

CIN - Cultural Integrity Network

Mitigation of Cultural Commodification Risk

1. Problem Overview

Craft Voyage is operating in Vietnam, where cultural commodification is predicted as a future issue. Cultural commodification has diluted the true essence of local heritage:

In Northern Vietnam, the **commodification** of cultural practices is particularly evident in the case of the Hmong minority in Cat Cat Village, near Sapa. Traditional elements, such as performances and crafts, have been transformed into tourist attractions, often losing their authenticity. For instance, the **qeej**, a traditional Hmong instrument, is now used merely as a decoration, and cultural performances are reduced to shallow displays that cater to tourist expectations rather than preserving cultural depth. Similarly, in the Cham community of southern Vietnam, sacred practices are being commodified for tourism. The Cham Rija Nâgar ceremonies, traditionally sacred events, are performed inappropriately by unauthorised individuals, polluting the cultural and spiritual significance of the ceremonies. These cases highlight a broader trend of cultural commodification driven by economic interests, risking the erosion of genuine cultural heritage in favour of tourism development, as seen in both northern and southern Vietnam.

If this happens to Craft Voyage, who will be under impacts:

Cultural commodification presents several risks to **Craft Voyage** and its associated stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and tourists. The impacts on each of these groups are interrelated and can significantly affect the overall sustainability and success of the business.

Local Communities: For the communities that Craft Voyage works with, such as the Hmong and Cham, commodification can lead to a dilution of their cultural heritage. As traditional practices are altered to cater to tourist expectations, locals may lose control over how their culture is represented. This can cause a sense of disempowerment and alienation, as their traditions become more about entertainment than meaningful cultural expression. If local communities feel that their culture is being exploited, their willingness to participate in tourism ventures could decline, jeopardising the collaboration that is crucial

for Craft Voyage's operations. Additionally, the degradation of cultural authenticity can weaken the community's identity and spiritual connections, leading to long-term social impacts.

Local Artisans: For local artisans who rely on the sale of authentic, handmade products, cultural commodification can have devastating effects. As mass-produced and inauthentic souvenirs flood the market, artisans may struggle to compete, losing their traditional customer base. This not only impacts their livelihood but also threatens the preservation of craft-making traditions passed down through generations. The fair trade principles promoted by Craft Voyage could be undermined as genuine artisans face increasing difficulty in maintaining their economic viability against cheaper, commodified products.

Local Businesses: Local small businesses, especially those that partner with Craft Voyage, also face the threat of being overshadowed by larger, less culturally sensitive operators who capitalise on commodified versions of cultural experiences. These businesses may become marginalised as mass tourism favours operators that offer more commercialised, entertainment-driven versions of cultural tours. This commodification could damage the trust and cooperation between Craft Voyage and local enterprises, potentially leading to the breakdown of long-term partnerships and the weakening of community-based business networks that Craft Voyage strives to build and support.

Craft Voyage's Reputation: From a business perspective, commodification threatens the core of Craft Voyage's brand promise: offering **authentic cultural experiences**. If tourists perceive that the experiences are superficial or staged, it could lead to negative reviews and a loss of trust in the brand. Craft Voyage markets itself as a company that preserves cultural integrity, and any association with commodified practices could result in reputational damage. This, in turn, could reduce tourist interest and affect future bookings, undermining the company's growth potential.

Tourists: Tourists themselves are seeking meaningful, immersive cultural experiences. However, when cultural practices are commodified, tourists may feel that the experiences are artificial or inauthentic, leading to disappointment. This reduces the emotional and educational impact of the tour, which is a key selling point for Craft Voyage. Disenchanted tourists may be less likely to recommend the experience to others, reducing word-of-mouth marketing and returning customers. Furthermore, if tourists feel misled, it could harm Craft Voyage's reputation as a business that offers unique, culturally respectful experiences.

Tourism Sector and Long-term Viability: Commodification also risks the long-term viability of cultural tourism as a sustainable economic strategy. If cultural practices are stripped of their depth and meaning, the very uniqueness that attracts tourists will fade. Over time, this could lead to a decline in demand for cultural tours, reducing the sector's contribution to the local economy. Craft Voyage, which relies on the enduring appeal of authentic cultural tourism, would face significant challenges in maintaining its market position if this trend continues unchecked.

2. Solution description: “Cultural Integrity Network”

To address the challenges of cultural commodification and promote sustainable cultural tourism in Quang Binh Vietnam, Craft Voyage will establish the **Cultural Integrity Network (CIN)**. This comprehensive approach brings together stakeholders across government, education, and tourism sectors to create a model that preserves cultural integrity while empowering local communities.

Key Components of the Solution:

a) Educational Network: The CIN will collaborate with key stakeholders to promote cultural education and preserve authenticity.

- **Tour Guide Training:** Equipping Guides with Cultural Sensitivity and Knowledge

Comprehensive Cultural Training:

Action: Implement a mandatory training program to ensure tour guides have deep knowledge of local customs, traditions, and histories. This will help prevent misinformation and promote respectful storytelling during tours.

Cultural Sensitivity Workshops:

Policy: Align with Vietnam’s Law on Tourism, which emphasises that service providers meet cultural representation standards. Workshops will train guides on handling cultural matters delicately and engaging with communities respectfully, fostering authenticity in every tour.

- **Tourism Departments:**

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT):

Action: Align tourism practices with **cultural preservation goals** by promoting tours that maintain the authenticity of cultural experiences.

Policy: In Vietnam, VNAT’s sustainable tourism programs emphasise supporting local communities and preserving cultural heritage in their marketing efforts (The AREA).

- **Local Artisans and Artists Community:**

Action: Engage local artisans in the design and delivery of tours to ensure **accurate cultural representations and** community involvement. The network will ensure that local artisans benefit directly from these efforts, preserving their livelihoods and traditions.

b) Domestic Tourism Promotion: To enhance awareness and engagement from local communities, the CIN will develop targeted strategies to promote cultural heritage domestically.

- **Tourism Promotion Authorities:**

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT):

Action: Develop **marketing campaigns** aligned with government promotions to position Craft Voyage tours as qualified, authentic cultural experiences. We will collaborate with the government to gain recognition under domestic tourism campaigns such as VNAT's "**Vietnam Timeless Charm**".

Policy: Both governments already have policies in place to encourage domestic tourism. These campaigns offer an opportunity to promote cultural tourism to local audiences by providing incentives like discounts and packages.

c) Quality Assurance Measures: Maintaining the quality and authenticity of the experiences is essential for CIN.

- **Screening and Onboarding:**

Action: Implement a **rigorous screening process** for all partner businesses to ensure that they align with Craft Voyage's cultural preservation goals.

Policy: Vietnam's tourism guidelines under the **Law on Tourism** emphasise that businesses must meet specific standards of cultural representation to receive certification.

- **Cultural Preservation Guidelines:**

Action: CIN will establish a set of "**cultural preservation guidelines**" for all network members. These guidelines will dictate how cultural practices are presented, ensuring that they remain respectful and accurate to their origins.

d) Balanced Experience Design: Craft Voyage will carefully design its tours to offer a balance between traditional and modern experiences.

- **Immersive Cultural Tours:**

Action: Create tour packages that provide an **immersive cultural experience**, blending traditional practices with modern aspects of Vietnam. This will ensure a broader appeal while maintaining the authenticity of the experience.

Policy: In Vietnam, VNAT's **Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2030** encourages combining cultural and modern elements to attract a diverse audience.

e) Community Benefit Programs: Craft Voyage will implement economic models that ensure local communities directly benefit from tourism revenues.

- **Profit-Sharing Model:**

Action: Develop **profit-sharing models** to ensure that a significant portion of tourism revenue goes directly to local communities. These models will also support local artisans through **fair trade practices** and **skills development programs**.

Policy: Vietnam has policies aimed at promoting economic empowerment of local communities. In Vietnam, **VNAT's** community-based tourism initiatives focus on ensuring that local people benefit from tourism through training and profit-sharing agreements.

f) Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam):

Action: Partner with schools, universities, and cultural institutions to integrate **cultural education** into curriculums. These programs will focus on the significance of local artisanship, traditional practices, and the broader cultural heritage of the regions.

Policy: In Vietnam, the **Ministry of Education** runs programs to include local history and culture in school curriculums to foster national pride.

3. Supporting data

- Observational data from iAccelerate Australia shows that using VR for educational and marketing purposes has been very effective in attracting new customers and retaining old residents. Studies have shown that **80% of global travellers** seek authentic cultural experiences, but commodified tours, which only scratch the surface of Indigenous traditions, are failing to meet this demand (*Tourism Research Australia*, 2023).

- With the global VR market expected to reach **\$22 billion** by 2025, tourism is set to benefit significantly. In fact, **68%** of global travellers are interested in using VR to preview destinations. Incorporating this technology positions Craft Voyage at the forefront of a growing trend, attracting tech-savvy tourists and enhancing user interaction. This VR model aligns with Australia's focus on tourism innovation. A 2023 report by Tourism Australia found that **70%** of Australian travellers are more likely to book a tour if they can interact with it online, and **45%** are interested in VR tours. By

adopting similar technology, Australian tourism can make its offerings more immersive and engaging for global audiences. Craft Voyage's VR tours will appeal to Australian travellers, helping them connect with Vietnam's rich cultural heritage before arriving, while also setting a precedent for Australian operators to incorporate VR into their own offerings.

- We ensure the **authenticity** of the tours by working closely with **local artists and artisans**. For example, in a survey conducted by **Destination BC**, **87%** of tourists who participated in Indigenous-led tours reported feeling a deeper connection to the local culture compared to non-Indigenous-led alternatives. Additionally, the **Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)** has reported that visitor satisfaction rates for Indigenous experiences are **30%** higher on average compared to mainstream tourism offerings (Jennings 2017; Destination BC 2024). In **New Zealand**, **Māori** cultural tours attract around **55%** of all international visitors, with tourists indicating a high level of satisfaction due to the **authentic**, interactive nature of the experiences. The New Zealand government also supports these tours by encouraging Indigenous people to lead the tours themselves.

The data collected above demonstrates that cultural tourism involving local communities not only preserves traditions but also results in significantly higher tourist engagement and satisfaction.

4. Results and outcomes

The **Cultural Integrity Network (CIN)** is designed to mitigate the risk of cultural commodification for Craft Voyage, ensuring that the business does not fall into the trap of diluting the authenticity of the cultural experiences it promotes. As Craft Voyage seeks to offer immersive and culturally rich tours of Vietnam's craft villages, the commodification of these traditions presents a significant challenge. Without proper measures, there is a risk that cultural practices could be commercialised and altered to cater solely to tourist expectations, which would undermine the company's mission to preserve and promote authentic cultural heritage. The CIN initiative ensures that this risk is addressed from the outset, providing a framework for the sustainable development of cultural tourism.

One of the ways the CIN mitigates this risk is by establishing clear **cultural preservation guidelines** that all partner businesses must follow. These guidelines will dictate how cultural traditions are presented, ensuring that they are not modified or simplified for commercial purposes. Through a rigorous screening and onboarding process, Craft Voyage will ensure that only partners committed to preserving cultural integrity are included in the network. This will protect the business from being associated with inauthentic or commodified experiences that could damage its reputation and brand.

Furthermore, by involving local artisans and communities directly in the design and delivery of tours, the CIN empowers these communities to take ownership of how their cultural practices are shared with

tourists. This direct involvement ensures that the presentations of these traditions remain true to their origins, while also providing economic benefits to the communities involved. By integrating fair trade practices and profit-sharing models, the CIN not only protects the cultural integrity of the tours but also creates sustainable income streams for local artisans, further reducing the risk of commodification.

The **educational network** component of the CIN also plays a crucial role in mitigating commodification. By educating both tourists and local communities about the importance of cultural preservation, Craft Voyage ensures that there is a shared understanding of the value of these traditions. This educational focus prevents the erosion of cultural significance, as tourists are more likely to appreciate and respect the depth of the traditions they encounter, rather than expecting superficial or "entertainment-only" experiences. This alignment of expectations is key to maintaining cultural integrity and preventing commodification.

Ultimately, the **CIN initiative** acts as a safeguard for Craft Voyage, allowing the business to expand while maintaining its commitment to cultural preservation. By focusing on authenticity, quality control, and community involvement, the CIN ensures that Craft Voyage can scale without compromising the very traditions it seeks to promote. This approach not only mitigates the risk of commodification but also positions the company as a leader in sustainable cultural tourism, setting a standard for how tourism can respect and preserve cultural heritage while delivering meaningful experiences.

5. Challenges we may encounter

Challenge	Solution
Stakeholder Alignment	Establish clear objectives and communication channels to ensure that all stakeholders understand the importance of both economic and cultural goals. Building consensus may require time and effort, but it is crucial for success.
Funding and Resource Allocation	Advocate for long-term government funding by highlighting the economic and social benefits of cultural tourism. Seek external funding from NGOs, international organisations, or private sponsors to complement government contributions.
Bureaucratic Delays	Build strong relationships with key government contacts, ensuring clear communication of project urgency. A well-organised project plan can help reduce delays caused by bureaucratic inefficiencies.
Ensuring Authentic Representation	Implement a rigorous screening and onboarding process for partners, ensuring commitment to cultural authenticity. Regular audits and community feedback mechanisms can help maintain integrity.

Resistance from Local Communities	Engage local communities as equal partners from the start. Encourage active participation in decision-making and ensure that economic benefits flow back to the community. Transparency and respect are key to overcoming resistance.
Cultural Sensitivity and Misrepresentation	Collaborate closely with cultural practitioners and community leaders to design educational content and tour packages. Regular training for tourism staff helps prevent cultural misrepresentation.
Scalability and Quality Control	Develop and implement strict quality assurance measures, including periodic reviews, customer feedback, and audits. Set clear cultural preservation guidelines that all partners must follow.
Conflicting Tourism and Cultural Policies	Advocate for sustainable tourism policies that balance economic development with cultural preservation. Work with environmental and cultural advocacy groups to pressure governments to adopt sensitive tourism practices.
Managing Tourist Expectations	Educate tourists on the value of authentic cultural experiences through pre-tour briefings and VR content. Early management of expectations ensures tourists appreciate the deeper significance of the culture they encounter.

6. Scalability and future potential: a solution for Australian tourism

To ensure a sustainable and effective scaling strategy for Craft Voyage's **Cultural Integrity Network (CIN)**, the expansion must be gradual, aligning with the unique cultural and business environments in Vietnam first, before making the leap to Australia. Here is a proposed 10-year phased approach that takes into account the specific characteristics of Vietnamese tourism and the eventual adaptation to the Australian context.

Years 1 to 3: Expanding within Quang Binh

In the initial three years, Craft Voyage's primary focus will be on expanding the CIN within Quang Binh province. This region holds significant potential for cultural tourism, given its mix of historic sites, traditional craft villages, and local artisan communities. The strategy will involve:

- **Strengthening local partnerships:** CIN will continue to engage local artisans, traditional performers, and businesses to solidify their role in cultural preservation.
- **Building a strong educational network:** Partnerships with local schools and cultural institutions in Quang Binh will expand, allowing for greater involvement in community-led tourism

development. Educating local stakeholders about the risks of commodification will remain central to this phase.

- **Training and onboarding new partners:** Rigorous onboarding processes for new tourism providers and artisans will be implemented to ensure cultural authenticity. All new partners will be required to adhere to the cultural preservation guidelines developed by CIN.
- **VR and digital innovation:** The successful integration of VR technology will continue, allowing Quang Binh's unique cultural heritage to be promoted in Vietnam's domestic market and abroad.

Years 3 to 5: Expanding to Central Vietnam

As the model is refined and CIN is well-established in Quang Binh, Craft Voyage will expand its operations to other provinces in **Central Vietnam**. These provinces share similar cultural richness, such as the historical significance of Hue and the craft traditions in Quang Nam (home to Hoi An).

- **Engaging new stakeholders:** New partnerships will be forged with provincial tourism authorities and artisans across Central Vietnam, bringing more cultural sites and traditional crafts into the CIN model.
- **Creating region-wide campaigns:** Marketing strategies, coordinated with Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), will focus on promoting Craft Voyage's tours as the premier choice for authentic cultural tourism across Central Vietnam. These campaigns will aim to attract both domestic and international tourists by leveraging VNAT's existing sustainable tourism initiatives.
- **Enhanced community benefit programs:** The **profit-sharing model** will be further refined to ensure that local communities and artisans in Central Vietnam are directly benefiting from the tourism revenue, fostering greater local involvement and long-term commitment to preserving their cultural heritage.

Years 5 to 10: Scaling Nationally

By year 5, Craft Voyage will have sufficient experience and credibility to expand the CIN across **Vietnam's national landscape**, incorporating regions in Northern and Southern Vietnam, each with their own unique cultural identities and traditions.

- **Customising programs regionally:** As CIN expands nationally, Craft Voyage will adapt its cultural preservation guidelines and training programs to fit the distinct cultural practices of each region. This will ensure that the diversity of Vietnam's cultural heritage is respected and authentically represented.
- **National partnerships and policy alignment:** Craft Voyage will work closely with VNAT and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism to align the CIN with national tourism policies,

ensuring that the program is recognised as a benchmark for sustainable, community-based cultural tourism.

- **Expanding VR experiences:** The use of VR for pre-tour education will be scaled across all new locations, providing tourists with the opportunity to engage with Vietnam's rich cultural history before their physical visits.

Australia current situation:

Cultural commodification in Australian tourism often results in the superficial presentation of Indigenous culture. Examples include "quickie" Didgeridoo lessons and inauthentic "Dreamtime" storytelling, which simplify complex traditions. These activities, usually led by non-Indigenous guides, misrepresent and trivialise deep-rooted practices. Commodification also extends to mass-produced "Aboriginal" souvenirs and homogenised cultural shows that ignore the diversity of Indigenous cultures. Sacred sites like Uluru and rock art have been exploited for tourism, often without proper cultural context or protection. Even significant ceremonies, like Welcome to Country, are sometimes misused as token gestures. These issues stem from prioritising entertainment over cultural education, misrepresentation, and economic exploitation of Indigenous communities. Addressing these problems requires authentic Indigenous involvement, proper cultural education, and ensuring economic benefits return to the communities.

Years 10 and Beyond: Expanding to Australia

By year 10, Craft Voyage will be ready to introduce the **Cultural Integrity Network (CIN)** to Australia, focusing on preserving and promoting Indigenous Australian cultures. After refining the CIN in Vietnam, Craft Voyage will adapt its insights on cultural preservation, community engagement, and tourism innovation to the Australian context, ensuring a respectful and sustainable approach to Indigenous tourism.

Adapting the CIN to Indigenous Australian Cultures: Craft Voyage will collaborate closely with the **Department of Indigenous Affairs**, tailoring the CIN model to respect the sacred traditions and practices of Australia's Indigenous communities. Cultural preservation guidelines from Vietnam will be adapted to meet the specific needs of Indigenous Australian groups. Key to this approach will be involving Indigenous elders and communities directly in decision-making, ensuring that their cultural practices are authentically represented and protected from commodification.

Partnership with Australian Tourism Authorities: Working with **Tourism Australia** and state-level bodies, Craft Voyage will promote Indigenous-led tourism experiences that align with Australia's **Tourism 2020 Strategy**, which emphasises the importance of authentic cultural experiences. CIN will collaborate on campaigns that highlight the value of Indigenous culture, ensuring that VR technology, already used in Vietnam, is adapted to showcase Indigenous Australian cultures in ways that educate and protect against cultural exploitation.

Regional Expansion: Initially, CIN will focus on regions with established Indigenous tourism markets, such as the **Northern Territory** and **Queensland**, before expanding nationally. The gradual expansion will ensure that

Indigenous communities remain active participants and direct beneficiaries, with Craft Voyage focusing on building trust and long-term relationships with local tourism operators and cultural leaders. This will help safeguard cultural integrity while promoting responsible tourism growth.

Interaction with Governmental Bodies:

- The **Department of Education and Training** will play a key role by incorporating comprehensive Indigenous cultural education into school curriculums, expanding on Australia's existing **Indigenous Education Policy**. This initiative will foster a deeper understanding of cultural authenticity and the dangers of commodification among future generations, helping to mitigate risks in the tourism sector.
- The **Department of Tourism** will introduce stricter standards for Indigenous tourism providers, ensuring that cultural experiences are led by Indigenous peoples and reflect their true traditions. CIN will advocate for these regulations and collaborate with the department to monitor operators and issue certifications, preventing the exploitation of Indigenous cultures for entertainment.
- The **Department of Indigenous Affairs** will expand its **Indigenous Cultural Tourism Development Plan** to protect sacred sites and traditions from commodification. By offering financial support and training to Indigenous-owned businesses, the department can empower these communities to manage how their culture is shared with tourists, fostering economic growth while preserving cultural integrity.
- The **Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)** will promote CIN-certified Indigenous tourism businesses that meet high cultural preservation standards, focusing on attracting international tourists seeking authentic experiences. Austrade will also work with Craft Voyage to set a global benchmark for responsible tourism practices.
- The **Department of Environment and Heritage Protection** will protect Indigenous cultural sites by enforcing stricter guidelines under the **Australian Heritage Strategy**. By collaborating with Indigenous communities, the department will ensure that these sites are safeguarded from over-commercialisation, while tourism operators will be trained to respect both the environment and cultural traditions.

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