# Down the rabbit hole and back again: Dynamics of enchantment in media tourism

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*Date*: 17/06/2022

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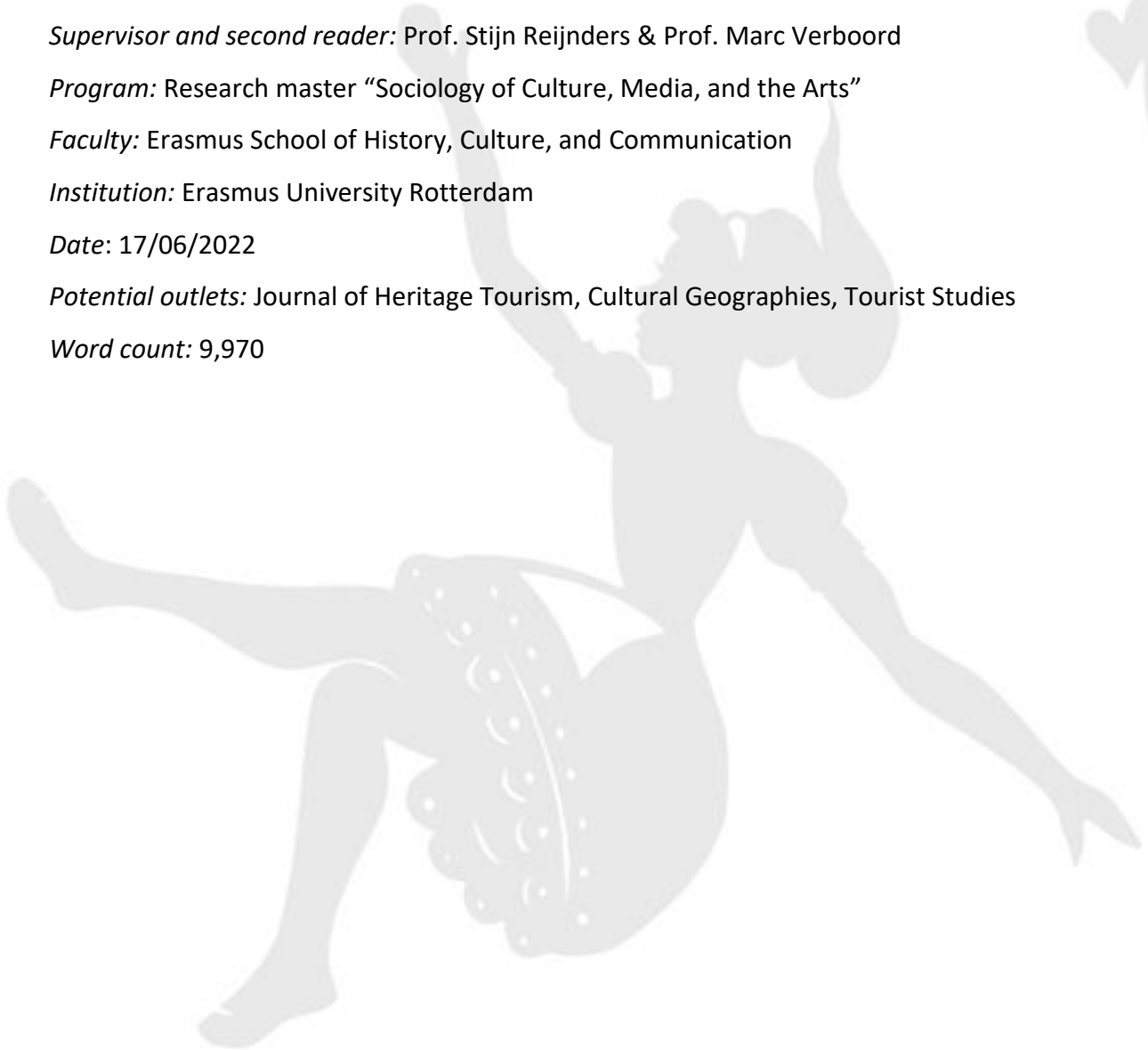
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# 1. Introduction

'Down the rabbit hole' is an oft-used expression. People have different things in mind when they say they fell down the rabbit hole, such as getting interested in something to the point of distraction (Schulz, 2015), or having a psychedelic trip (Urban dictionary, 2009). But the most famous of rabbit holes is, of course, the one Alice tumbles down when entering an alternate reality in Lewis Carroll's classic novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Ainsworth, 2010). Interpreted according to its 'original' meaning, the rabbit hole marks the beginning of "an adventure into the unknown…[and] captures the embodied experience of losing rational control and plummeting into the unfamiliar" (Morey, 2011, p. 8), strange, and apparently new 'Other world'. Seen in this light, the rabbit hole metaphor translates into what Stiegler (2021) describes as a 'state of liquidity and uncertainty' caused by the immersion into realities other than the everyday.

The feeling of being transported somewhere beyond the actual, material world is not unique to the rabbit hole. Most fantasy stories feature some identifiable threshold (an object or place) that provides the characters within a story, as well as the readers of that story, with a point of transition between realities and also, by extension, modes of perception (le Lievre, 2004). This magical nexus point is conventionally referred to as 'portal', defined as a gateway between the primary 'real' world and the secondary worlds that authors create as imaginary worlds (Campbell, 2002, 2010). Portals spill off fantasy book pages and film screens and into reality within the context of 'media tourism', the phenomenon of people travelling to places associated with popular culture narratives found in books, films, games, and television series (Reijnders, 2016a). Here, rabbit holes move beyond the figurative and become quite literally represented in space, visualised and concretised by physical entities that help make tangible otherwise intangible literary motifs. Examples of fictional-turned-real-life portals abound in media tourism, ranging from fantasy to allegory[1].

The field of media tourism has largely been driven by individual case studies into the places that function as magical, star-dusted portals into fictional realities; however, it is time

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[1] Besides the famous Platform 9 ¾ and other real-life *Harry Potter* portals like Diagon Alley, there is Whitby Tate Hill Sands where Dracula comes ashore, the *Star Trek* filming location Vasquez Rocks, used as the backdrop for Captain Kirk's iconic fight against the Gorn, Snæfellsjökull volcano, famous for being Jules Vernes' center of the earth, and more allegorical than literal, Acheron River, or Hades gate to the 'Underworld' (i.e. realm of the dead) – to name only a handful of examples.

to enrich the discussion with more case-transcending research (Reijnders, 2020). One way to do so is by critically evaluating existing case studies and deriving appropriate generalisations or models, as this can help contribute to the systematic advancement of knowledge (Connell, 2020). Along these lines, the purpose of my exploratory study was to test, refine, and expand research by Lovell (2019) on *Harry Potter* tourism in historic cities. Since *Harry Potter* is what literary scholar Mendlesohn (2014) calls an 'almost archetypal portal-quest fantasy', I figured that Lovell's (2019) ideas could also apply to other locations connected to this particular kind of story. In that case, it might be possible to describe tourists' experiences of places narrated through distinct types of fantasy texts at a more general level. As such, I focused on the sub-genre of portal-quest fantasy in relation to media tourism to establish whether certain works of literature or film incline the reader or spectator-turned-tourist to make and ascribe similar meanings to their experiences. The theoretical relevance of my paper is that I show a way to progress the field of media tourism in the desired aforementioned systematic manner – that is, by using definitions and classifications of the fantasy genre as a conceptual framework for juxtaposing similarly mediatised sites within and across national contexts. Practically, I make some suggestions regarding tourists' generally preferred scenario for falling down the rabbit hole.

Empirically I have conducted a cross-comparative analysis of 300 TripAdvisor reviews about three tourist attractions where portal-quest fantasies are inherently present. Studying 100 responses per site allowed me to compare and contrast the views tourists hold regarding their experiences of places steeped in portal-quest fantasy. My case studies were chosen not only because they broaden the Anglo-Saxon focus that dominates media tourism. Moreover, they have distinctive characteristics pertaining to both their staged-ness and officialness that can bring nuance into the discussion. A brief introduction of the sites under study is in order: Jiufen Old Street near Taipei, Taiwan, falsely said to be the inspirational location for the 2001 Studio Ghibli anime *Spirited Away*[2]; Al-Khazneh (The Treasury) in Petra, Jordan, which is both a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the new seven wonders of the world, used for the filming of the fantasy-adventure film *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (1989); and last but not least the Hobbiton set in Waikato, one of New Zealand's Middle Earth landscapes where

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[2] In an interview with Taiwanese media, filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki debunked the rumour that Jiufen Old Street inspired the setting of *Spirited Away*. This has not stopped tourists from visiting the site and proclaiming that it does, in fact, constitute Miyazaki's source of inspiration.

parts of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012-2014) films were shot[3]. The research question guiding my investigation of these places was how do tourists describe and evaluate their experiences of sites connected to portal-quest fantasies? By studying tourists' accounts of 'falling down the rabbit hole'-experiences in a cross-comparative way, I hope to help move the field of media tourism from the personal and idiosyncratic to the common or shared.

The rest of my paper is structured as follows. Firstly, I present a literature review that attempts to define and situate portals in a touristic context. Building on the concept of 'lieux d'imagination' developed by Reijnders (2010b, 2011), I aim to show that places where stories of popular culture are present, as well as the objects and people that reside within them, can be understood as portals for imagining narrative worlds. Additionally, I attempt to infuse the concept of lieux d'imagination with an awareness of the importance of genre, arguing that a site might evoke different experiences in tourists depending on the nature of the story being visited. Using a study by Lovell (2019) as a springboard, I then offer a theorisation of tourists' experiences of mediatised sites connected to a particular type of story, namely, portal-quest fantasies. From there, I discuss my research design in a methodology section, before moving on to the observations that my analysis yielded. In a conclusion, I sum up the main takeaways and highlight their practical relevance for the field of media tourism as a whole.

## 2. Theory

Portals are a universal phenomenon that permeates different societies, cultures, and religions. A variety of things, places, people, and happenings can be regarded as portals, such as relics (Lovell & Bull, 2017), material possessions of the deceased (Simpson, 2014), religious or secular pilgrimage sites (Edensor, 1998; Mark, 2015; Arrelano, 2007), saints (Di Giovine & Choe, 2020), and death as the final rite of passage into afterlife (McAnany, 2011; Tsuji, 2011; Eaton, 2011; Lee, 2008). Portals have a long history as the demarcation between mortal and divine realms but more recently, they have evolved into a hallmark of popular culture genres, particularly that of fantasy. This is because fantasy revolves around "a radical departure from

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[3] While Jiufen Old Street and Al-Khazneh are historical heritage sites that chime with Lovell's (2019) research on 'fairytale, neo-medieval tourist destinations', the Hobbiton film set is a more staged destination that cannot be considered historical in the same way. However, "the celebrity dust attached to a filmed item is equivalent to a historical artefact" (Lovell & Bull, 2017, p. 177), meaning there is a certain historicity to the Hobbiton that makes it an interesting case in point.

the real" (Mathews, 2016, p. 6), meaning authors such as writers and filmmakers must create "entrances from our time and place into other unique worlds" (Thompson, 1981, p. 8) which work by the faculty of the imagination. To achieve this, they designate something as a portal, "an in-between place, or threshold, that allows for the transition from one world to another" (para. 1) by creating places where realities touch (Bushell, 2020). Since portals launch quests that are magical, science-fictional, or supernatural in nature, they are an intrinsic part of the imaginary worlds inhabited by both characters and readers (Harwood-Smith, 2017).

As already mentioned, portals can extend beyond literary and cinematic works within the context of media tourism. This is because mediatised sites where popular narratives may or may not have been enacted offer fans and tourists a portal into the narrative worlds these places embody. Especially attractions associated with fantasy products can achieve narrative transportation beyond the physical world, as they have taken on connotations of the unreal, supernatural, or impossible. Theoretically, one way to investigate tourists' symbolic journeys into the realm of fantasy is through the concept of 'lieux d'imagination'.

Lieux d'imagination (places of the imagination) are physical points of reference to an imagined world (Reijnders, 2010a). These places channel a "phenomenon whose essence is non-physical" (Reijnders, 2010b, p. 4) in that it "actually takes places in the mind" (Reijnders, 2011, p. 234). Indeed, at their very core, portals are psychological phenomena, as "it is in the head and heart of the fan or tourist…where the transitional moment takes place" (Reijnders, 2011, p. 234). But the experience of traversing a portal into the imagination usually does not occur in a vacuum, since "even the wildest fantasies spring from something recognisable, for the simple reason that there would be no way to picture them otherwise" (Reijnders, 2010a, p. 5). That recognisable 'something' frequently is a place because physical, material features help make palpable narrative worlds by setting in motion a train of associations that can give shape and colour to the imagination.

Lieux d'imagination hold imaginative power especially when enriched by simulacra – "devices that stimulate" (de Solla Price, 1964, p. 9) such as shops, props, and costumes – and mediated by 'site guardians' (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001) like tour guides. The latter has been said to oil the wheels of inspiration through forms of affective labour (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021) that Chronis (2012) terms 'narrative imagineering'. From this, I slightly re-conceptualize lieux d'imagination with Campbell (2010) as all those places, objects, and people that help tourists

enter new worlds by either literally or symbolically carving out the space through which they access alternate realities.

The concept of lieux d'imagination has many strong suits. Perhaps most importantly, it directs our attention toward physical entities that serve as what Rosa (2018) calls 'our axis of resonance' or 'vibrating wires' between self and world. In leading tourists down the rabbit hole, lieux d'imagination can stimulate what Maslow (1959) terms 'peak experiences' of joy, elation, and transcendence. The key question remains as to how stories influence these peak experiences. After all, stories inject tourists' imagined landscapes with meaningful emotional associations that play out during the actual act of tourism (Reijnders, 2016b). Of course, even among tourists focusing on the same text these associations can differ widely because of the reader's unique relationship to that text (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2017). Yet stories are still of a certain nature, characterised by genre-specific conventions that shape the creative process of writing and interpretive process of reading. As such, classifications of story types might be useful in understanding the role and effect of narrative form on tourists' experiences of lieux d'imagination. Mendlesohn (2014) identifies four distinct but overlapping types of fantasy – portal-quest, intrusion, liminal, and immersive fantasies – that position the reader in specific ways by means of rhetoric. For example, intrinsic to the functioning of portal-quest fantasies is an authoritative narration that ensures acceptance in the story being told, whereas liminal fantasies use irony and equipoise to 'make readings available' instead of shutting them down (Mendlesohn, 2014). Existing research offers an interesting theorisation of how portal-quest fantasy might shape touristic experiences of lieux d'imagination.

Lovell's (2019) study on *Harry Potter* tourism in historic cities posits that tourists have 'magically real imaginative experiences' of place. For clarity's sake, imaginative experience is a concept that encompasses tourists' fantasised and 'real' encounters with a site, combining imagination with perception (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2017). Magical reality synthesises these components: on one hand, it is "underpinned by stories…, encapsulating the fantasies which tourists seek" (p. 450) and on the other hand, it inheres in heritage attractions that can raise one's 'fairytale consciousness' (Lovell, 2019). Regarding the former, tourists might picture or imagine places connected to portal-quest fantasy as enchanting and dreamlike (Lovell & Bull, 2017). Regarding the latter, Lovell (2019) introduces the term 'magi-heritage transportation' to show how forms of built, intangible, recreated, reproduced, or revived heritage can equip

tourists with a 'magical gaze' that frames their way of seeing in imaginative ways. As already mentioned, *Harry Potter* is a typical portal-quest fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2014), hence there is a good chance that the pertinence of magical reality to the experience of lieux d'imagination extends beyond the scope of Lovell's (2019) study to also include similarly mediatised sites.

Another aspect that makes magical reality especially relevant for the purposes of this paper is that, by definition, it encapsulates the rabbit hole effect. Lovell (2019) defines magical reality as combining a "perceptual realism and the fantastic, so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinctions between them" (p. 499). While she does not provide a clear definition of 'the fantastic' and 'the marvellous', luckily, we can draw on work by other scholars to clarify the unique situatedness of magical reality. Todorov (1973) defines the fantastic as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (p. 25). He goes on to suggest that the fantastic segues into a neighbouring realm – namely, either that of 'the marvellous' (the supernatural accepted), or 'the uncanny' (the supernatural explained) – once the person experiencing this hesitation turns their uncertainty about the apparently supernatural event into some form of certainty (Todorov, 1973). As such, magical reality constitutes the stepping stone toward imaginary worlds because it ushers in the fantastic, just like portals do. Against this background, I suggest using the terms 'magical reality' and 'marvellous reality' in a more context-specific way as opposed to interchangeably like Lovell (2019).

Finally, one area left blank by Lovell (2019) is what happens when there is a mismatch between storyline and historical-cultural place narratives from tourists' perspective. Indeed, she posits it is only "when magic and reality are aligned…[that] the imagination is allowed to flow, unfolding marvellous realities" (Lovell, 2019, p. 451). But what kind of experiences take shape when tourists report some form of expectation-reality gap? Perhaps in such cases they experience what Max Weber famously calls the 'disenchantment of the world', defined at its most basic level as a process of rationalisation or 'de-magicisation' whereby supernatural or impossible elements retreat from the world (Green, 2005). Besides investigating the possible generic applicability of magical reality for theorising tourists' experiences of places that host portal-quest fantasies, this study thus follows another goal: to find out some main pitfalls of falling down the rabbit hole. By exploring incongruences between tourists' expectations and actual lived experiences, I hope to identify some drivers of disenchantment that infringe on magically real experiences. In this way, I can help both tourism providers and tourists achieve

the desired goal of constructing or crossing a portal through which marvellous realities come to life.

## 3. Methodology

This exploratory study employed a form of text analysis to examine tourists' accounts of experience with places that approximate the idea of a portal. The website TripAdvisor was used as a source of data because its user-generated reviews represent narrations of journeys that offer insight into 'hot' cognitive states like beliefs, opinions, preferences, and intentions held by tourists. Moreover, TripAdvisor is characterised by value pluralism, featuring reviews by all kinds of online active tourists who, as commentators and intermediaries, wish to testify to their experiences. Bissell (2011) points out that reviews are more than a reflective practice focused on a specific past journey undertaken, for they affectively condition possible futures by providing potential travellers with tips and tricks aimed at minimising uncertainty and the possibility of nasty surprises. Therefore, TripAdvisor may prove to be a fruitful empirical lens for furthering our understanding of the way tourists envision a seamless experience of falling down the rabbit hole.

The cross-comparative analysis undertaken was based on three case studies that can produce a detailed, multi-faceted understanding of the phenomenon under study (Crowe et al., 2011). As already stated in the introduction to this paper, my case studies are Al-Khazneh, Jiufen Old Street, and the Hobbiton film set. Each of these places represents a 'high potential case study' that records a minimum of 100 and maximum of 1000 TripAdvisor reviews which explicitly mention the portal-quest fantasies tied to them, namely, *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*, *Spirited Away*, and *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* trilogies. These case studies also offer a well-rounded picture of the research topic, providing complementary insight into tourists' experiences of, and attitudes toward, authorised-unstaged (Al-Khazneh), authorised-staged (Hobbiton), and unauthorised-unstaged (Jiufen Old Street) attractions.

As already indicated, TripAdvisor can give my research question a fair chance of being answered. As the most popular user-generated content site in the tourism sector, it registers more than 340 million users and over 225 million reviews (Baka, 2016). Perks other than data availability are the speed, simplicity, and non-intrusive nature of data collection, the latter of which reduces interference in the behaviour of those studied (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2014). Of course, TripAdvisor also has disadvantages related to the lack of supplementary information

about demographics. This then makes my analysis one of reviews, not tourists (Alexander et al., 2018). With a nod to Reijnders (2016b), I acknowledge that my study thus neglects socio-cultural context, which much of the imagination is shaped by. Lovell and Thurgill (2021) point out a silver lining in the lack of metadata on TripAdvisor: it can limit bias toward respondents by removing researcher preconceptions, reducing potential errors in judgment.

A purposeful random sample of 300 TripAdvisor reviews (100 per site) that reference the respective films in their titles or within the text itself was obtained using a randomization algorithm. Purposive selection supports my research aims and the element of randomisation heightens the credibility of my study (Patton, 2002). I decided to gauge my sample based on theoretical sufficiency as an alternative to saturation because quality (e.g. richness, diversity, depth, complexity) is arguably more telling than quantity (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This means that I did several sweeps of the data in a first step, coming to the conclusion that the selected reviews were good enough to proceed with the analysis. Needless to say, I make no claims to generalisability.

The data was analysed using a thematic 'template approach'. The reason for choosing this inductive-deductive "method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) is twofold. Firstly, it allows researchers to examine between-case issues in experientially focused studies like this one (Brooks et al., 2015) while also ensuring a clear, sustained focus on key areas of study through the use of a priori themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Secondly, this method can fall within contextual constructivism (Madill et al., 2000). As a researcher, I take such a stance, maintaining that any phenomenon can be interpreted in multiple ways because meaning is always situated and contextual.

Another key reason in favour of template analysis is less theoretical and, hence, more practical in nature. In the early phase of this project, I attempted to take the necessary steps for conducting one-on-one Zoom interviews and realised that, unfortunately, this simply was not possible. For one thing, tourism operators told me that site visits have decreased rapidly due to COVID-19, making it difficult to recruit tourists whose memories are still fresh. Besides this, I learned that disseminating my research study announcement via tour operators would be harder than expected because of concerns related to data privacy. Moreover, neither the financial nor temporal scope of this project allowed me to travel to the places myself, leading to issues of reliability. For all these reasons, I opted for template analysis. Future studies can

implement my initial research design idea to present a more in-depth phenomenological and socio-cultural perspective on the subject matter.

The data analysis process proceeded in a deductive-inductive manner. First, I devised an initial template with themes and sub-themes using both theoretical aspects that my study is driven by and issues that emerged from a small subset of data, namely 10 reviews per case study (see Appendix A). The central a priori theme was magical reality, put on par with portal transitions that I operationalised as leaving the familiar and entering imaginary worlds which, in the context of media tourism, reflect the fictional world of the story being visited. Utilising my initial template as a basic interpretive framework, I then conducted the remainder of my analysis in a more bottom-up than top-down fashion. After coding text passages with in-vivo or characterising codes, I used the analytic method of constant comparison to condense my set of initial codes into top and lower-level themes. Meanwhile, I expanded and modified my initial template when necessary, adding new themes and redefining existing ones. All themes constitute representations of personal experience in the form of sentences and phrases that capture something relevant in relation to my research question.

The iterative re-development of my template continued until I felt like it conveyed a comprehensive overview of my data. Using Brooks and King's (2014) terminology, I regarded a linear, as opposed to diagrammatic, presentation of my final template (see Appendix B) as sensible because the data analysis uncovered broad, overarching themes (e.g. magi-heritage transportation) that encompassed successively narrower, more specific ones (e.g. natural or cinematographic heritage). In any case, my final template should not be understood in terms of conceptual perfection but rather as an orientation tool to help me tell my story about the data (Gibbs, 2012).

## 4. Analysis

Contrary to Alice's accidental fall down the rabbit hole, tourists need to set the scene for them to be transported to Wonderland, whatever its form may be. By creating the 'right' conditions for immersion, they help heritage environments to successfully work their magic, be that through historical-cultural, natural, or cinematographic means. As such, there is work involved in becoming enchanted along the lines of the particular story being visited, meaning magical reality is something to be actively pursued rather than passively attained. Moreover, enchantment of the world is complemented by re-enchantment of various kinds, for tourists

described being sucked into, and spit out by, the rabbit hole in uniquely different ways. Thus, mediatised sites can not only serve as conduits to marvellous states of being, but also enrich the manner in which tourists experience and understand the 'real' world.

The above-described experiential dynamic of (re-)enchantment is illustrated in figure 1. Of course, this simplistic model does not depict tourists' actual experiences of falling down the rabbit hole and returning from Wonderland. The reason for this has to do with the nature of my data: retrospective travel narrations concern just a fragment of the overall experience, reflecting highly filtered and stylised representations of a journey. As such, my model should be understood as capturing the way tourists *describe* what might be termed an 'experiential arch' involving three different phases: the arrival/being there, the enchantment, and the re-enchantment. From a narrative perspective, these phases are mutually dependent and occur one after the other but, in reality, they may well progress in a more complex, non-sequential fashion. Therefore, the ensuing data analysis must be taken with a grain of salt, as it portrays tourists' ideal-typical scenario of falling down and resurfacing from the rabbit hole. The value of my model is that it represents an orientation tool useful for tourists and tourism providers assessing whether a site and service offering meet the criteria apparently crucial for sparking a productive release of the imagination.
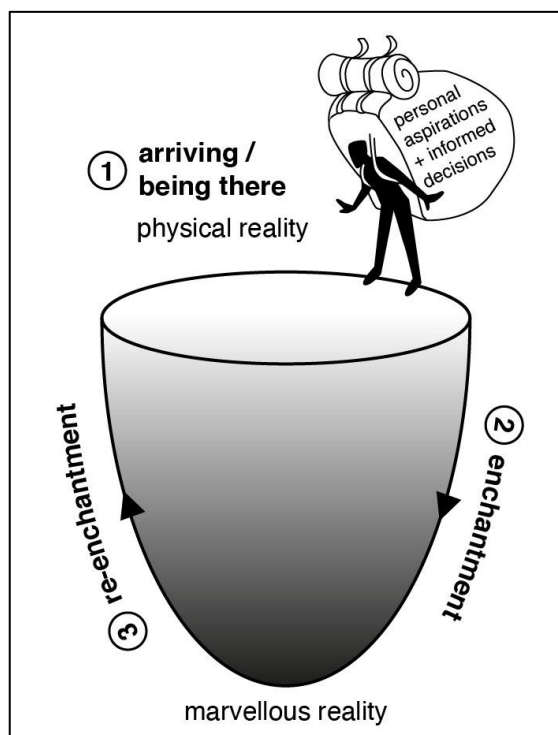


Figure 1.: The three experiential phases described by tourists' recounting their experiences of places associated with portal-quest fantasies

## 4.1 The arrival/Being there

Tourists described their real-time, on-site experiences as going one of two ways with regard to the fall down the rabbit hole. Those who reported what they perceived as harmony between the imagined image and 'real' version of place often subsequently talked about the environment settling them into worlds of fantasy. But those who pictured the site differently than what it appeared to them in reality remarked on the disappointment of the experience, suggesting disenchantment rather than enchantment. The majority of tourists offered pieces of advice on how to reduce potential expectation-reality gaps and, hence, facilitate magically real experiences. Before discussing these recommendations, I will briefly touch upon the role personal travel aspirations play in opening up the rabbit hole because, without the right kind of motivation, even a perfectly planned trip has difficulty bringing marvellous realities to the fore.

### 4.1a Personal aspirations

While fairly obvious, it must be stated that tourists need to know and, ideally, like the story grounded in the place being visited to be put in imaginative touch with its settings and characters. Quite logically, heritage environments can only pull tourists into narrative worlds when the contours of those worlds have previously been sketched out:

> "Have never seen Indiana Jones so seeing the Treasury did not have any celluloid moments for me" (lotsofspots)

Celluloid moments for imagining reality otherwise were, indeed, largely enabled by narrative predispositions:

> "When movie come to life right in front of your eyes. My advice is to watch a Hobbit movie before you come so whatever the tour guide tells you, it will make sense" (Yus)

> "Anyone who was a fan of the Indiana Jones Films will be sure to be enthralled by the first view of the Treasury as seen when exiting the Siq" (bodkinAmman)

> "I love the feel of the place with all the lanterns hanging especially at night when all
>
> of them are lit up, feels classic since I watched the anime spirited away" (PrincessCha)

The first two statements indicate that readership and fandom can serve as vehicles for states of enthrallment that engage tourists' imagination and facilitate sense-making. The latter, on the other hand, implies a déjà vu, where tourists feel a sense of having experienced the place before thanks to having seen the film set in it. Both equally suggest that more awareness of, and liking for, a story can help tourists reminisce back on literary and cinematic memories in ways that are conducive to magical reality. But staged attractions seem to form an exception to this 'rule':

> "Even if you are not a huge fan of the movies this is a magical tour. Every aspect of
>
> the adventure has been considered carefully" (MyKitchenStories)

> "You don't have to be a LOTR or a Hobbit fan to enjoy the fantastic scenery, movie set
>
> wonder and totally enthralling 2 hour guided tour of the Shire" (blueshark_m4ko)

It makes sense that non-fans have an easier time falling down the rabbit hole at the Hobbiton because this "movie set wonder" has enough "carefully considered" signposts to show them the way. Thus, 'performing places' (Lovell & Bull, 2017) that are more contrived than natural might have a greater ability to enact inclusive enchantment.

Interestingly, not all tourists who were familiar with the story in question seemed to want their narrative imagination to take over. This strengthens Reijnders' (2016b) argument that media tourists' travel motivations encompass not just 'the desire to step into the shoes of a character and become part of a beloved story' but also, among other things, the wish 'to pay respect to the underlying creative process of highly praised writers or directors':

> "Jiufen is a foodies paradise. Taste the amazing variety on offer…Come also to pay
>
> homage to Miyazaki's anime Spirited Away" (Anjali A)

This statement reflects a casual interest in bonding with the story, emphasising instead both the lure of Jiufen's culinary heritage ("foodies paradise") and the act of visitation as a way of

"paying homage" to acclaimed filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, perhaps in order to increase one's standing as a fan. Other tourists felt less of a need to pay their respects, but likewise did not voice an intention to fall down the rabbit hole, even though they knew of the story:

> "The Treasury is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985 and was voted one of the New 7 Wonders of the World. Even the movie "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" shows "The Treasury" in part of the story" (Christina C)

> "I am not a fan girl of the Lord of the Rings series of films, but certainly appreciate the art of film making. It is rare to see a living film set as they are often torn down post production" (Geoff W)

While the passing mention of *Indiana Jones* seems to function only as a reinforcement of Al-Khazneh's inherent historic value and already distinguished status, the latter remark implies that some tourists care more about aspects of film production than immersion into narrative worlds. Both statements support Waysdorf and Reijnders' (2017) argument that tourists can use the story projected onto a place as an impetus for learning about the 'real' history of the site and technical processes of filming. These modes of discovery are mediated but not quite as defined by the use of imagination generally associated with marvellous reality. Thus, more often than not, tourists must deliberately seek out the rabbit hole rather than stumble upon it like Alice does in Carroll's book because otherwise, they might get (pleasurably) lost in the wider historical-cultural and technical context within which it is placed. The exception to this is 'spatial hinge', which I discuss in section 4.2a.

Another key aspect of magical reality besides knowing the way to, and wanting to fall down, the rabbit hole is the minimisation of external stressors. Indeed, many tourists offered would-be travellers some advice on gear (e.g. walking shoes, sunscreen, hat, umbrella, water bottle), tour products, walking routes, and the time of visit to help them fine-tune their trips in ways supportive of enchantment. Below, I discuss informed decisions that tourists saw as beneficial to falling down the rabbit hole.

## 4.1b Informed decisions

Essentially, all suggestions made by tourists about what they felt was the best way to experience the site through their imagination revolved around this idea of 'being there'. For one thing, being there requires a sense of solitude. Particularly but not only tourists to Jiufen Old Street expressed negative feelings of being crammed with large crowds and the creeping commercialisation of place:

> "Jiufen is famous for one of the cafe that inspired Bathhouse in Spirited Away and that is the reason why I visited this place. It is pretty disappointing though. The street and shops are crowded and not that charming. The famous tea house itself is expensive and overrated. If you do not have much time in Taipei, you can skip it" (TheNayzer)

> "Tourist-oriented to the point of sacrificing old flavours. I've been to Jiufen Old Street several times, but the more I go, the more I realize that this place is becoming more and more tourist-oriented. Take a look at the shops and you'll see more and more redundancies, as well as stores that offers merchandise which have absolutely no connection with the area" (RCL_TPE)

These statements suggest that touristification can strip a place of its old-world charm, allure, and 'original' historic character, culminating in disappointing experiences. Lovell and Thurgill (2021) therefore rightly state that "simulacra can congest the imagination with magical over-tourism" (p. 15), leading to feelings of placelessness. While some tourists enjoyed conversing with souvenir peddlers, arguing "it all just adds to the experience" (Morecowbell5), most did not appreciate commodified culture. Instead, they recommended visiting the sites at specific times of the day to avoid encountering crowds and vendors:

> "Go super early if you want the place to yourself. It's very quiet and peaceful before the loads of people from tour buses come. They get loud and all sounds echo in the Siq" (JenHLee)

"It's definitely worth spending overnight here to get a feel of the place where all people have gone away!" (Ping L)

Clearly, the "feel of place" is considered more captivating and enchanting when tourists have the site to themselves. As such, falling down the rabbit hole requires tourists to seek solitude and calm conditions that can enable contemplation and prolonged immersion. Alternatively, they can practice selective attention to compensate for the lack of a low-key vibe:

"Unfortunately due to vandalism, you are unable to go inside. We took the opportunity to sit quietly and marvel at this structure – amidst noisy camels, hawkers and other tourists" (Jo_Rose_Gum)

This statement shows a strategy similar to that of wearing blinders, highlighting that tourists can optimise for pleasantness and induce enchantment effects like "marvel" by blocking out perceived distractions like noise, crowds, and hawkers. Thus, magical reality can thrive when tourists focus more on what does rather than does not appeal to them.

Besides peace and quiet, tourists argued that travelling at the 'right' time comes with the reward of obtaining more picturesque views of the scenery:

"If you come at different times during the day, especially in the evening, the stone reflects different light. So in the evening its more rosy and there are less tourists around" (youke_worldwide)

"Omg the night scenes were so beautiful. Much more beautiful than what I imagined it to be. My brother kept telling me it will be an awesome sight in the night, much different compared to the daytime…in the night, we get to see the mesmerizing lights of the houses & restaurants on the hill and enjoy the breezes that blows right from the sea to where we were standing made us much delighted as we get to enjoy a different sight in the lovely night. The red lanterns hanging on the restaurants made me felt so dreamy and reminisced the scenes reflected on old Japanese movies and Spirited Away during the 昭和 era" (Poshberries)

These statements convey a sense of atmosphere created by dim natural and artificial lighting that can frame places in a "rosy" glow which, in turn, might put tourists under the spell of a "mesmerizing" effect. The role of atmospheric light conditions in evoking magical reality will be more elaborately discussed within the context of natural magi-heritage transportation in section 4.2b.

In addition to choosing the 'best' visiting times, tourists to all sites encouraged others to consider issues of flow and pace so as to lay the foundation for enchantment through and via heritage elements. Both fans and non-fans suggested that magical reality hinges on being able to explore a place on one's own terms, in one's own time:

> "Although I absolutely loved the movie set, this experience was kind of a nightmare :( The Hobbit houses are so beautiful and seem so real, but you don't have the time to actually enjoy the place cause they're pushing you through in no time!…So all that is left from the visit is just a brief impression, a lot of stress and sadness…and a lot of anger, cause they take so much money for it yet don't actually let you ,be there' and really experience it! It's a real rip off" (Magdalena)

This statement leaves little doubt that being hurried at a destination can result in barriers to immersion, leaving "just a brief impression" of all a place has to offer. The crucial importance of actually being there for connecting to the story in an embodied way has been emphasised by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018) in their study on a Harry Potter theme park. While tourists to Jiufen Old Street and Al-Khazneh also stressed the value of unbounded exploration, ample opportunity to linger around seemed to matter more for tourists to the Hobbiton. This might be because tourists visiting staged attractions want to indulge in their fandoms without time constraints, or 'geek out' with fellow fans, as Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018) put it. Another reason could be that these tourists expect something more in return for the pricing and value proposition of a service packaging:

> "I thought it was a bit overpriced. You hardly have time to take photos or look closely into the hobbit homes…You can't touch anything and only one or two houses were open for picture purposes only. Absolutely nothing inside the house…All souvenirs

quite pricey. Only for Hobbit fanatics I'm afraid, cannot recommend this very expensive walk through" (Menchu B)

Clearly, enchantment and hence magical reality presuppose tourists' ability to scope out the full potential of their experiences even more so in simulated environments of entertainment and consumption, be that through unrestricted access or photo-ops. One way for tourists to ensure having enough time and means to properly enjoy the site is by booking suitable tours specifically geared toward fans:

"After reading so many reviews about the set being so over crowded during the day, the evening banquet tour was so quiet and there was nobody but our group of approx 40 people. All of our photos are amazing as we were able to take our time and take photos of everything without anybody in our way" (Kate)

To conclude, this section aimed to map out the problem that, from tourists' perspective, lies at the heart of disenchantment: the inability to 'be there'. A lack of privacy and serendipitous discovery led most tourists to perceive the site either as visually incongruent with its fictional portrayal, or simply as less remarkable than imagined. Therefore, if reality deviates from the imagination, distorting and commodifying the romantic image that tourists hold of the place, then enchantment is nipped in the bud, so to speak. For magical reality to arise, tourists must first put in work that involves familiarising oneself with the story being visited, trip-planning, and being thick-skinned enough to endure 'hiccups' that lie outside of one's control. It is only under the 'right' conditions for immersion that tales of enchantment can unfold.

## 4.2 The enchantment

In situations where tourists' framed their experiences in ways favourable to achieving magical reality, many reported met expectations that generally gave way to an enchantment of the world. As such, Lovell (2019) correctly argues that heritage sites can transport tourists into fantasy universes when there is fitness between two entities: the story being visited and its immediate physical context. This paper found evidence not only for the ability of historical and cultural heritage elements to enchant tourists, but also identified 'new' forms of natural

and cinematographic magi-heritage transportation. In the next three sections, I discuss what objects, settings, and landscapes tourists generally associated with the magical gaze.

## 4.2a Cultural-historical

Several tourists to Jiufen Old Street commented upon (im)material things that served as vehicles of the imagination for them. Echoing Lovell (2019), they suggested that alleyways and lanes hold great imaginative power, expressing that these narrow urban spaces inspired them to weave narrative worlds around their surroundings:

> "The narrow alleyways, colourful stalls and bright red lantern are very distinctive and easily recognizable and will bring back memories of the well-loved anime from Hayao Miyazaki" (MitchMicahandKaykay)

In the same breath, many referenced bright red lanterns and anything that has a 'rustic' and 'quaint' feel, such as the Japanese-style A-Mei Tea House:

> "It has the rustic feel of an old village, with its enchanting sceneries, narrow lanes and quaint shops" (ermasyafiqah)

> "Quaint little teahouses bring you a feel like Miyazaki's animation Spirited Away with the red lanterns" (redpagoda)

These statements underscore that the old-world patina of historic cities presents tourists an alluring rabbit hole to fall into, because the past can feed into and fuel the imagination. What they also show is that cinematic motifs like the red lanterns in *Spirited Away* can function as powerful mnemonic triggers, serving as "distinctive" and "easily recognisable" resources for the imagination. As such, the magical gaze is innately intertwined with historic structures like winding streets and traditional architecture but further enhanced by associative connections made through popular culture.

Besides tangible historical heritage, intangible cultural heritage emerged as a catalyst for the imagination. Tourists stressed that sensory aspects of food products and other haptic

or olfactory cues play a role in magi-heritage transportation, especially if they mirror related images that tourists imagined while consuming the story:

> "At night, it will feel like you have been transported into another dimension. Fans of the movie (such as I) will be overwhelmed with the sights, smells, and overall feel of this small town" (despresso)

> "The smell of good cooking permeates the narrow lanes, drawing in unsuspecting visitors, as it did Chihiro's parents in the movie Spirited Away" (Anjali A)

These statements reveal that enchantment extends far beyond gazing to include stimulation of all five senses. Seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, and feeling: the totality of the experience makes magical reality seep into the everyday more easily. Notably, this observation has been made by other scholars finding that embodied practices contribute to tourists' experience of being-in-the-world, be it 'real' or imagined (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018; Lovell & Bull, 2017; Chronis, 2012; Reijnders, 2011).

Finally, it is interesting to note that Jiufen Old Street also conjured mental images of portal-quest fantasies that bear no connection to the site itself:

> "…it was seriously some Harry Potter magic getting through those narrow alleys" (Taylor D)

This type of experience Thurgill and Lovell (2019) refer to as 'spatial hinge', that is, when one "locate[s] extra-literary experiences in actual-world places not associated with the novel but which feel like they share the same affective environment" (p. 17). The fact that *Harry Potter* comes to mind when tourists walk and drive along the narrow streets of Taiwan is testament to the versatile nature of magi-heritage transportation and even more so to the unparalleled cultural impact of JK Rowling's fantasy series.

While this section largely reiterated and slightly expanded Lovell's (2019) ideas about heritage-led enchantment, the next sections add a fresh perspective by honing in on natural and cinematographic environments that can prompt a fall down the rabbit hole.

4.2b Natural

Tourists to both Al-Khazneh and the Hobbiton made clear that landscape can also act as a living stimulator of the imagination. Especially Al-Khazneh evinced cases of natural magi-heritage transportation, as the walk through Petra's crevices appeared to form a prompt and an invitation for tourists to engage their active imaginations:

> "…The walk along the Siq is magical – only accompanied by the sound of your heartbeat and your footsteps. The first view of the Khazneh is timeless. This is straight out of Indiana Jones (and Tintin!)" (badcafe)

> "I thought I was Indiana Jones. Walking through the narrow gorge to the Treasury gave that added and dramatic suspense to the first sighting. Absolutely a wonderful experience and for a moment you think you wear a leather hat and carry a bullwhip around!" (Zandbak)

Each of these statements emphasises the build-up of excitement and resolution of suspense experienced when passing through the narrow gorge (Siq) that leads toward Al-Khazneh and setting eyes on the temple for the first time. For tourists like Zandbak this anticipation of the eventual encounter culminated in a process of 'experience-taking' whereby one partially lets go of one's own identity to assume that of the protagonist (Lenz, 2014). But others displayed less 'behavioural insiderness' (Roesch, 2009) and adopted an 'imaginative eye' (Lovell, 2019) instead by engaging in magical thinking that supernatural things might happen:

> "Amazing to come through the ravine and see this!…Seeing it in real life, you can imagine Indiana Jones coming out of it!" (Petra201602)

One way to picture the perspective implicated in the imaginative eye is by looking at tourists' pictures of Al-Khazneh. This is because they articulate 'spatial fairytales' characterised by the focalisation of the Nabataean structure using depth of focus (Lovell, 2019). To provide a vivid example accompanied by an excerpt from the review:

"Al-Khazneh is a beautiful sight as you make the final turn down the Siq...you really
  do feel like Indiana Jones :)" (TrvlGal83)
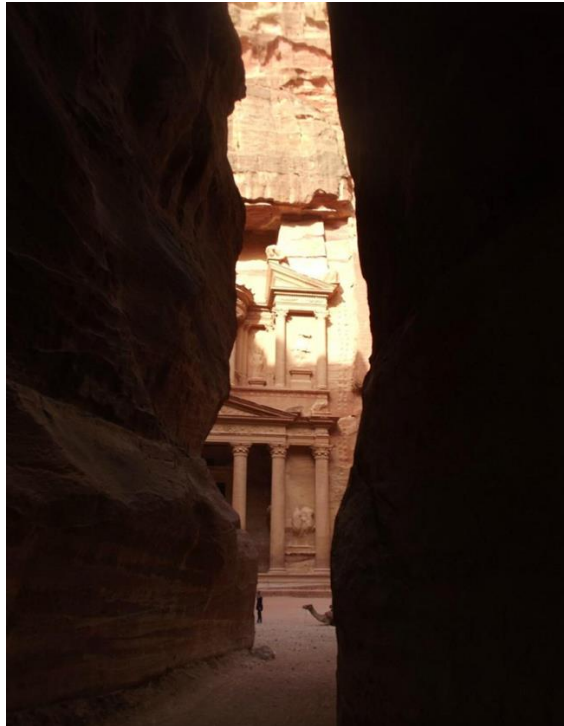


The 'atmospheric perspective' (Rose, 2001) of this low-angle shot conveys a feel for tourists'
experience of natural magi-heritage transportation. That feel encompasses a broad range of
stimuli ranging from seeing the sun shimmer on Al Khazneh's impressive façade to having an
earworm of film music:

"The Treasury really does appear out of the Siq like a mirage, with the sun glinting on
the façade – I had the Indiana Jones theme tune in my head" (TheLush1010)

As such, not only the walk along Petra's meandering trails but also the rosy hues of the whole
sandstone area can bring back memories of imaginary worlds. In fact, even relatively generic
landscape attributes seem to have an enchanting effect, as a small number of tourists to the
Hobbiton remarked:

> "So, what made this place an awesome and magical place? The uniqueness of feeling like you were part of the Hobbit movies. The inspiring countryside views of the sheep, cows and a beautiful moonlit night" (T L)

> "The view was out of the textbook and matched the memories of poems and stories read as a child with scenic view of lush green mountains, sheep around" (Harshraj Sanghvi)

Clearly, not only unusual and rare geographical features like Petra's rock formations but also more common elements of nature like grazing cattle and lush mountains can absorb tourists into the story being visited, or transport them into unrelated narrative worlds along the lines of spatial hinge. Thus, natural magi-heritage transportation encompasses highly cinematised landscapes that have been iconicised by popular culture, as well as landscapes that for many of us occur within the everyday.

## 4.2c Cinematographic

The final version of magi-heritage transportation differs from its counterparts in that tourists are more actively involved in falling down the rabbit hole. Only few Hobbiton tourists described suddenly shifting to an imaginative state, evoking the startling feeling of traversing a portal into fantasy worlds:

> "WOW is the first thing I said, as you walk into the main area you are transported to not just a different place and time but directly into the movie" (mrlogboy)

The sense of immediacy in Hobbiton tourists' experiences of magical reality can be explained as follows: theme park-like spaces add a layer of encouragement for tourists to feel like they have entered another world through their separation from interactions and appearances of everyday life (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). Indeed, as silverthreads1010 remarked, "the trip on the bus to and from the actual set really set the scene". Overall, Hobbiton tourists seemed very much aware of, and complicit in, the illusion of Middle Earth presented.

While the Hobbiton did facilitate the uncontrolled feeling that overcomes those who enter the rabbit hole, most tourists did not describe plunging into imaginary worlds. Instead, they rationalised and maintained a critical distance from marvellous realities:

"…it's been lovingly created to allow you to imagine you are in the Shires and that Frodo, Samwise and Bilbo are about to pop out of their Hobbit holes" (Ian G)

"The area is well maintained and looks as if the hobbits really could be living there" (Gene K)

"It feels so real, it's as if it's always been there" (Jode)

While the first statement clearly conveys a form of accompliceship whereby tourists need to willingly suspend their disbelief to become part of narrative worlds, the latter two recall this idea of 'double consciousness'. Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018) define the concept in relation to the 'ironic imagination', arguing that theme park tourists feel 'as if' but not completely like they are immersed in narrative worlds, aware and appreciative of the effort which feeds into maintaining the false facticity of what essentially is artifice. Most tourists consented to being amazed, or actually 'bought' the semblance of reality that the Hobbiton conjures. But not all expressed the enchantment experienced as part of magical reality:

"Think of this as a walk around the Hobbit neighbourhood and you will be delighted" (Charles S)

"This tour turned out to be a good experience. The details outside of each Hobbit house was great…Even though the houses were facades & a tree was fake, it was still impressive" (Passion4Travel4Life)

These statements foreground feelings of delight and of being impressed, not those produced in the process of becoming engrossed in a story. By contrast, one tourist expressed the exact opposite sentiment, namely, total immersion into imaginary worlds:

"It felt like you were really in the Shire vs a movie set. There is nothing there but Shire"

(CaliforniaJbaby)

From this, we can gather that staged attractions can facilitate not only magically real but also hyperreal experiences where representations appear as more 'real' than reality (Baudrillard, 1994). As such, cinematographic magi-heritage transportation can pave the way for different kinds of experience that vary in their uses of the imagination but share in common a reliance on how well simulacra keeps tourists at a remove from everyday reality. Table A summarises indicators of the magical gaze not previously identified by Lovell (2019).

| Qualities | Illustrated by |
|---|---|
| Fairy tale settings | Castles, cathedrals, cottages, lanes, *traditional tea houses* |
| Anthropomorphism | Towers, clocks |
| Architectural agency | Winding streets, looming structures, hidden houses, lanes, *alleyways, cobblestones* |
| *Natural agency* | *Mountains, moonshine, mirage-like reflections, gorges, meandering trails* |
| Magical hosts | Drinking beer, opening windows, buying fruit, *smelling/consuming food* |
| Scale | Small doors, small chapel |
| Disorientation | Leaning buildings |
| Uncanny | Poignancy of ruins |
| Tall tales | Apocryphal stories in tours, renamed street signs |
| Personal narratives | Dressing up in costume, making up names, inhabiting character, *having a theme music earworm* |
| Pagan/folklore | Green man, Morris dancing, devilish carvings |
| Literary fairy tale figures | Inklings, Boccaccio |
| Punctum/mystery | Ancient graffiti, lost diary, *red lanterns* |
| *Single words* | Pure, *rustic, quaint* |

Table A. Impressions of in-/tangible magi-heritage at tourism sites connected to portal-quest fantasies. Adaptations are shown in italics (adapted from Lovell, 2019, p. 460).

To sum up this section, magi-heritage transportation is a versatile phenomenon with roots in historical-cultural, natural, and cinematographic heritage elements. Be it built forms like swallow-tail roofs and other typical traditional building styles, or the natural topography

of a site and a simulacrum of filmed reality: the affordances of heritage sites can lead tourists to make imaginative leaps into narrative words ranging from that of the story rooted in place to completely unrelated stories. Magi-heritage transportation can unfold only when tourists ensure and experience a satisfactory encounter with the destination, but expectation-reality congruence is not an absolute guarantee for magically real experiences. Some tourists called Jiufen Old Street a "spitting image of" (Ummi J) of *Spirited Away*, or described Al-Khazneh as "just like" (e.g. Marty O and JRonherjollys) *Indiana Jones*. Yet, their endorsement of the sites' plausible, internally consistent, and believable appearances did not cause them to talk about their experiences in magically real terms (e.g. enchanting, poetic, dreamlike). Thus, the 'anti-rational dynamics' developed by Reijnders (2011) is not an undisputed choice, because there are some tourists who test their imaginations against reality and then refrain from removing that symbolic distinction in spite of matching appearances, deciding instead to remain firmly rooted in the 'real'.

## 4.3 The re-enchantment

The third experiential phase that some tourists described passing through (only) after having been enchanted is that of re-enchantment of the physical world. For them, it was not the encounter with imaginary worlds but the encounter with the place itself that constituted their peak experience. As such, stories enable the enrichment of tourists' experiences, acting as a stepping stone for them to obtain a richer understanding of the 'real' world. A red thread that weaved itself through the accounts of re-enchanted tourists were sentiments of positive surprise and expectations having been exceeded. The reasons for above-and-beyond on-site experiences differed depending on the staged-ness of the site, hence why I discuss them one by one in separate sections below.

### 4.3a Non-staged attractions

Only tourists to Al-Khazneh explicitly reported exceeded expectations, using phrases such as "exceeds the hype" (Aaron G), "even more amazing" (MDHAtlanta & Xicanita L), and just like *Indiana Jones* "but better" (e.g. Richtea1000 and Baljindersingh) and "far more awe-inspiring" (ScotAlberta) to describe their experiences. Maybe Jiufen Old Street did not evoke unexpectedly positive feelings because this unauthorised site leaves greater doubt about the legitimacy of the rumoured inspirational connection, setting tourists up for disappointment, or due to its increasing commercialisation. The more official, secluded Al-Khazneh, however,

instilled in tourists a sense of awe (Jo_Rose_Gum), humility (Leepancheetah), and reverence (Christine M) thanks to the level of craftsmanship inherent in the structure itself. Apart from the intricately detailed façade, tourists highlighted the historical value of Petra by pondering such things as Nabataean water supply systems and trading activities (Brian T). Here are just two examples:

> "Being able to walk through this ancient city, and take in all the history truly felt like a privilege" (Iborrego2286)

> "To walk through the SIQ and see the Treasury unfold before you – even more stunning than when Indiana Jones saw it. How anyone could carve something so exquisitely beautiful out of the rock defies belief" (BarryJose)

These statements indicate that tourists who compare their imagined conceptions of the site to its 'real' appearance do not immerse themselves into imaginary worlds when they see the latter as surpassing the former in terms of experiential value. Instead, their experiences take on a new direction, for the site, quite unexpectedly, transports them back up the rabbit hole into a more profound reality that exceeds the fiction. In other words, tourists can experience narrative transportation into fantasy universes but bounce back to discover facets of human existence when reality is perceived as something much greater than anything stories have to offer. Here, the act of imagining *Indiana Jones* serves as a hook that mediates the interaction between tourist and place, opening the door to meaningful experiences that produce deeper and broader understandings of the world.

The experiences of re-enchanted tourists might be defined with Lovell and Bull (2017) as 'real-real'. Real-real experiences are existential, elevated, and embodied, representing an authentic, spontaneous, and non-performative engagement with a site (Lovell & Bull, 2017). Implicated in real-real experiences is a 'bird's eye viewpoint' that involves tourists ascending to the highest point in a landscape, where they strengthen their sense of far-off time periods and thereby connect to 'deep heritage' (Lovell & Bull, 2017). The pursuit of such a bird's eye perspective shone through in tourists' reviews of both Al-Khazneh and Jiufen Old Street:

> "Make sure to save up all of your energy to do the 950 step climb to the top of Petra to see the Treasury! You will NOT regret it!!!!!!" (Waldi J)

> "The best part about the place is the view at the top of the mountain where the Old Street is located, where land meets the sea and sky...simply breath-taking" (B Wong)

For some tourists, the bird's eye view was enriched by a 'romantic gaze' that places value on solitude and privacy at the time of experience (Zare, 2019):

> "Another must, if you are able, is to...take the donkey trail down to view the Treasury from above. Beautiful and you will likely have the view all to yourself" (TrvlGal83)

As established earlier, enchantment also works better when tourists are able to let their eyes roam free without hindrances like crowds and time stress. Thus, there seem to be similarities in the drivers of real-real and magically real experiences. This might partly explain why Lovell and Bull (2017) propose that tourists frequently switch between these and other experiential states.

In summary, tourists whose on-site experiences logically begin with 'being there' can arrive back in physical reality sooner than they might expect when their sudden appreciation for the historical-cultural heritage of the site trumps being immersed in narrative worlds. The rabbit hole thus takes on another dimension, leading to and then from magically real to real-real experiences.

### 4.3b Staged attractions

Tourists to the Hobbiton also reported exceeded expectations, not in terms of history but more with regard to the overall satisfaction with the tour. Among the aspects mentioned were tour guide performance, especially traits like knowledgeability, attentiveness, humour, and conviviality, as well as amenities, the set condition, and complementary ale at the Green Dragon pub. For instance:

> "This trip was incredible!!! Exceeded all expectations, our guide Sonny was brilliant and so knowledgeable and he was so passionate about his job" (Shell)

The above and similar statements reinforce Buchmann (2010) in that Hobbiton tourists seem to greatly value sincerity in the relationship with guides, sometimes more so than finding the exact spot where so-and-so did this and that. In other words, connecting to imaginary worlds is not always the non-plus-ultra even for fans and tourists visiting staged attractions. Instead, they might prefer to geek out with nerdy tour guides whose contagious energy facilitates re-enchantment rather than just enchantment of the world.

To conclude both sections, tourists who fall down the rabbit hole can return enriched in a variety of ways. Some may translate their experiences into fairytale authentications that infuse a site with marvellous qualities, while others momentarily deep dive into their fantasy selves only to see 'real' aspects of heritage with fresh eyes, or develop a greater appreciation for the people who labour to make their trip memorable. Precisely this makes the rabbit hole a source of enduring fascination: you never know just where it might take you to.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper started out with the seemingly simple idea of falling down the rabbit hole within the context of media tourism. The reason for embarking on a cross-comparative study of mediatised sites that can function as portals toward imaginary worlds was twofold: firstly, to establish whether and to what extent already existing concepts developed on the topic of *Harry Potter* tourism also apply to the experience of tourists visiting attractions that likewise contain this kind of portal-quest fantasy story. Using genre classification as a springboard, I aimed to present a theoretically informed way of systematically advancing the field of media tourism and help remove its predominant focus on individual case studies. Secondly, I hoped to bring nuance into the discussion by comparing and contrasting three locations – Jiufen Old Street, Al-Khazneh, and the Hobbiton – that not only vary in their degrees of officialness and staged-ness, but also widen the Western focus that currently dominates research in this area. Future studies are encouraged to examine sites connected to other types of fantasy, such as Vasquez Rocks (immersive fantasy) and Snæfellsjökull volcano (liminal fantasy), as this might lead to a better understanding of the relation between fantasy genre categories and tourists' imaginative experiences.

Methodologically, I obtained a purposeful random sample of 300 TripAdvisor reviews about my three case studies using a randomization algorithm. A thematic template approach was adopted to analyse these reviews deductively by means of a priori themes adapted from

Lovell (2019), and inductively in a grounded theory-inspired interpretivist manner. The main initial theme was 'magical reality', described by Lovell (2019) as an in-between state of mind reminiscent of that experienced during portal transitions when passengers leave behind the 'real' world to enter Other worlds where the supernatural is real. Whenever possible, I made connections between magical reality and sentences or phrases used by tourists, for example, by grouping them under sub-themes like 'magi-heritage transportation', that is, the capacity of heritage environments to enchant. Where accounts did not readily fit the initial template, I inserted new themes until a final template was established. While template analysis comes with the benefit of developing theoretical concerns derived from stated research objectives, this method also has a notable limitation further complicated by the nature of my source of data, namely: a loss of in-depth understanding with regard to individual cases. Future studies should therefore add a socio-cultural, phenomenological perspective to this study by veering toward experimental set-ups and follow-up interviews.

The analysis found support for Lovell (2019), suggesting that tourists visiting different destinations associated with portal-quest fantasies have magically real experiences. As such, Mendlesohn's (2014) classification of the fantasy genre appears to present an apt framework for conducting case-transcending research in media tourism. Notably, my study expands the concept of magi-heritage transformation by showing that not only cultural-historical but also natural and cinematographic heritage elements can send tourists down the rabbit hole. Most importantly, I uncovered a recurring dynamic of (re-)enchantment that tourists described in their accounts of experience with all three sites. This dynamic is practically relevant for both tourists and tourism providers because it recognises offshoots of magical reality, pointing to some of the reasons that drive experiences of disenchantment. For example, tourists should engineer out peak periods where crowds and marketeers create a busy atmosphere that can be detrimental to discovery and immersion. Moreover, tourism providers should ensure that their pace and general conduct chimes with that of tourists so as to avoid causing feelings of being under time stress or agency-less. Essentially, both tourists and tourism providers must create the right conditions for 'being there' in an embodied, unrestricted, relaxed way, since the rabbit hole actually is less serendipitous than planned.

Besides aiding the cause of 'magical-placemaking' (Lovell, 2019), my paper highlights the power of stories in facilitating peak experiences of different sorts. For some tourists who perceived the site as surpassing anything they would have imagined possible, the temporary

immersion into marvellous realities was accompanied by a re-enchantment of the world that took shape around awe for historic architecture and fun learning processes encapsulated by the notion of edutainment. Thus, the rabbit hole that mediatised locations offer tourists can enrich their experiences not just in imaginative but also in very 'real' ways, making them look at the world in a different, more brightly illuminated light.

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# 7. Appendices

## A. Initial template

1. **Alternative travel motivations**

   1. Interest in film production processes

   2. Interest in history, architecture, (food) culture, and nature

2. **Perceived congruence: Magically real experiences**

   2.1 Magi-heritage transportation

       2.1a Historical and cultural heritage

       2.1b Natural heritage

       2.1c Staged-authentic cinematic heritage

           2.1c1 Audience complicity

   2.2 Narrative predispositions

       2.2a as stimulators of magical reality

3. **Perceived incongruence: Non-magically real experiences**

   3.1 Unmet expectations

       3.1a Perceptions of packed-ness and pace

       3.1b Barriers to participation

       3.1c External perceived realism

       3.1d Touristification

       3.1e The remedy: Proper preparation

           3.1e1 Suitable clothing

           3.1e2 Time of visit

   3.2 Exceeded expectations

       3.2a Overall tour satisfaction

           3.2a1 Tour guide performance

           3.2a2 Amount and quality of detail

       3.2b Feelings of awe

           3.2b1 Bird's eye view

           3.2b2 Natural beauty

           3.2b3 Historical nostalgia

B. Final template

1. **Alternative travel motivations**

   1. Educational-appreciative experiences

   2. Heritage experiences

2. **Perceived congruence: Magically real experiences**

   2.1 Magi-heritage transportation

       2.1a Historical and cultural heritage

       2.1b Natural heritage

       2.1c Staged-authentic cinematic heritage

   2.2 Narrative predispositions

       2.2a as stimulators of magical reality

       2.2b as safeguards of magical reality

   2.3 Deviations

       2.3a General exceptions

       2.3b Unauthorized sites

           2.3b1 Belief

           2.3b2 Uncertainty

3. **Perceived incongruence: Non-magically real experiences**

   3.1 Unmet expectations

       3.1a Un-/authorized attractions: Disappointments and disbelief

           3.1a1 Perceptions of packed-ness and pace

           3.1a2 External perceived realism

               3.1a2a Barriers to participation

               3.1a2b Touristification

               3.1a2c Physical appearance (buildings, spaces, landscape)

       3.1c The possible remedy: Proper preparation

           3.1c1 Informed choices

   3.2 Exceeded expectations

       3.2a Un-/authorized attractions: Awe and edutainment

           3.2a1 Non-staged

               3.2a1a Natural beauty

               3.2a1b Historical nostalgia

3.2a1c Bird's eye view

3.2a2 Staged

3.2a2a Overall tour satisfaction