Striking a balance between consumption and conservation: 
Promoting sustainable behaviors of heritage visitors

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Understanding tourists’ behavior is a key challenge to achieve sustainability in heritage tourism. Studies on heritage tourism fall short in sufficiently considering tourists’ behavior in relation to the sustainable management process (Alazaizh, Hallo, Backman, Norman & Vogel, 2016; Buonincontri, Marasco & Ramkissoon, 2017; Landorf, 2009; Ramkissoon & Uy saline press). There is a need for heritage site managers to better understand heritage tourists’ sustainable behavior to promote long-term sustainability.

In an attempt to bridge this gap, we propose a conceptual framework to examine how tourists’ heritage experiences influence their sustainable behavior, highlighting the potential role of destination attachment. Tourism literature has emphasized the concept of destination attachment, originated from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980). Destination attachment relates to “the process whereby an individual’s experiences with both the physical and social aspects of an environment results in the development of strong emotional bonds with that place” (Chen, Leask, Phou, Symbolic, 2016, p. 604). Research has demonstrated that tourists’ attachment to the places they visit can contribute to an understanding of their behavioral intentions, including their pro-environmental behavior (Lee, 2011; Ramkissoon, Smith, Weiler, 2013a, 2013b). On this basis, the proposed framework extends the theoretical interrelationships between tourists’ experience at heritage sites, place attachment and tourists’ sustainable behavior. In particular, we draw from the literature and practical examples to dwell both into the general (i.e. civil, educational, financial, persuasive, and legal) and site-specific dimensions of sustainable behavior of heritage tourists. The proposed framework has potential implications for the development of place marketing strategies aimed at strengthening visitors’ bonds with cultural destinations and encourage them to preserve, protect and enhance cultural heritage sites. Further, it can provide heritage managers and destination management organizations a basis to realize the diversity of cultural tourism market segments in relation to the sustainable management process.