourism and remains a niche form that is practiced by a smaller number of people. According to Robinson and Novelli (Novelli, 2005, p. 12), SIT “may be defined as a form of tourism which involves consumers whose holiday choice is inspired by specific motivations and whose level of satisfaction is determined by the experience they pursue”. Similarly, Palmer and Lester described photographic tourism as a specific form of SIT. These authors pointed out that a tour group undertaking this type of tourism is accompanied by a professional photographer who serves as the team leader. Moreover, in order to ensure that the learning experience during photographic workshops is effective, the number of participants is limited.

What is more, Palmer and Lester also noted “the power of the photographer to take or appropriate people, places and objects and to control how an image is represented as a result of his/her artistic and technical skills” (Novelli, 2005, Table 1.2, p. 19). In summary, equipment and photographic knowledge play a fundamental role in photographic tourism, and thus these factors must be considered when defining a reference framework for photographic tourism.

2. Definitions and framework

Before considering the theoretical framework and its evolution since the digital revolution, it is necessary to clarify the modern definition of this niche tourism.

On the basis of the literature on SIT, Gogoi (2014, p. 111) proposed two coordinated definitions of tourism and photographic tourists, which are both taken as reference points for this study. If we consider photographic tourism as “that form of special interest tourism in which [a] tourist visits a particular place with the primary aim of photographing subjects that are unique to him”, a photographic tourist might be defined as “a person who travels with the prime objective of photographing something unique”. Neither the type of photography practiced (portrait, street photography, etc.), nor the technique used (macro, panning, etc.) seem to be influential in the above-mentioned definitions, although they are perfectly in line with the definition published more than a hundred years earlier.

In this study, we would like to overcome the representation of the framework provided by Gogoi because it is considered both incomplete and misleading. Using the set-type interpretation proposed in Figure 1, the author identified four main dimensions of Photographic Tourism (PhT): in addition to Photography and Tourism (already considered as SIT), the dimensions of Tourist and Tourist Destination were added. The phenomenon of photographic tourism is to be found at the intersection of these four dimensions, so at the centre of Figure 1.

The main reason why this concentric Venn-type representation is misleading is because it suggests that there is a hierarchy of dimensions and that each dimension cannot live separately from the others. For example, in Figure 1 it seems that photography is an activity limited to tourists who practice SIT, but this assumption is clearly incorrect, as pointed out previously by Robinson and Picard (2009).

In addition, it is not clear why the author, who studied photographic tourism during a time that was characterized by the diffusion of information and communication, did not consider that the use of the Internet has completely changed how photographs are produced and used. In fact, nowadays they are rarely viewed after being

printed on paper. In digital photography the obsessive use of photographic social media is evident (e.g. Flickr, Instagram, 500px, etc.), and use of the material support that these media provide has become common practice, both for amateurs and professionals.

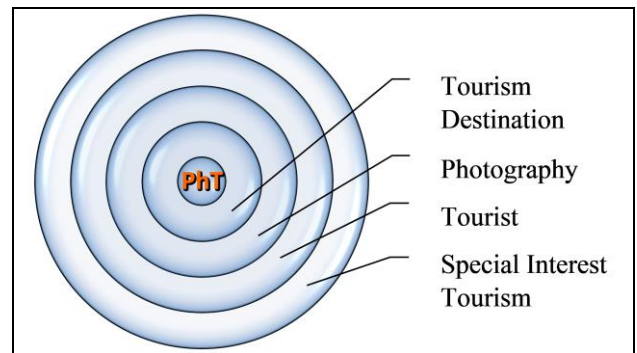


Figure 1. The original representation of the theoretical framework. Source: Gogoi (2014, p. 111).

On the basis of these behaviours, Zaccomer, Marangon and Troiano (2019, p. 59) stated that in a digital world there is a close interconnection among photographic equipment, the use of social media sites primarily devoted to hosting photos and the propensity to book travel packages, by means of which these special tourists are able to photograph particular places, or events, and to improve their photographic skills. Therefore, following the digital revolution, which has revolutionized both the technical aspects of photography and the way it is used, the addition of the social media dimension would seem necessary in redefining the framework (Figure 2).

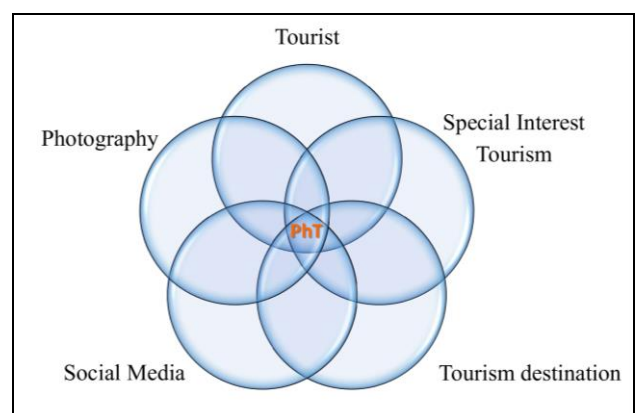


Figure 2. The new representation of the theoretical framework. Source: Zaccomer (2019, p. 25).

In consideration of this redefinition of the theoretical framework, it can be stated that photography is a phenomenon that may have no relationship with tourism. Without seeking to contradict Robinson and Picard (2009), even SIT and its human component can theoretically exist in forms that are unrelated to photography; for example, on business trips, which Novelli (2005) considered a form of SIT, there is not always the time to move to the desired location, visit it and take pictures. Furthermore, some people might not be interested in photography at all, so that when they behave like tourists, even if they have a smartphone, they might not use it as a camera (Mang et al., 2016).

The intersection between the tourist and photography dimensions contains important elements related to equipment, skills and knowledge of photographic techniques, all of which important in studying photographic tourism. These aspects are also significant from the point of view of the psychological benefits to the photographic tourists themselves, as pointed out by Palmer and Lester (Novelli, 2005, p. 19).

Similarly, regarding social media, it is possible to point out that, even if a large share of tourist packages is delivered through the Internet, self-organized trips do not necessarily require the services offered online. Furthermore, not all people have social profiles or feel comfortable posting their photos. Consequently, only at the intersection of the tourist, photography and social media dimensions do tourists' attitudes towards travelling, shooting and posting photographs to share their impressions and memories of a trip with other users emerge.

In this revised framework, it is necessary to discuss the photographic software aspect, especially in terms of the development and post-production of photographs in a digital format. In fact, in digital photography the hardware and software aspects of the computer are included in the photography dimension. However, following the development of the Internet and social media, many of the functions and post-production capabilities are available in the photographic social network or on a myriad of sites for amateurs, many of which are partly or completely free.

As mentioned above, the photographic software aspect has also developed extensively in the social media dimension. Indeed, the photographer's ability to use these software tools, both on the computer and online, is part of their general photographic skills. Consequently, the intersection of the tourist, photography and social media dimensions provides a full representation of all the elements required to define photographic tourism. However, only the further intersection of these three dimensions with those of the SIT and the tourist destination, typically not fungible in this particular SIT, seems to be able to provide a suitable delimitation of photographic tourism.

To complete the upgrade of the proposed framework, it is necessary to point out that the definitions given by Gogoi (2014) do not lose their importance in this redefinition. Rather, they are further strengthened thanks to the support of a broader framework that takes into account the digital revolution, which has also disrupted the field of photography since the start of the new millennium.

2.1 Edutainment and workshops

As pointed out earlier, when practicing photo tourism through a tour operator, photographic workshops are always incorporated into the package, increasing the overall tourism experience.

During the scheduled workshops, it is the role of the professional photographer, mentioned towards the end of the introduction, to teach participants photographic techniques. As a result, photographic tourism could be considered not only a personal educational opportunity, but also a form of edutainment (Lu, 2010).

The concept of *edutainment* – a portmanteau of the words “education” and “entertainment” – has today evolved to mean anything that can be communicated and learned in a fun and productive way. For example, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines *edutainment* as “The act of learning through a medium that both educates and entertains”.

The “learning by doing” teaching method fits

comfortably into this concept, especially as regards workshops. For the purpose of this paper, a *photographic workshop* is considered as an opportunity for photographic tourists to improve their skills and expand their creative vision. It is a mixture of lectures and practical exercises and is designed to teach new techniques, not only in the field but also in the studio. In addition, post-production skills are taught (using the most popular software for digital editing and the organization of photos) together with business skills for those who intend to start a new business.

One of the main objectives of this paper is, in fact, to test whether students and amateur photographers have different expectations concerning workshops. On the basis of this result, it will be possible to give accurate information to those involved in designing packages oriented toward photographic tourism.

3. Methodology

Two surveys were conducted in order to better understand the preferences of tourists with respect to the characteristics of an “ideal package” for photographic tourism, including their willingness to pay more to get what they want. In detail, the data are derived from two computer-assisted web interview surveys conducted in 2018.

The first, concerning the relationship between social media and photographic tourism (SMPHT), was conducted at the real-world level of the academic community of the University of Udine in Italy, and involved “users of photographic equipment” (mainly smartphones). Students were selected on the basis of their interest in taking photographs, often during the holidays, and their propensity to post their photographs online.

On the other hand, the second survey, called Flickr and photographic tourism (FkPhT), was conducted only at virtual level and was aimed at Italian users of photographic social media. By targeting respondents that published high-level photographs on social media, contact was made with, “amateur photographers” rather than just basic users of photographic equipment.

In other words, college students, who represented basic users of photographic equipment possessing little skill and a more limited budget, were compared with amateur photographers, who have more photographic experience and are more likely to possess a greater budget to finance their passion.

The choice of Flickr as the photographic social media site of reference was based on the characteristics identified in previous works (Michel, 2013; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013; Zielstra e Hochmair, 2013; Kádár, 2014; Cvetojevic et al., 2016; Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2021). Moreover, due to its application programming interface services and the availability of photograph metadata, it was possible to conduct a pilot survey as well as a global geographical analysis thanks to photograph georeferencing (Zaccomer and Grasseti, 2017; Zaccomer 2019).

Though differentiated, both questionnaires included the following sections: respondents’ socio-economic characteristics, use of social media, photographic equipment and knowledge, knowledge of photographic tourism and an identical choice experiment to simulate a market context (an aspect that will be covered in a different article). A total of 1,153 questionnaires were collected from the two surveys, 725 from students and 428 from Flickr users. The data were collected with Google Forms¹ and analysed using SPSS[®] 24, a well-known statistical analysis software package.

4. Results and discussion

In this paper, attention will be focused on very specific aspects of the surveys. In fact, after considering the demographic structure of the respondents, both the characteristics that a photographic tourism package should have (including the presence of a workshop) and the willingness to pay more than for an equivalent non-photography-oriented tourism package will be investigated.

First of all, it is necessary to consider the demographic structure of the respondents,

¹ Carefully considering the problem of occasional duplication of records that occurs with this tool.

including their geographical distribution, which is quite different in the two surveys.

4.1 Demographic structure

From the observation of demographic variables, the gender structure appears asymmetrical, with a higher female prevalence (75.5%) in the university survey and a higher male prevalence (71.7%) among Flickr respondents. Regarding age, given the types of populations involved, it was logical to expect that students' age would generally be lower than that of Flickr users. In fact, looking at the distribution by age group, among the respondents to the SMPHT questionnaire there is a substantial concentration of 20-year-olds (83.3%), with the 20-24-year-old modal class accounting for 68.8%. For Flickr users the distribution is not concentrated, but the modal class rises to 50-54 years and accounts for 13.6%, while the entire over 50 component accounts for as much as 35.7%.

As regards respondents' place of residence, the University of Udine, like other Italian universities, tends to attract local students. Thus, residence is completely concentrated in the north-east of Italy (96.4%). On the contrary, the spatial distribution of FkPhT is more dispersed, with north-east Italy accounting for only 28%, the north-west 33.2%, the centre 20.1% and the south and the islands 18.7%.

4.2 Preferences

In both statistical surveys, the respondents are asked to consider all the possible features of an "ideal package" for photographic tourism. Like the questionnaires, these characteristics were deduced from the literature used to construct the framework presented in Figure 2. This literature was supplemented by information gathered through attendance of photography clubs and active participation in photography workshops. Finally, as mentioned above, an initial pilot survey was also conducted on Flickr users to determine the best way to select amateur photographers (Zacommer, 2019).

In summary, all the results obtained from the two surveys presented here are perfectly

consistent with Gogoi's (2014) definitions and the new theoretical framework developed for the modern world of digital photography.

The features that the Flickr amateur photographers desire in an ideal package, are given in order of importance in Table 1.

On average, amateur photographers reported five "ideal" characteristics. The first three are all present in over half of the respondents: to have adequate time to photograph (66.8%); to set a minimum photographic knowledge requirement in order to participate in the trip (for 57.7%) and to organize the trip during periods of low tourist turnout (51.4%). On the other hand, the university students reported an average of 5.4 characteristics, mainly the presence of workshops (66.2%), the possibility of having time for extra photographic activities (49.2%) and having adequate time to photograph (48.7%). Therefore, the top feature both groups have in common is adequate time to carry out one's passion, while the presence of workshops, a key feature of this type of tourism, is also appreciated by amateur photographers (39.7%).

Other common features can be found in the lower part of the ranking: studio photography does not seem to be as popular, unless included in a workshop. Furthermore, the availability of specific hotel services and equipment hire are not considered important by either of the groups.

Finally, for both groups the presence of a site dedicated to travel is more important than the possibility of taking part in a contest at the end of the journey. It should come as no surprise that amateur photographers are less interested in these contests since they are very aware from experience that participation would require them to grant the organizers exploitation rights to their photographs.

In answer to a specific in-depth question, the willingness to pay extra for a package geared toward photographic tourism was expressed by 82.9% of the respondents (see Table 2).

Even though a 16-20% surcharge is the modal class for both groups, it is interesting to note that the least willing to pay extra are amateur photographers, despite having a higher average age and in theory a greater spending capacity.

<i>Answer mode</i>	<i>SMPT</i>			<i>FkTF</i>		
	<i>Freq.</i> <i>abs.</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>% cases</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>abs.</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>% cases</i>
adequate time to take photos	353	9.0	48.7	286	13.5	66.8
minimum photographic knowledge requirement	203	5.2	28.0	247	11.6	57.7
low tourist turnout	348	8.9	48.0	220	10.3	51.4
careful choice of places	227	5.8	31.3	190	8.9	44.4
presence of workshops	480	12.3	66.2	170	8.0	39.7
all-inclusive package	325	8.3	44.8	162	7.6	37.9
dedicated website	302	7.7	41.7	156	7.3	36.4
leisure and free time	357	9.1	49.2	152	7.1	35.5
hard-to-reach destinations	206	5.3	28.4	110	5.2	25.7
final photo contest	222	5.7	30.6	88	4.1	20.6
print/post-production	263	6.7	36.3	87	4.1	20.3
<i>ad hoc</i> hotel services	137	3.5	18.9	75	3.5	17.5
equipment hire	216	5.5	29.8	75	3.5	17.5
meet different people	166	4.2	22.9	71	3.3	16.6
studio photography	105	2.7	14.5	37	1.7	8.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>3.910</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>539.3</i>	<i>2.126</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>496.7</i>

Table 1. The desired features for an ideal package (in order of importance for amateur photographers).

Source: own processing of data SMPT-FkTF 2018.

Due to automatic rounding provided by the statistical software, the sum of singular percentage frequencies may be slightly different from the total shown in the Tables 1 and 2.

<i>Stated surcharge percentage</i>	<i>SMPPhT</i>			<i>FkPhT</i>		
	<i>Freq.</i> <i>abs.</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>cum. %</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>abs.</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i> <i>cum. %</i>
0–5%	30	4.1	4.1	74	17.3	17.3
6–10%	87	12.0	16.1	80	18.7	36.0
11–15%	142	19.6	35.7	68	15.9	51.9
16–20%	168	23.2	58.9	90	21.0	72.9
21–25%	134	18.5	77.4	61	14.3	87.2
26–50%	112	15.4	92.8	39	9.1	96.3
51–75%	38	5.2	98.1	9	2.1	98.4
76–100%	7	1.0	99.0	2	0.5	98.8
over double	7	1.0	100.0	5	1.2	100.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>725</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>428</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>-</i>

Table 2. The percentage distribution of the surcharge that respondents are willing to pay for an ideal for an ideal photography-oriented tourism package (compared to a non-oriented one).

Source: own processing of data SM/FkPhT 2018.

In fact, by calculating a weighted average of the distribution, net of the last modality², students report a willingness to pay a surcharge of 22%, while for Flickr users it is only 16.3%. This can be justified by the fact that, being generally more experienced, amateur photographers are more likely to organize trips by themselves and are thus more responsive to the price variable.

What is more, they tend to spend a lot on good quality photographic equipment. In fact, the pilot survey of Flickr users highlighted that 71 percent of the amateur photographers observed had at least one reflex camera with interchangeable lenses and almost half of them (35%) had a full frame camera (Zaccomer, 2019).

As for the students, most of them shoot with smartphones or compact cameras, while the lucky ones either own a reflex with a better sensor (such as APS-C) or hope to receive one as a graduation gift.

5. Conclusions and future research

The first part of this article presented an enhanced theoretical framework, which not only eliminated the hierarchical order of dimensions but also incorporated the influence of social media and the digital revolution, which also have significantly impacted the field of photography. Without the digital revolution, even this study would not have been possible.

It is important to note that the interpretation of the results is based on the proposed theoretical framework. This relates to the market demand for photographic tourism. Within this framework, the preferences of photographic tourists are of primary importance to tour operators competing in this market niche. As can be easily observed in Table 1, the preferences investigated involve all five dimensions of the theoretical framework.

The data collected through the two surveys revealed differences between the preferences of

² Since no precise value can be attributed for the answer “over double” and this modality was used by few respondents, it was excised from the average surcharge.

university students and those of amateur photographers, particularly those who upload their shots to Flickr. An implication of this study is that it has shown that the photographic tourism market is not homogeneous.

The aspect that is of most interest to this article concerns learning, which in the case of photographic tourism takes the form of a workshop. From a theoretical standpoint, this aspect relates to the intersection between the tourist’s subjective dimension and that of photography (Figure 2). Furthermore, if the workshop also includes Internet and computer skills, it becomes necessary to consider the intersection of three dimensions, including that of social media. As emerged from the data collected in Table 1, it is university students – who often do not have much experience in photography – that expect a photographic tour package not only to offer an opportunity to travel, but also to increase their photographic knowledge and skills (66.2%).

Amateur photographers are, just from a quantitative point of view, less interested in attending a workshop (39.7%). However, their interest will be aroused if the workshop is technically advanced or is offered by well-known photographers. This kind of behaviour suggests that it is necessary to consider the target audience when designing a package geared toward photographic tourism, thus differentiating the proposal for younger tourists, eager to learn the art of photography, and amateurs, who are already well-established in the photographic world. Differences in responsiveness to the price variable should also be taken into account.

From a geographical point of view, it is important to note that the research shows significant interest in the environment by both groups observed. Specifically, 87.6% of students share landscape photographs on the Internet, and 94.5% share nature photographs. Similarly, among Flickr photographers, the percentages are respectively 94.6% and 93.9%. From this point of view, photographic tourism has other interesting characteristics. In fact, first of all it can be seen as a mode of landscape enjoyment that fits very well with slow mobility (Zaccomer, 2021). In line with the vision of

slow mobility of the Regional Landscape Plan of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Guaran and Pascolini, 2019) and the actual presence of a network dedicated to it, some proposals have already been made to integrate not only photographic tourism with slow mobility, but also – in addition to the photographic workshop – other educational initiatives regarding the nature and history of this region of the North-East of Italy (Zaccomer and Pigo, 2021; Zaccomer and Dalmazio, 2023). In this territorial context, university students of a Geography course have been actively engaged in the development of a pilot project aimed at identifying slow photographic itineraries (Zaccomer, 2022).

In the future, the relationship between photographic tourism and sustainability is going to be explored. This relationship is not so clear, as in the case of photographic safaris in Africa (Mbaiwa and Hambira, 2021), but it is certainly possible to say that photographic tourism is a niche tourism that necessarily involves small groups in order to get the most out of the teacher-learner relationship during the workshops. Moreover, more importantly, it is a suitable form of tourism for the seasonal adjustment of flows since photographic tourists not only demand calm shooting conditions, but also wish to avoid having other tourists in their field of vision who might “ruin” their shot. However, while off-season tourism primarily favours environmental sustainability, economic sustainability is more difficult to achieve. In fact, in order for operators to integrate photographic tourism with the most common forms of tourism, profitability is always necessary (Bonner, 1993; Baker, 1997).

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