

Cultural tourism out of confinement

The lockdowns, border closures and other restrictive measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic brought tourist and cultural activities to a halt in most EU Member States between mid-March and mid-June, significantly affecting businesses and consumers. A progressive easing of these restrictive measures is now under way.

Lockdown in tourism and culture

The coronavirus brought much of the planet to a halt. Activities in the domains of [tourism](#) and [culture](#) were the first to be suspended, and among the last to resume. [Tourism](#) and [culture](#) have a high share of [SMEs](#) and [precarious](#) employment, and are among the sectors worst affected by the consequences of the crisis. They contribute a lot to the gross national product (GNP) of, and employment in, the Member States that were hit hardest by the pandemic. Among them, France, Italy and Spain are home to [16 %](#) of Unesco World Cultural Heritage sites and to a third of EU cultural heritage sites. Sector stakeholders are concerned by the fact that [13 %](#) of the [95 %](#) of world museums that closed due to the coronavirus may never reopen.

Closed from mid-March, most EU internal borders reopened as of mid-June, whereas external borders started to reopen progressively in early July. Both internal and external tourism stopped from one day to the next, as did cultural activities with the closure of all cultural premises. World Heritage sites were closed or partially closed in [90 %](#) of countries across the world in April. By the end of May, only [46 %](#) of them had reopened.

Relationship between tourism and culture

A [2009 OECD](#) publication highlights the mutually beneficial relationship between culture, which attracts tourists, and tourism, which enhances culture and creates income, while also supporting cultural heritage, production and creativity. Cultural tourism has been one of the fastest-growing global markets, and cultural and creative industries, in addition to cultural heritage, its driving force. In order to reap all the benefits of this relationship, partnership between the two sectors is essential. While sustainable tourism, protection and management of cultural assets promote local culture and well-being, [badly planned](#) tourism results in overcrowding and deterioration of traditional culture, in crime and increased property prices and taxes.

Moreover, loss of [tourism revenue](#) in places of cultural interest results in loss of social security and revenue for artists and cultural professionals. It [strongly affects](#) not only heritage sites, but also museums, crafts and cultural sectors which are often involved in seasonal cultural events and festivals.

According to estimates of the UN [World Tourism Organization](#), tourism suffered a loss of US\$80 billion in the first quarter of 2020; this has had a negative impact on those working in the cultural sector and on artists' mobility, due to the cancellation of festivals and to border closures.

Easing of coronavirus-related measures in culture and tourism

According to Unesco, [financial investment](#) in the culture subsectors (museums, heritage sites, creative industries) will be strategic for economic recovery, possibly also benefiting tourism. To repair the damage to the creative economy, the World Bank has rapidly provided US\$14 billion worth of liquidity to the sector.

Easing lockdown measures, while observing requirements such as keeping a physical distance, wearing a face mask or using a tracing app, across Member States and particularly in tourist regions, is equally challenging for the sectors of tourism and culture. As recommended by the OECD, because these sectors are highly interdependent and face similar difficulties, they could coordinate their efforts or set up joint partnerships to help each other survive and perhaps thrive.

Italy was the first to reopen some of its famous sites, in the last weekend of May, with the Leaning [Tower of Pisa](#) admitting only 15 persons at a time, with face masks and an electronic device to warn if the one-metre distance has been violated. Some cities have started using open [public spaces](#) for cultural activities, for example, for film projections on building facades (Rome), for cultural festivals and events in the streets and public squares (Seville), or for artists to display their works (Paris).

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has made [recommendations](#) for museums' reopening, including:

- admitting a limited number of visitor to museums and galleries, and online ticket purchase in advance to manage the flow and ensure contactless entry;
- prohibiting group tours and allocating strict time slots;
- installing floor signs for social distancing;
- organising special sessions for visits by elderly people;
- introducing a one-way system for visits and replacing audio guides with smartphone apps;
- placing protective barriers for exchanges that cannot occur digitally.

Performing Arts Employers' Associations League Europe has published [strategies](#) for reopening theatres and cultural activities in different countries, and provided guidance on risk assessment and prevention.

European Commission proposal for tourism and transport

In its [communication](#) of 13 May on tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond, the Commission recognised the correlations between culture and tourism and proposed initiatives, such as technological and financial solutions, to support and potentially revive the two sectors.

The digital cultural heritage platform, [Europeana](#), will further develop its [tourism](#) angle; in June it put on display European cultural jewels and hidden gems never before shown. The [Cultural gems](#) web app is launching a citizen ambassadors' campaign to support proximity tourism. Opportunities to discover natural and cultural gems closer to home and taste local products could be even greater in 2021 – the [European Year of Rail](#) – when a host of events will be held to promote intra-EU tourism by train.

Joint efforts on the part of the Member States and the Commission to support information-sharing aim to encourage EU citizens to discover the diversity of landscapes, cultures and experiences in the EU. An example of these efforts is the Commission's [European Capitals of Smart Tourism](#) award, initiated by the European Parliament in recognition of EU cities' outstanding achievements as tourism destinations in four areas, among which cultural heritage and creativity. Another initiative the Commission intends to promote is the [European Destinations of Excellence](#) (EDEN), launched in 2006. It enhances the visibility of emerging, non-traditional EU destinations committed to socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism.

Patronage voucher schemes, set up by some Member States to encourage customers to support hotels or restaurants, could be extended to tourism-related aspects of the culture and entertainment sectors. The Commission [Re-open EU](#) web portal provides links to such schemes to help customers find all the initiatives and offers in the EU, linking up suppliers with all initiatives and platforms offering such schemes.

On 18 June, the Commission launched a social media campaign – '[Europe's culture](#) – close to you: This Summer I visit Europe' – with a focus on sustainable, local, cultural tourism. The campaign raises Europeans' awareness of their rich cultural diversity and of the cultural sites in the EU that have been granted the [European Heritage Label](#) for their role in European history, and/or the [European Heritage Awards](#)/Europa Nostra Awards. The campaign also covers the Council of Europe [cultural routes](#) initiative. As part of this initiative, the EU supports the [Routes4U](#) project in four EU [macro-regions](#) – the Alpine, the Adriatic-Ionian, the Baltic Sea and the Danube – to foster their development through cultural heritage tourism.

European Parliament

A resolution on transport and tourism in 2020 and beyond ([2020/2649\(RSP\)](#)), adopted during the Parliament's June plenary session, recalled that 68 % of EU tourists choose their holiday destination for its cultural heritage, and that cultural tourism accounts for 40 % of the sector. It highlighted the need to move to more sustainable forms of tourism that respect the environment and cultural heritage. It furthermore called on the Commission to strengthen the financial sustainability of cultural sites funded by the European Regional Development Fund and to allow the development of private-fund schemes to sustain them. The EP urged support for both the culture and the tourism sectors, especially for SMEs and the self-employed. It also urged the introduction of alternative support mechanisms for cultural workers who are heavily dependent on tourism, and for a larger budget for the Discover EU programme in order to boost youth tourism across the EU. It pointed to the fact that safety rules for visitors entail an extra burden on cultural institutions and sites, and to their need for public aid during the recovery period.

