



Research to inform policy from the University of York, School of Arts and Creative Technology

SCREEN TOURISM

Regional development, fan labour and sustainability

Dr Bethan Jones

Summary

- Film and TV tourism has a big economic impact in the UK. A 2021 report by the BFI shows that two thirds of tourists who visit the UK are influenced by locations and landmarks from British-made films and TV programmes, and visitors spent an estimated £892.6 million in film-related tourism in 2019.
- Screen tourism also has cultural, economic and environmental implications for local communities. But it can also bring more visitors to locations that lack the infrastructure to deal with them have a negative environmental impact
- As digital and social media become ever more popular, fans are sharing locations they have visited and increasingly act as unofficial marketers for screen tourism. This unpaid labour is sometimes exploited by studios and other organisations, and this needs to be addressed.
- Sustainability should also be addressed by studios, local authorities and other organisations involved in filming, before filming takes place, e.g. engaging with fan communities and creating sustainable screen tourism toolkits.

Recommendations for Policy

1. Screen tourism should be included in heritage and cultural tourism, not seen as separate. The UK's screen sector forms part of the country's heritage and culture and should be marketed as such, both nationally and internationally.
2. Funding is needed to develop screen tourism products that are immersive and/or experiential.
3. Plans to make screen tourism economically and environmentally sustainable need to be embedded into the working practices of studios, local authorities and other organisations involved in on-location filming. Governments, local authorities and tourism agencies should work with productions to predict the largest impacts and write contracts or agreements that stipulate which organisations are responsible for taking which actions.
4. A toolkit that outlines best practice and key considerations could also be developed for use in the industry and by relevant stakeholders.
5. More protection is needed for fan influencers used by studios, networks and tourism agencies to market filming locations.

Context

Screen tourism is where viewers visit sites of filming locations for films and TV programmes. This offers fans a profound way of experiencing their favourite texts. The UK and Ireland are among the most desirable screen tourism locations because of the success of media properties such as Outlander, Harry Potter and Game of Thrones.

Screen Scotland estimated that £64.9 million of visitor expenditure for Scottish businesses in 2019 came from screen tourism activities, and Tourism Northern Ireland has estimated that each year Game of Thrones brings 350,000 leisure visitors to Northern Ireland, who spend more than £50 million. Visitors to filming locations will often:

- reenact scenes from the source text
- dress up in clothing similar to characters' costumes
- take photographs and compare these to stills

Given the growth of user-generated content on social media platforms, such as videos, blogs and photographs, the power of fandom to encourage visits to filming locations cannot be overstated. Studios, heritage organisations and tourism agencies have sometimes taken advantage of this, offering influencers bespoke tours or early access to exclusive events and locations in exchange for sharing this content to their followers.

The UK government has recognised the importance of screen tourism to local environments:

- Chatham Historic Dockyard was awarded £5,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Funding to run a feasibility study on a new film location experience.
- Hertfordshire County Council received £828,229 from the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund for development of new screen tourism products.

But the role of fans in driving visits to filming locations is not taken into consideration: they are often assumed to be passive tourists rather than taking an active role in making meaning at these sites.

The environmental impact of screen tourism has also been ignored, or else considered only in broader discussions about tourism, when screen tourism can involve very different motivations and activities.

New Research and Evidence

The UK has seen huge benefits from film and TV tourism. A 2021 report from the BFI shows that inbound tourists spent approximately £729.4 million in film-related screen tourism in 2017, estimated to have increased to £892.6 million in 2019. A 2022 study by Megabus revealed that over half of Britons had booked trips and days out in the UK because they were inspired by films or TV shows filmed in those locations. Visit Kent reported that in 2021/22, filming

generated an estimated £8 million for the Kent economy because of productions/franchises such as Call the Midwife and James Bond.

Visitors are also inspired by productions other than blockbusters:

- A convention dedicated to the 1960s cult TV show The Prisoner takes place each year in Portmeirion.
- Holmfirth attracts fans of Last of The Summer Wine, which ended in 2010.
- Port Isaac continues to see Doc Martin fans visit the home of the grouchy doctor Martin Ellingham.

People have various motivations to travel to filming locations. These are examined in the academic literature but less so by the industry.

A 2021 report by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)/Netflix highlights that both films and travel can transport audiences 'to new worlds, triggering emotions and offering an escape from reality' (p.16). But so far, the industry has mostly ignored:
fans' emotional engagement with production texts
how fans' on-location practices can be used to drive other members of fandoms to visit locations

Now, though, studios and other tourist organisations are beginning to use user-generated content and influencers in their marketing materials. In this way, they are creating a new type of workforce that may not receive – or expect to receive – compensation for their labour because they don't view it as such.

Fans contribute to fandoms in different ways. Dressing up as favourite characters, writing fan fiction and sharing information on visiting filming locations are all examples of fan labour undertaken at no cost. Studios and organisations that market filming locations are beginning to use fans to share content to a wider audience, but there are few protections for these influencers – they might not be compensated for their work at all, or they might be offered products or experiences in return for free promotion. More research is needed on fan influencers, their position in the economy and labour market, and how they could be protected to ensure their labour is not exploited.

See our report [Screen Tourism: Regional Development, Fan Labour and Sustainability](#)

Further information

To find out more about the University of York's work on digital creativity, check out XR Stories, SIGN and the School of Arts and Creative Technologies:
xrstories.co.uk
screen-network.org.uk
york.ac.uk/arts-creative-technologies

Contact

XR Stories: enquiries@xrstories.co.uk
SIGN: enquiries@screen-network.org.uk
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