



## BEYOND THE SOUVENIR: THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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**Abstract.** Tourist destinations often cater to visitors through stereotypical experiences and mass-produced souvenirs. This article explores the potential of theatre to transcend these limitations and offer a more profound engagement with a destination's culture. The article will analyze different approaches to tourist-oriented theatre and their effectiveness in achieving these goals.

**Key words:** tourist-oriented theaters, performance, satisfaction, experience

For many, the quintessential tourist experience revolves around snapping photos at landmarks, filling their bags with trinkets, and ticking destinations off a bucket list. While these activities can be enjoyable, they often leave a surface-level impression. This article delves into the transformative potential of theatre to offer visitors a richer, more meaningful engagement with the cultural heart of a destination. Theatre transcends the realm of the souvenir. It breathes life into a location's history, traditions, and social fabric. Imagine stepping out of a museum and into a live performance that retells the captivating narrative behind those dusty exhibits. Imagine witnessing local stories unfold on stage, forging a connection with the soul of a place through shared laughter, tears, and understanding. This is the power of tourist-oriented theatres.

Here is a sample country with well-developed tourist-oriented theater scenes: Chinese tourist-oriented theaters are a unique blend of traditional performance arts and modern entertainment, catering to both domestic and international tourists. These theaters offer a glimpse into Chinese culture, history, and folklore through captivating shows that often incorporate acrobatics, dance, music, and drama. The tourist-oriented performance is one of the most important products in tourism destinations in China. It plays a positive role in the tourism industry and urban development in the destinations. First of all, theater products in the tourism destination enhance the city's image and promote its popularity. As one of the tourism resources, tourists-oriented theaters increase the attractiveness of tourism products, and then promote to build up the city branding. In the aspect of economic benefits, theater performances are beneficial to increase the revenue of travel agencies and tourist attractions. In the meanwhile, they are the catalyst of broadening employment channels for local residents and spurring the development of related industries, such as catering and hospitality industry in the local area. For example, most tourist attractions in China gain revenues from entrance tickets. The tourism industrial structure is simple and industrial chain is relatively short.

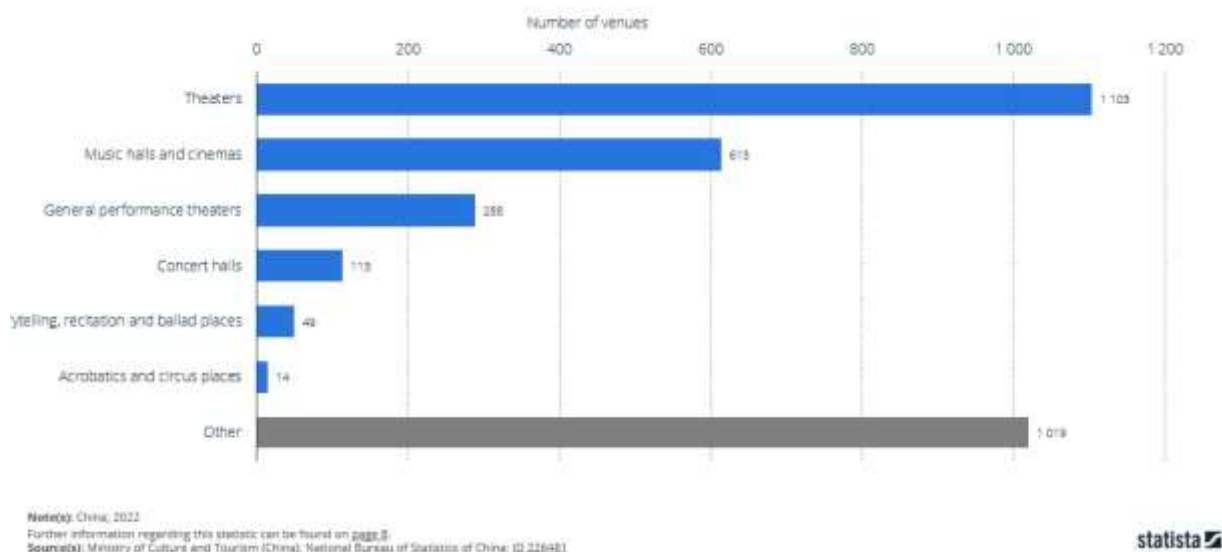


Zhuge and Cui (2005) divided the performances by the type of the city where the performing arts venue is located in. The first type of the city is mega cities such as Beijing and Shanghai where there are numerous tourists. The performing arts market in those cities is more aiming at international inbound market. The performing arts venues established close business relationships with travel agencies. Their targeted market is primarily in connection with overseas visitors.

The second type is small cities with distinguishing features where the major of the tourists are domestic groups organized by travel agencies. Their entertainment activities at night are less selective. Thus, tourist-oriented theaters are more likely to be successful as long as their products are unique and well-known.

The last type is big cities without unique culture and arts. The tourist-oriented theaters are difficult to succeed in this type of cities due to the great number of consumption choices at night and insufficient number of international inbound tourists.

The success of tourist-oriented theaters depends on the marketing of performances which is a co-work by theater promoters and travel agencies. Travel agencies play a very important role in increasing the number of audiences for tourist-oriented performances, because many tourists are encouraged to consume in a tourist-oriented theater by tour guides.



**Figure 1. Number of cultural performance venues in China, by type.**  
**Resource:** <https://www.statista.com/statistics/226481/number-of-cultural-performance-venues-in-china-by-type/>

The cultural sources of tourist-oriented performances are the Chinese national culture, world traditional culture, popular culture and mixed ones. In respect of the cultural values presented by the performances, there are aesthetic values, traditional cultural values and modern cultural values.



In conclusion, tourist-oriented theaters have the potential to redefine tourism. They can transform it from a superficial pursuit of souvenirs and selfies into a journey of cultural discovery and meaningful connection. As audiences leave the theater, they carry with them not just a program, but a deeper appreciation for the place they've visited and the people who call it home. The stage becomes a catalyst for forging lasting memories and fostering a more enriching travel experience.

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