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A PHILOSOPHER IN THE WORLD OF TOURISM: REFLECTIONS FROM AUTOETNOGRAPHY

UN FILÓSOFO EN EL MUNDO DEL TURISMO: REFLEXIONES DESDE LA AUTOETNOGRAFÍA

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ABSTRACT: After briefly characterizing the autoethnographic method and showing some of its applications, I try to construct a narrative about my arrival to tourism research and teaching, recounting my beginnings as a professor at Universidad del Mar (Huatulco, Mexico) and my subsequent development in the tourism field, describing my main teaching and research activities as well as my participation in working groups. Finally, I present some suggestions in order to establish areas of contact between philosophy and tourism that may enrich the field of tourism studies. **Keywords**: autoethnography, tourism education, tourism epistemology, tourism ethics.

RESUMEN: Después de caracterizar brevemente el método autoetnográfico y mostrar algunas de sus aplicaciones, intento construir una narrativa sobre mi llegada a la investigación y docencia en turismo, relatando mis inicios como docente en la Universidad del Mar y mi posterior desarrollo en el campo del turismo, describiendo mis principales actividades de docencia e investigación, así como mi participación en grupos de trabajo. Finalmente, presento algunas sugerencias para establecer áreas de contacto entre filosofía y turismo que puedan enriquecer el campo de los estudios turísticos. **Palabras clave**: autoetnografía, educación turística, epistemología turística, ética turística.

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INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING AND METHOD OF THIS TEXT

In this text, I aspire to provide a sincere and relatively complete account of some aspects of my experience as a teacher and researcher in the field of tourism that I consider significant. I believe such reflections may be of interest if they are taken as the concretion of a general case, given that many tourism scholars come from other disciplines. Starting from this exposition of my personal experience, I will seek to move towards slightly broader proposals on the relationship between philosophy—my original discipline—and tourism. The method I chose to start this journey is autoethnography, a method in which the researcher positions themself as part of the research and which Ellis (2008, p. 48) describes as "research, writing, narration and an ethnographic method that connects what is personal and autobiographical with the cultural, the social and the political". Buzard (2003, p.61), in turn, provides a characterization consistent with the previous one: "the study, representation or knowledge of a culture by one or more of its members". Both perspectives of autoethnography will play a role throughout this writing.

As explained by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010), autoethnography owes much to the impact of postmodernism, specifically to the crisis of confidence triggered in the social sciences by some conceptions often encompassed within that current (e.g., the indifference to *grand narratives* or Kuhnian criticisms on the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge). Such ideas made many social scientists wonder "what would [such sciences] become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proposed stories instead of theories, and if they were consciously value-centered rather than claiming to be free of them" (Ellis et al., 2010). It is, therefore, a way of doing research that is alien to the conceptions of positivism, which underlines the ideal of objectivity, as well as to colonialism and the situation of power in which the researcher places themself before the researched.

Today, autoethnography is a widely accepted social research methodology that has been successfully applied in many disciplines. Due to the proximity to certain aims of this article, I will pay special attention in the first place to the use that has been made of autoethnography in education, starting with its role in the classrooms as a methodological strategy capable of ensuring that homogeneity is gradually transformed into an understanding of diversity achieved through dialogue (Montero-Sieburth, 2007). Starr (2010), in turn, discusses the methodological implications of autoethnography as an exploratory method useful for placing the individual and their values within a broader context than that provided by their own history and values. Autrey's (2005) doctoral dissertation analyzes, among other things, how the author's own school experiences influenced her later practice as a primary school teacher, and Dethloff (2005) reflects on the experiences, problems and interpretations raised by his transfer as principal from one public elementary school to another in the same district. Speaking in the same way about autoethnography's application to educational problems, Rivera (2012) constitutes a particularly interesting case, as it represents a courageous and provocative review of 30 years of teaching activity, with no other intention than to generate debate and make the reader reflect on some especially flagrant problems in the Spanish university reality. Something similar happens with Pelias (2003), who reflects on the fact that academics can hardly see things beyond a superficial level, due in part to

the difficulties of obtaining a deep understanding of any topic, and also to certain characteristics of academic life. The text provides so much detail about these characteristics that it is difficult for any university teacher not to identify with much of what it exposes.

In Mexico, the work of Mercedes Blanco is especially relevant. She is an anthropologist who has not only theorized about autoethnography but has also written interesting pages in which she exposes and reflects on lived experiences. In one of her articles, Blanco (2012) narrates her experience as an anthropology student and professional, trying to explain her growing interest in qualitative methodologies. This narrative is intertwined with a story that connects the author with the archaeologist Arthur Evans through the myopia both share that arises from a tourist experience, such as a trip that Blanco made to the island of Crete (Greece). Another of her texts uses the stories that two women elaborate about their experiences when they went on vacation in their youth, to exemplify how narrative research is capable of generating knowledge (Blanco, 2011).

These texts by Blanco have brought us closer to the world of tourism, in which we also find a number of direct applications of autoethnography. One of the articles that most caught my attention is by Noy (2007), based on a poem the author wrote when he was younger, during a holiday visit to the tourist destination of Eilat (Israel). It is a poem that elicits a series of interesting reflections, whose main theoretical reference is the concept of tourist experience proposed by Cohen (1979). Noy uses this poem, conceived at the time as a birthday present that would be given to a relative who later developed a mental illness, to explore some of the emotions triggered by tourist experience, emphasizing especially the negative ones. The defense of visual autoethnography made by Scarles (2010) is also a text of great interest: according to this author, autoethnography is capable of delving into numerous aspects of the experience of encounter that a tourist has with a place, particularly in its sensual and emotional dimensions. For Scarles, combining autoethnography in an interview with photo-elicitation allows the researcher and her informant to share their experiences, thus opening spaces for understanding things that remain hidden in other approaches. The article by Barbieri, Santos and Katsube (2012) reflects on the field reports of one of the authors in Nyakinma (Rwanda) trying to show the value of autoethnography as an instrument capable of understanding the experience of volunteer tourism. In addition to highlighting the need for more critical research on this form of tourism, this text shows how to develop more satisfactory experiences for tourists by pointing out, for example, the benefits that voluntary tourism offers to them and to host communities, as well as certain problems that must be solved to fulfill this development.

Also in Mexico, Jorge Meneses has made interesting contributions from an autoethnographic perspective, which he integrates with multi-situational ethnography, privileging a view of the subjects from the perspective of their interaction contexts. This approach serves, for example, to give a very adequate representation of Huatulco (both the tourist destination—the Bahías de Huatulco Fully Planned Center—and its area of influence, which includes the municipality of Santa María Huatulco and surrounding areas) through of the tensions generated by its dynamic character as a border area (Meneses, 2019). In another text, describing his relationship with fishing, before and especially after his arrival in Huatulco, helps Meneses to illuminate a problem of great importance, such as the way in which the introduction of tourism to this area, after the expropriation decree of 1984, altered all the productive relations and the modes of configuration of space, generating great injustices towards the local population. In this

way, his own activity as a night shore fisherman has made him seek to “understand the ways in which fishermen are losing space” (Meneses, 2015, p. 128) in the new reality of Huatulco as a tourism destination.

Autoethnography has made other appearances in the field of tourism (see, e.g., Botterill, 2003; Miller, 2008; Huang, 2010; Modesti, 2011) but for the moment I will stop here. To contextualize my text within the panorama outlined here, I would say that it is an attempt to apply autoethnography to the world of tourism research and teaching—a reflection on the experiences accumulated by a philosopher who has been in that world for fifteen years, seeking to make a small academic contribution to it.

TOURISM AND ME: THE BEGINNING

I came to the world of tourism studies in a rather fortuitous manner, after obtaining my position as a full-time teacher at the Universidad del Mar-UMAR (Huatulco, Mexico). Before that, my contacts with tourism had been very limited and only from the point of view of the tourist (or one "affected" by tourism). I gradually waded into the subject after my arrival, as I hope to show throughout my exposition, which starts with an exhibition of the beginnings of my activity in tourism studies—a period I consider especially significant because of its implications for everything that followed.

Many times I have heard tourism scholars complain that their area is full of upstarts. Being an upstart myself, I am forced to defend the idea that there is nothing wrong *per se* with people changing subjects of study, leaving their comfort zone, or learning new things, as long as two conditions are met: acknowledging that one is a novice and being willing to learn. That is why I think it can be positive to expose the journey of a person who, as I have already said, came to the field of tourism studies in a casual way, but stayed for years in this field and who was—and continues to be—willing to make his small contribution to it. This contribution, of course, is conditioned by academic training, which in my case includes a bachelor’s degree and a Ph.D. in Philosophy, as well as a Master of Business Administration.

Before arriving at UMAR, I taught Philosophy while studying my Ph.D. at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, in the city of Cuernavaca, Mexico. In November 2006 I began the candidacy process at UMAR, and on January 3, 2007 I began my duties as a teacher. I was hired as a marketing teacher, a subject in which I have both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, and was assigned to teach the Bachelor’s in Tourism Management curriculum. I was also attached to the Institute of Tourism Research, where, of course, many tourism experts worked, as well as researchers who had little contact with the subject, given that the subjects they worked with were of a more general nature. My hiring was delayed for a while due to bureaucratic inconveniences derived from my immigration status, and I was only able to teach General Marketing classes for a couple of months. For the following semester, I was assigned two subjects: Tourism Marketing and Research Seminar II. The first subject never gave me too many problems, and I think I quickly reached a level of relative competence. The second was quite a challenge and, with the perspective given by time, it seems to me that it had a lot to do with my later investigations.

That was the only semester I had to deal with that subject, but I think readers can easily imagine the difficulty of my situation. I had thirty-six students in their last semester, who had extensive knowledge of many areas of tourism, were working on topics that interested them—and furthermore, that they had already investigated, since they had spent the previous semester preparing their research protocols, for which they

had had to read a lot about their topics. I tried to update myself as soon as I found out that I would be teaching that subject, but it is easy to see that this was like putting a band-aid on a gangrenous leg. Faced with such a situation, I had to think strategically to establish to what extent I could be useful to that group of students rather than a hindrance (as later, unfortunately, I saw happen with another teacher). The first thing I thought was that I could be useful as a reviewer of spelling, grammar and, especially, the arguments presented in each thesis. In this task I could help one hundred percent of the students. Some theses had to do with management topics I knew, and it was not so difficult for me to understand their application to the area of tourism (as I was approaching it at that time, it was just an application). In those cases, perhaps two-thirds of the total, I could be helpful in reviewing the content at various levels of depth. Of course, there were works that dealt with very specific tourism topics that were truly arcane for me, so much so that I was forced to acknowledge my inability to contribute anything at that level. In such cases, I had to speak directly with several supervisors to find out about the aspects that I did not know and, above all, to have certain guarantees that I would not make mistakes when reading the papers (or, if I did, that mistakes were not too serious). As I recall, those conversations with the supervisors were very interesting indeed.

Beyond all these measures, I began to read everything I could about tourism, using the bibliographies of the research protocols as a starting point. Luckily, some "basic" titles were repeated often, so after reading perhaps 15 or 20 books, I started to speak the same language that my students spoke, albeit in a very rudimentary way. After another month or two of intense work, another dozen or two well-studied books, there finally came the time when I was fully aware that, so to speak, the door of discipline had been opened for me. This meant that I could already see some paths to advance through the terrain of tourism. Of course, I was far from being able to claim familiarity with that terrain or to be able to do any minimally original research, but at least I was aware of the existence of some walking trails. After that moment, I moved towards more specialized aspects, as I never sought to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. I would have liked to, of course, but I knew that it was impossible, like so many other things that we would all like to do. Rather, I tried to look here and there, picking topics that suited my interests.

In my opinion, it is very significant that my first two texts on tourism were dedicated to analyzing the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) from a neo-pragmatist point of view, based in Rortyan considerations on human rights (Filgueiras, 2009), and to using Kuhn and Rorty to reflect on what Jafari called the "scientification of tourism" (Filgueiras, 2010b). This topic was introduced to me by the late Juan Manuel Domínguez Licona, then Director of the Institute of Tourism Research, in one of our first interviews; he considered it to be the type of issue typical of tourism but also capable of catching the interest of someone who came from philosophy. Now, I understand those two texts as an example of a certain attitude of "hey, here is a new topic called 'tourism'; let's apply my usual authors to see what happens".

As I have already said, in parallel to this task, which was very challenging, I also had to teach Tourism Marketing to two additional groups. Despite the effort involved in such an overdose of classes and groups (although nothing compared to what would come later: one semester I had to teach four daily subjects) teaching Tourism Marketing represented a great advantage for me, as it allowed me to settle on a well-known field and, from there, to explore certain aspects of the tourism universe. Among these aspects, several issues caught my attention from the outset as representing suggestive

connections between tourism and new marketing trends, such as neuromarketing or advergames.

In short, that first semester of contact with tourism research was difficult—but above all, very enriching. In June 2006 I explained *Begriffsschrift* and anomalous monism in my lessons, and just a year later I felt comfortable talking about the demonstration effect or place branding.

Quite a change.

TOURISM AND ME: DEVELOPING THE RELATIONSHIP

Many things have happened since my first contacts with the world of tourism studies, and in the next three sections I will briefly summarize three of them: (i) the theoretical interests that guided my research, (ii) the teaching and outreach activities, and (iii) the management and other working groups in which I participated.

(i) Regarding the research, although I worked other topics, the first one that I focused on was the ethics of tourism. This has been a constant from 2007 until today. Tourism ethics interests me because it constitutes a natural field for the development of one of my main lines of research—applied ethics—which I have continued to cultivate, generally (but not exclusively) from a neo-pragmatist perspective.

The elaboration of a research article about the degree of agreement of Huatulco's tourism sector in regards to certain considerations of environmental ethics contained in the GCET (Filgueiras, 2010a) was a particularly significant moment for me. Its relevance arose in the first place from the interest that the research had for me, because to some extent it fulfilled an old aspiration to make ethics a more "experimental" topic—using the terminology of Appiah (2008)—and therefore *prima facie* more capable of dialogue with the different sciences and also more capable of taking advantage of the different contributions of these sciences. In addition, to *put ethics to work* in this way (and this is the second reason for the personal relevance of this article) I had to plunge into the fieldwork: doing interviews, designing surveys, etc., all of which conformed a true "reality check" that produced excellent results at a personal level.

That the research referred to Huatulco is not incidental; this beautiful and complex town—my place of residence since 2007—has also become one of the main axes of my theoretical production from several perspectives, including environmental ethics, which is one of my main lines of research. Some of the topics I have discussed have been construction projects planned in Cacaluta Bay (Filgueiras, 2016), the contrast between the narratives of progress imposed by Fonatur (the governmental body in charge of developing Mexico's fully planned tourism destinations, including Huatulco) and the testimonies of the original inhabitants of the area, whose lands were expropriated to build the tourist destination (Filgueiras, 2015).

The third topic of interest is space tourism, which I have been studying for more than a decade. Given that it is a very novel topic and sometimes is still perceived by many as "science fiction," my research has been limited to the most sober aspects of the market, particularly to showing how it is possible to carry out research that determines the potential of this tourism modality. At this point, I was lucky enough to supervise a thesis on space tourism (Piñón, 2016—as far as I know, the first bachelor's thesis on the subject in Mexico), as well as working with its author in several other texts on the subject, always from the market perspective indicated above. My interest in space tourism is due, ultimately, to factors that can be considered ethical or philosophical. I think that fact serves to shore up a line of research that supports almost all of my

production.

(ii) Parallel to that research work, I became more specialized in tourism marketing, something reflected in the various workshops and lectures I gave about several topics, from theme parks to the aforementioned space tourism. Although I wrote some marketing papers, I chose to dedicate myself mainly to teaching, in addition to participating in as many outreach and management projects as possible. The logic behind that choice was quite clear to me, and I would like to state it explicitly here: as a philosopher, one is used to addressing (practically univocally) other philosophers. This seems to be one of the reasons why, in certain circumstances, philosophy does not have the impact that it could or should have, for example, on public policies, or even on people's behavior. Knowing this limitation first-hand, it was clear to me from the first moment that I was not going to let the same thing happen when I acted as a tourism marketer.

On the contrary, in this facet of my job I have tried to teach my students the most effective marketing techniques, and also to promote the latest marketing trends among university professors and students, as well as among non-university audiences, such as tourist service providers or government officials, with the intention (perhaps utopian) of positively impacting production structures. So, when I teach marketing, I want to cooperate in the creation of a powerful tourism sector in Oaxaca, a sector full of community businesses, social enterprises of companies close to the needs of its community—in sum, capable of generating wealth that actually reaches the pockets of those who need it the most. On other occasions, more metaphorically, I say that my job is to make new Thomas Cooks appear on the Oaxacan Coast. I must also say that it is by no means an empty ideal; it is based on years of working with generations of students where the exceptional is often the norm.

Taking this into account, for about four or five years (before the COVID-19 pandemics), the final assessment of my Tourism Marketing courses has been developed through a scheme whereby students act as community managers of those local companies (usually in the tourism sector) who want to participate, or conduct marketing audits for them. According to what I have discussed with both parties, for students it is an activity of great importance for their training that is also relatively pleasant, while companies find it quite useful. Of course, it is difficult to specify the results of these promotional activities, but one of the local entrepreneurs told me that, during the time when a team of students was more involved in promoting his business, he experimented a sales increase of around 30%. Moreover, his was not the only case of success, as feedback has always been very positive.

(iii) In addition to the tasks mentioned so far, I also had the opportunity to collaborate in different working bodies. Among them, the "Tourism Territory Planning" academic group deserves a special mention. This group, for which I was responsible for approximately six years, was created in 2006 by the aforementioned Juan Manuel Domínguez Licona, not only a distinguished scholar of tourism geography (see, e.g., Domínguez, 2008) but also a great human being whose example left a deep mark on all of us. The group mourned the tragedy of its founder's premature death in 2010, not only from the human point of view, as is evident, but also in terms of its theoretical dynamics, which has always been a fluid exchange of ideas between specialists from various areas. After some difficult times, the group was able to recover, and it is hoped that it will continue to advance towards further achievements.

I also collaborated with other colleagues in the elaboration of a study about an interesting question: what role would tourism play in a Mexico without oil? This task,

which lasted for several months, allowed me to work side by side with specialists in tourism. Up to that point, I had mainly related to social scientists and humanists, some of whom had an interest in tourism. However, this work team was mainly made up of tourism scholars, which represented a challenge for me. At a theoretical level, it was an excellent opportunity to order my ideas about tourism ethics and marketing, the areas that I focused on.

Another work worth highlighting was my 2013 participation in the development of the *Bahías de Huatulco Competitiveness Agenda* (SECTUR and UMAR, 2014). This project, which required great efforts from all participants (we would joke that we had consultants' stress but teachers' salaries) was financed by the Mexican government and headed by Paulino Jiménez Baños, who then served as Director of the Institute of Tourism Research of our University. The agendas were organized according to two main axes: a diagnostic study, for which I developed the sections most directly related to Marketing, and a series of projects that we had to collect from government agencies, civil society and the entrepreneurial community, in addition to the projects proposed by academics.

I remember a project I developed together with other colleagues from the academy, as well as with local entrepreneurs, called Integral Management and Marketing System for Huatulco (SIGECH, by its acronym in Spanish), whose stated intention was to "provide Huatulco with a brain and a nervous system that allows destiny to act in a unified and organic way" (SECTUR and UMAR, 2014: 739). Subsequent conversations with specialists convinced me that this thorough destination management system could be considered the first step for the possible conversion of Huatulco into an intelligent destination (Piñón and Castillejos, 2019). One aspect of this project I am interested in highlighting is that the people who should have liked the project, really liked it—namely, the micro- and small entrepreneurs of Huatulco, precisely the group that would benefit most from the implementation of a system such as the one I proposed. If I speak conditionally, it is because the work of the agenda also served to realize the relevance of political considerations when developing tourism projects.

In 2010, the Postgraduate Division of my University commissioned me to create a master's degree in tourism marketing, which I carried out together with several colleagues from the Institute, analyzing many other postgraduate programs from around the world as well as interviewing potential employers of our graduates to learn their needs and thus design a program that would satisfy all who might be involved. However, due to a very serious personal problem, I was compelled to leave the first line of the project a few days before the start of the classes—but without abandoning it, as I collaborated as a teacher every year from its launch until my sabbatical period.

In 2017, after that sabbatical, I was appointed Advisor of the Master's program. (Some time later, the position changed its title and I became "Coordinator" of the program.) This appointment prompted me to delve into details of tourism education to which I had previously paid little attention, such as schedules or distribution of classrooms (not my thing at all). Beyond that, I have been able to work along with a remarkable team, from whom I continue to learn every day, on such attractive tasks as defining lines of research or reviewing the structure of the study plan or developing syllabi—and all of this was in addition to the usual satisfactions of teaching at the postgraduate level. I left the position in 2021.

I could go on about other aspects as well, such as collaboration with CENEVAL in the design of graduation exams for bachelor's degrees in Tourism for all Mexican universities, or some of my work with the public sector or with various NGOs. But I'll

stop here.

There can be no doubt that I developed a kind of identity as a scholar of tourism during this journey that I have just presented. Although being a philosopher sometimes make me still feel like a Buddhist in the middle of a Catholic mass, other times—and this is something generated through experience sharing and participation in multiple common activities, of which this article has provided a sample—I feel that I speak the same language as tourism experts, that I already share numerous codes and even understand the jokes and gossip, and that such details reveal that I am already part of this research community.

INTERRELATING PHILOSOPHY AND TOURISM

So far, I have narrated some of my experiences in the world of tourism. However, I would not like to dwell on that exhibition of my lived experience, because it does not even come close to exhausting the many contact points between philosophy and tourism. Now, faithful to the vocation of autoethnography, I am interested in using my analysis as a springboard to reach more general reflections, which will no longer have to do with the personal history of a philosopher in a tourism research center, but will instead concern relationships that can be established at an academic level between tourism and philosophy. Of course, this is a subject that merits much more treatment, but in the following lines I will try to establish some considerations that permit a preliminary discussion.

I will start with an element that has always surprised me since the moment I came to the world of tourism research—which is when I learned that Jafari (2005, p. 46) excludes philosophy from the "interdisciplinary foundation of tourism studies". I know that Jafari is not the only voice in this field, and also that in Mexico and Latin America there are scholars who adamantly introduce philosophy into the tourism debate, be it from a specific current such as phenomenology (case of Panosso, 2008), either by building a set of reflections from different points of view on an area of philosophical inquiry (case of epistemology in Castillo and Panosso, 2010). If this situation continues, taking into account the contributions of philosophy may result in a positive differentiating note for Latin American tourism studies. However, bearing in mind Jafari's current influence, I am concerned that philosophy will be excluded from the tourism studies matrix, which is otherwise quite complete (as it includes topics as diverse as agriculture or religion).

How are we to defend the inclusion of philosophy in that matrix or in any similar attempt to address the complexity of a scientific study of tourism? My first response is that, if there is a discipline prepared to take on the challenge of complexity in all its magnitude, it is none other than philosophy. In my opinion, there are two particularly "hot" areas that require special theoretical attention and in which philosophers can make interesting contributions to the world of tourism research: epistemology and ethics. In epistemology there is much work to be done—in the first place, rethinking many of the theoretical materials of the discipline as well as its basic concepts, trying to develop unifying theories, perhaps in some cases formal theories (following the example of other sciences that have been formalized). Beyond these specific tasks, I believe tourism offers philosophers an excellent opportunity to exercise what we could call the "epistemological imagination" and thus be able to develop new ways of approaching inter- and transdisciplinarity.

On the other hand, ethics and its different branches offer us another wide area of

contact, with many opportunities to establish fruitful relationships. The analysis of codes of ethics—their creation processes, their theoretical approaches, and their practical use—facilitates an enriching dialogue between ethics and the social sciences. Training service providers and tourism planners in moral reasoning techniques, such as the well-known Potter's box or any of those shown by Fennell (2006, pp. 257–287) could be another point of contact, as could also be the inclusion of the ethical element in studies of tourism potential.

Finally, rather than take philosophy as a *Fach*, I would like to make a brief reference to its practitioners. Philosophy professionals are usually prepared to work on (and even enjoy) the most complex and elusive topics—as such, they can be very useful allies if what you want is to organize networks of researchers capable of addressing the universe of tourism in all its complexity. For all the reasons I have described, I hope that the example presented in this article will serve to bring more philosophers closer to such a fascinating universe, and also for tourism scholars to include more philosophers in their own research. In my opinion, such an approach will be very beneficial for both tourism and philosophy.

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