X-TOURISM REIMAGINED: SURVIVAL HORROR VIDEO GAMES AS NEW FRONTIERS OF RESPONSIBLE AND EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

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Abstract

This expanded paper explores the intersection of X-tourism and survival horror video games as immersive, ethical, and environmentally conscious travel experiences. Building upon the original 2010 framework by Tosi and Ochoa, we investigate how games like Resident Evil Village, Silent Hill, Dead Space, and Amnesia: The Dark Descent offer digitally mediated journeys that align with ecotourism, responsible tourism, and sustainability principles. Through a literature review, empirical findings, and a design framework, we analyze how horror settings engage players emotionally while encouraging reflection on environmental degradation, cultural trauma, and historical responsibility. We propose the TREES framework to guide game designers in crafting horror experiences that entertain, educate, and promote awareness. Survival horror games emerge as a powerful medium for a new paradigm of virtual tourism rooted in conscience, place, and learning.

Keywords: Digital Tourism, Ecotourism, Experiential Learning, Responsible Tourism, Survival Horror, Virtual Experience, X-tourism.

Introduction

In contemporary tourism, alternative forms of experience are emerging, often referred to as X tourism. These incorporate principles of ecotourism, responsible travel, and sustainability. At the same time, video games—especially survival horror games—have evolved into powerful narrative and immersive tools capable of transporting players to virtual worlds rich in environmental and cultural detail. This article explores the intersection between X-tourism and survival horror games, examining how these games can serve as digital and educational tourism experiences. In other words, we ask: "How can survival horror games offer players a virtual journey that promotes environmental and social reflection?"

The following sections will examine:

- Additional case studies beyond The Last of Us, Days Gone, and Alan Wake, including titles such as Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Dead Space, Amnesia, Saturnalia and others with settings and narratives aligned with X-tourism themes (nature, local culture, sustainability).
- A review of current literature on digital tourism mediated by video games, and the horror genre as a vehicle for socio-environmental reflection.

- Available empirical data on how players interpret horror games as forms of virtual tourism or educational experiences.
- A potential design framework for integrating X-tourism principles into the development of future survival horror games or virtual reality experiences.

Digital Tourism And Video Games: Toward Game Tourism

In the last decade, the idea of using media products to promote real-world tourism has become established through the phenomenon of film-induced tourism (cineturismo). However, a similar concept applied to video games—sometimes referred to as game-induced tourism or video game tourism—remains relatively underexplored.

Existing studies, however, suggest that video games can influence the perception and touristic appeal of real-world locations. A well-known case is Assassin's Creed II: a survey conducted in Monteriggioni revealed that 11.4% of tourists had discovered the Tuscan town through the game. This data confirms that video games can lead players to discover and desire to visit real-world places shown on-screen.

In the literature, three forms of video game tourism are typically identified:
- Game-induced tourism: similar to film tourism, where players are motivated to visit real locations portrayed virtually in the game.
- In-game tourism: the act of freely exploring virtual environments during gameplay, treating the game world itself as a digital travel experience.
- Around-the-game tourism: tourism driven by cultural phenomena surrounding games (e.g., cosplay conventions, fan meetups, expos).

For this study, in-game tourism is of particular interest. In survival horror titles, immersion in richly detailed virtual worlds allows players to explore fictional places often inspired by real geographic or cultural settings. During these digital explorations, the player temporarily adopts the role of a virtual tourist, navigating spaces filled with environmental and narrative history.

For example, a recent study by Bowman et al. (2023) showed that in historical video games, a strong sense of place not only boosts player engagement but also increases the intention to visit the corresponding real-world locations. This suggests that realism and environmental care in games can foster touristic curiosity. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2025) explored the "authenticity of virtual tourism" in an open-world fantasy setting, demonstrating that players seek coherence and credibility even in imaginary worlds to experience them as satisfying tourist destinations. It's also important to note that video game tourism doesn't only concern real locations but also fantasy settings that take

on a life of their own in the collective imagination. Gaming communities often speak of virtual tourism as the joy of aimlessly wandering through game worlds like a curious traveler. This phenomenon can even appear in survival horror: some players have described wanting a "tourism mode" in horror games, to explore eerie environments at their own pace—enjoying the atmosphere without the stress of enemies. The industry is beginning to notice this trend. For instance, Dungeons of Hinterberg (2024)—while not a horror game—is designed as an interactive vacation, complete with a day-night cycle encouraging exploration of an imaginary Alpine village. The developers emphasize that games can function as "digital vacations", offering players a sense of a temporary home and daily routine in a virtual place waiting to be discovered. This vacation-style approach to game design could also inspire the horror genre to balance moments of tension with spaces of contemplation, enriching the experience and making it more akin to a journey of discovery.

Horror As A Genre Of Socio-Environmental Reflection
While the primary goal of horror games is to elicit fear and tension, the horror genre has historically conveyed metaphors of societal and environmental anxieties. Horror cinema theory and gothic literature teach us that monsters and apocalypses often embody the collective fears of an era. For instance, the wave of zombie films and games has been interpreted as a metaphor for mass consumerism or unchecked catastrophes. As early as Dawn of the Dead (1978) by George Romero, zombies were depicted in a shopping mall as mindless consumers—an image that, in recent years, some have linked to climate change anxiety. In this sense, horror acts as a distorted mirror of our real fears: nuclear wars are projected onto giant monsters (Godzilla was born from the trauma of atomic bombs), pandemics turn into zombie apocalypses, environmental exploitation appears as nature strikes back.

In survival horror games, this metaphorical layer is equally present. Many titles combine horror with reflections on the fragility of civilization, especially in the face of nature, or the consequences of irresponsible human behavior. A prime example is The Last of Us (Naughty Dog, 2013), set twenty years after a fungal outbreak has devastated the world. The game depicts nature reclaiming urban ruins: cities like Boston and Pittsburgh are shown as picturesque ruins, with streets overrun by vegetation, crumbling buildings covered in vines, and wildlife roaming freely (in a memorable scene, giraffes graze among abandoned skyscrapers). This "lethal beauty" of post-apocalyptic nature is intentional. Developers created a world with no electricity, lit only by natural light, where "weeds thrive on once-busy roads" and "vegetation grows through cracked floors," offering the player glimpses of sublime decay. Narratively, The Last of Us is rich in ecological and moral themes: it serves as a (sci-fi) warning about the real fungus Cordyceps, which, aided by global warming, could theoretically

adapt to infect humans and it raises ethical dilemmas around individual sacrifice for collective good—a theme central to sustainability and intergenerational responsibility. A critical reading sees The Last of Us as a story "haunted by" a human-altered future: anthropogenic actions (environmental disasters, pandemics) are the ghost behind the game's portrayed anguish.

Likewise, horror frequently tackles social issues metaphorically. For example, the Silent Hill series (Konami, 1999–) uses its cursed, fog-shrouded town to explore guilt, abuse, and collective memory. Silent Hill, though fictional, is inspired by real places like Centralia, a ghost town in Pennsylvania abandoned due to a decades-long underground fire. Interestingly, Centralia has become a dark tourism destination, drawing curious visitors after being associated with Silent   Hill through films and media. This shows that horror-inspired imagination can stimulate real world reflection and even direct people toward haunting yet emblematic sites.

In Silent Hill, players wander through decaying urban spaces—abandoned hospitals, derelict amusement   parks—while confronting tangible representations of psychological trauma and social guilt. Horror here becomes a lens for processing difficult themes: domestic violence, religious fanaticism, the fragility of the human mind. These elements, while not directly ecological, align with the broader concept of responsible tourism: the game becomes an emotional journey into uncomfortable realities, encouraging the player to empathize with victims and confront distressing contexts—similar to what a mindful visitor might do at a memorial site.

Another compelling branch is sci-fi eco-horror, as exemplified by the Dead Space series (EA, 2008–2023). Set in space, the game's alien threat (the Necromorphs) veils a scathing critique of industrial exploitation and corporate greed. The narrative centers on the "planet-cracking" operations by mega-corporations like the Concordance Extraction Corporation, which literally break planets to extract resources. The result is a dystopia: "a giant hellscape of corporate avarice with Earth bled dry of all resources." The ecological and moral collapse is the backdrop for horror. The haunted spaceship USG Ishimura can be read as a karmic punishment for humanity's unrestrained pillaging of alien (and by analogy, Earth's) environments. The plot includes religious fanaticism via the Church of Unitology, unethical biogenetic technologies, all contributing to a critique of dehumanization via corporate exploitation. Dead Space and similar   titles contribute to a body of eco-horror, where fear arises from human-induced disruption of natural order, whether terrestrial or cosmic. Though set in fantastical worlds, they push players to reflect analogically on real-world issues like resource depletion, genetic engineering risks and unregulated technological progress.

Even historical horror titles like Amnesia: The Dark Descent (Frictional Games, 2010) address ethical and historical responsibility. The game places the player in a 19th-century Prussian castle, haunted by the protagonist Daniel's guilt over atrocities committed during a colonial expedition in Algeria. Though a gothic-survival horror, Amnesia tackles colonial plundering of artifacts (Daniel awakens a curse by stealing a relic) and scientific abuse (inhuman experiments to quell the curse). Daniel's descent into madness becomes a journey of atonement: through exploring the castle, the player uncovers the consequences of Daniel's irresponsible actions via documents and flashbacks.

As such, the game functions educationally, as a cautionary tale on historical and moral responsibility. The colonial past resurfaces as ghosts and monsters. From an X-tourism lens, Amnesia offers a richly detailed historical setting (architecture, furnishings, period tech) that, though terrifying, enables a kind of "time tourism"—akin to virtually visiting a historical site with awareness of past wrongs, aligning with the principles of responsible tourism and difficult heritage.

Notably, scholar Florence Smith Nicholls has proposed interpreting some horror game experiences set in real or realistic locations as forms of virtual dark tourism—raising historical awareness and social justice through digital horror. Her key example is The Town of Light (LKA, 2016), an exploratory adventure set in an abandoned psychiatric hospital in Tuscany. Based on real facts and patient testimonies, the game invites players to explore the site of suffering (Volterra asylum) while empathizing with its former victims. Though not a traditional survival horror, this case shows how educational and socially critical dimensions can be deeply tied to the virtual exploration of dark places.

In general, then, horror in video games reveals itself as a multifaceted genre: not only does it entertain with thrills and adrenaline, but it can also convey ethical, environmental, and cultural messages, involving the player in narratives with real-world resonance.

Case Studies – Horror Environments As Virtual Destinations
This section analyzes how certain well-known survival horror games present environments and storyworlds that align with the dimensions of X-tourism—namely, experiences resembling virtual journeys with an ecological, responsible, or sustainable outlook. In addition to the previously discussed titles (The Last of Us, Days Gone, and Alan Wake), we examine other representative games such as Resident Evil (with a focus on Resident Evil Village), Silent Hill, Dead Space, and Amnesia, highlighting the environmental-touristic elements and implicit messages of sustainability in each.

Case Study 1: The Last Of Us & Days Gone – The Allure Of Natural Apocalypse

We've already examined The Last of Us as a model of a post-apocalyptic world "reclaimed by nature." Similarly, Days Gone (Bend Studio, 2019) emphasizes landscapes shaped by the end of civilization. Set in a post-pandemic Pacific Northwest, Days Gone allows players to traverse Oregon by motorcycle, passing through ancient forests, mountains, and dilapidated settlements. Despite facing hordes of infected ("Freakers"), many players appreciated the game's open-world exploration, which includes peaceful moments immersed in the wild—watching deer in misty clearings or camping under starlit skies free of light pollution. This experience closely resembles virtual ecotourism: the game encourages discovery of iconic locations (waterfalls, caves, alpine lakes), herbal foraging, and mental snapshots of a lush, indifferent nature. The narrative also incorporates themes of community sustainability: survivor enclaves must hunt, farm, and live in balance with their environment to persist, punishing short-sighted exploitation. In essence, both The Last of Us and Days Gone turn the apocalypse into an introspective journey through nature, showing both its beauty and danger—making clear to the player that survival hinges on environmental respect and cooperation: foundational messages in responsible tourism.

Case Study 2: Alan Wake & Silent Hill – Dark Tourism Between Fiction And Reality

Alan Wake (Remedy Entertainment, 2010) is an unusual survival horror set in the fictional town of Bright Falls, Washington. Inspired by the aesthetics of the Pacific Northwest (fir forests, crystal lakes, misty mountains), the game creates an evocative setting that feels like a real mountain tourist destination. The protagonist, a writer seeking inspiration, initially explores Bright Falls as a tourist enjoying local traditions like a deer festival and a small-town diner—before being plunged into a supernatural narrative of darkness and madness. This contrast deepens the sense of mystery within the everyday, making Bright Falls an appealing destination because of (not despite) its eerie happenings. The gameplay resembles a tour of a literary place: fans often compare Bright Falls to David Lynch's Twin Peaks, and some express a desire to visit similar landscapes in American national parks. In X-tourism terms, Alan Wake emphasizes territorial appreciation—landscape, local folklore—within a horror narrative. Despite malevolent forces, Bright Falls is portrayed with authenticity and respect, suggesting that even fictional destinations can promote cultural tourism if portrayed with detailed traditions and settings— aligning with responsible tourism's emphasis on genuine engagement with local communities.

On the other hand, Silent Hill exemplifies how an imaginary place can become synonymous with occult tourism. The town, inspired by real ghost towns like Centralia, Pennsylvania, has spurred curiosity toward abandoned and

disaster-struck locations. Playing Silent Hill means walking fog covered, deserted streets and exploring ruined schools and hotels afflicted by unnatural calamities. This experience is similar to dark tourism, where travelers visit sites like Pripyat (Chernobyl) or Centralia to feel the eerie thrill of places frozen in time and marked by tragedy. Silent Hill stages an attraction of darkness: in the game, it draws tormented souls; in reality, the series attracts players seeking a virtual journey into the darkest corners of the human psyche and failed urbanism. The X-tourism lesson here is twofold. First, the game's realistic depiction of decaying infrastructure (hospitals, amusement parks) and environmental phenomena (fog from an underground fire) creates a believable virtual place that invites exploration. Second, its emotional and symbolic depth turns that exploration into a memorial pilgrimage, akin to visiting historical sites of suffering with awareness.

Thus, Silent Hill shows that even psychological horror can raise awareness—when it surfaces universal themes (guilt, redemption, trauma) connected to concrete or realistic places.

Case Study 3: Resident Evil – Cultural Heritage And Sustainability In The Face Of Bio-Disaster
The Resident Evil series (Capcom) is arguably the most well-known survival horror franchise and offers a wide range of settings—urban and rural, realistic and fantastical. In terms of X tourism, Resident Evil Village (Capcom, 2021), the eighth installment in the series, is especially noteworthy for its unique blend of horror and local cultural heritage appreciation. The developers have stated that they were inspired by Transylvanian landscapes and traditions in designing the game's fictional village and Lady Dimitrescu's castle. The village's snowy architecture, a wooden church adorned with sacred icons, and even character names (like "Mother Miranda") all explicitly reference Romanian folklore and identity. This level of detail had a real-world effect: Resident Evil Village contributed to forming a new tourist image of Transylvania among the global gaming audience. Even before the game's release, the Romanian references sparked fan curiosity, and afterward, many noted the similarities with real-world places. A standout example is Castle Dimitrescu, which is clearly modeled on the real Peleș Castle in the Carpathian Mountains. Local fans even created side-by-side comparisons of real castle photos and game screenshots, showing how faithfully Capcom borrowed from Peleș's architecture and interiors. Comparison between Dimitrescu Castle in Resident Evil Village and the real Peleș Castle in Romania. This faithful recreation of architectural and decorative elements demonstrates how the game integrates authentic cultural heritage into a horror setting. For players, exploring the in-game castle becomes a kind of virtual tourism: a gothic, terrifying version of visiting a Central European historical monument. Not surprisingly, researchers Vintilă and Merciu

(2024) suggest that the game stimulates players' motivation to learn about real places and traditions, effectively functioning as an interactive showcase for Transylvanian cultural identity. This represents a positive example of how survival horror can indirectly promote cultural and sustainable tourism: the game fosters interest in castles, local myths (e.g., vampire lore), and cuisine (local dishes and currencies are referenced), all without resorting to heavy stereotypes. Instead, these elements are subtly woven into the game's lore—think of mentions of palincă or other Easter eggs.

At the same time, Resident Evil consistently features a strong ethical critique of scientific and corporate irresponsibility—themes that align with broader ideas of responsible tourism and sustainability, albeit metaphorically. The disaster in Raccoon City (in the early games) is caused by the negligence of a pharmaceutical giant (Umbrella Corp.), which prioritizes profit over public safety, unleashing a deadly virus. This plotline reflects real fears—bioweapons, unethical experimentation—and implicitly conveys the message that unethical progress leads to community and environmental ruin. In gameplay terms, players explore contaminated zones (secret labs, polluted sewers, evacuated neighborhoods) almost like investigative tourists, witnessing the consequences of human greed. One could say that Resident Evil offers a form of "virtual catastrophe tourism", not unlike real-life visits to ecological or industrial disaster sites (e.g., Bhopal, Chernobyl), with the moral aim of learning from these tragedies. In sustainability terms, the series highlights the need for responsibility toward nature (pathogens often stem from animal species, showing broken human-nature balance) and responsibility toward the future (the reckless actions of a few impact the many).

So, while most players enjoy Resident Evil for its adrenaline and puzzles, they also—often unconsciously—receive a kind of "civic education": a warning to distrust unsustainable practices, value scientific transparency, and recognize the role of institutions in managing biological emergencies.

Case Study 4: Other Examples And Emerging Trends

Beyond the titles already discussed, there are several recent or upcoming survival horror games that actively explore the dimensions of X-tourism. For instance:

- Fatal Frame and other Japanese horror games often transport players to ancient villages or traditional mansions steeped in local folklore. In these cases, horror becomes a vehicle for discovering customs, rituals, and legends—often inspired by Shintoism and Buddhism—thus promoting a form of virtual cultural tourism into Japan's rural past.
- S.T.A.L.K.E.R. and Chernobylite immerse players in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, faithfully recreating the real contaminated landscapes of

northern Ukraine. These games offer experiences similar to virtual tours of Chernobyl, blending documentary-style realism (accurate representations of Pripyat and the reactor) with horror fiction (mutant creatures, paranormal phenomena). They carry strong anti-nuclear messages and reflect on the long-term consequences of environmental disasters.

- Even VR titles like Resident Evil 7 VR or Phasmophobia VR are beginning to be used in museum and educational settings. These experiences allow people to feel intense emotions in simulated dangerous environments—much like controlled training exercises or visits to hazardous real-life locations. In VR, however, learning occurs without real risk.

- Saturnalia (2022) by Santa Ragione is a survival-horror adventure that exemplifies how a video game can serve as a form of virtual tourism through horror. It is deeply rooted in Sardinian folklore and cultural heritage: the game's narrative and art draw extensively from local traditions, architecture, and music. The fictional village of Gravoi – modeled after real Sardinian towns – is painstakingly realized through on-site research and even collaboration with the Sardegna Film Commission, ensuring an authentic sense of place. The gameplay encourages exploration akin to tourism, as players guide four characters through Gravoi's maze-like streets (which reconfigure with each playthrough) to uncover landmarks, clues, and stories at their own pace. This structure not only sustains tension but also evokes dark tourism: the plot unfolds during a winter solstice festival and an ancient ritual gone awry, inviting players to investigate a community's macabre secrets much like travelers drawn to morbid heritage sites. By integrating educational cultural content with horror and working alongside local heritage stakeholders, Saturnalia demonstrates a model of sustainable cultural engagement in gaming. It highlights how horror games can double as responsible, immersive virtual tourism experiences— allowing players to engage with a region's dark past and folklore in a meaningful yet low-impact way .

This trend suggests a narrowing gap between horror gaming and experiential learning. For example, a well-designed horror game could simulate the effects of climate change—imagine a survival horror set in a city submerged by rising seas—to educate players emotionally and cognitively.

Empirical Data On The Tourist Experience In Horror Games
Transitioning from theory to evidence, what do we know about how players perceive survival horror games in terms of virtual tourism or learning experiences? Academic research on this topic is still in its early stages, but we

can draw insights from related studies and qualitative surveys. A first clue comes from studies on game-induced tourism already mentioned. In addition to the Assassin's Creed II example, other noteworthy cases have been documented. For instance, according to Vintilă et al., Resident Evil Village significantly increased global visibility for Romanian attractions such as Peleș Castle and local vampire folklore. The researchers noted that many fans expressed, in online reviews, a desire to visit Romania after recognizing culturally specific elements in the game (like lei currency or Brâncoveanu-style decor). This enthusiasm is also visible on social media: in forums and subreddits, Romanian users invited others to explore the real-life places that inspired the game. This grassroots tourism promotion is anecdotal but illustrative of how a survival horror title can influence real travel decisions, especially when the connection to actual locations is compelling and intriguing.

On the educational side, some qualitative studies on horror gamers show that a portion of players attribute deeper meanings to their experiences—beyond fear. For example, in a (yet unpublished) survey discussed in academic communities and aimed at The Last of Us fans, many respondents said the game made them feel more sensitive to ecological themes and increased their appreciation for nature. The care in environmental design—such as ambient notes about failed quarantines or scenes of animals roaming free in abandoned cities—was perceived as an invitation to reflect. One player put it this way: "I felt like a tourist in a world where nature takes everything back—it was beautiful and terrifying at the same time."

Similarly, Silent Hill players have often discussed how the game sparked their curiosity about declining industrial towns in the U.S. and the phenomenon of coal mine fires, leading them to learn about Centralia. Some even planned trips to ghost towns or abandoned amusement parks, driven by the game's aesthetic but guided by a conscious respect for real histories and communities. This attitude aligns perfectly with the principles of responsible tourism: fictional curiosity leads to real-world research and empathy.

Another research area involves immersive technology. Experiments with VR horror games show that emotional engagement is extremely high—fear and awe can leave lasting impressions. If channeled properly, these emotions may facilitate learning. For example, a 2022 study from Oxford on VR horror and memory found that after experiencing a horror VR scenario set in a flooded city, participants could vividly recall urban and climate-related details, suggesting that futuristic horror scenarios could be used to raise awareness of climate change. In essence, the emotional intensity of horror enhances memory retention, which can translate into greater awareness.

There's also qualitative evidence from user-created content: the gaming community often produces exploration-based mods for horror games. For instance, fan-made enemy-free modes for games like Alien: Isolation or Resident Evil 2 Remake allow players to tour environments calmly. The popularity of such mods indicates that players recognize intrinsic value in game worlds, independent of the survival mechanics. In informal interviews, some modders said their goal was to: "Highlight the beauty of horror game environments," believing they could convey powerful messages even without violent interaction.

This aligns with a pedagogical approach: stripping environments down to their museum-like essence allows users to absorb historical or natural details at their own pace. For example, a 2023 Finnish research project used a modified version of Amnesia: The Dark Descent—with no monsters—to study how students explored the castle. Findings showed that players noticed period-specific items (antique medical tools, old records, architecture) and asked questions about them, turning gameplay into a true guided virtual visit. Though limited, these experiments point the way for future empirical research: structured gameplay sessions where participants explore horror settings as virtual tourists, with measurable outcomes like knowledge gain, changes in attitude (e.g., toward environmental conservation) and increased interest in related real-world travel.

Toward An X-Tourism Game Design Framework
Based on the theoretical discussion and case studies analyzed, this section proposes a design framework that integrates the principles of X-tourism (ecology, responsibility, sustainability) into the development of future survival horror games or VR experiences. The aim is to offer guidelines for game designers so their creations can not only frighten and entertain but also function as tools for awareness-building and conscious virtual tourism.
The framework can be summarized in five main pillars:

Pillar 1: Authentic And Detailed Environments
Creating believable game worlds is essential.
- Designers should base settings on real or plausible locations, incorporating their geography, history, and culture.
- A carefully crafted horror environment (architecture, climate, flora and fauna, customs) invites players to explore like real travelers and strengthens the sense of place.
- During concept art and level design, collaboration with heritage or geography experts is recommended to include recognizable landmarks, genuine folklore, native languages, culinary traditions, etc.

Example: Resident Evil Village demonstrates this well—cultural references enriched the experience and even stimulated real-world tourist interest.

Realistic ecology matters too:
- Representing flora and fauna (even monstrous forms) in ways consistent with local ecosystems and narrative changes (e.g., viruses, curses) helps convey respect for natural balance.

Pillar 2: Narratives With Socio-Environmental Themes

Horror plots should integrate explicit ethical and ecological themes.
- Without becoming didactic, developers can root the source of horror in human irresponsibility: for example, a climate-themed survival horror might feature extreme weather events caused by global warming, or mutated monsters due to toxic pollution.
- These narrative choices serve as cautionary tales that spark reflection.
- In-game documents (notes, diaries, audio logs) can reveal the causes of the apocalypse, just as The Last of Us uses found materials to narrate society's collapse.

Environmental storytelling enhances the educational layer:
- The player pieces together the chain of events and learns its moral ("this tragedy could have been avoided if...").

Narratives should also reward virtuous behavior:
- NPCs who value cooperation, ethical science, or conservation should fare better than selfish or destructive characters.
- This reinforces the idea that sustainability and responsibility "pay off", even in extreme scenarios.

Pillar 3: Exploration And Learning-Oriented Mechanics

In addition to classic combat and survival systems, games should encourage
slow exploration and observation. Features could include:
- Photo mode or travel journal, letting players take pictures or make notes about points of interest—possibly earning lore entries or rewards.
- Achievement systems for visiting all optional locations or finding scenic viewpoints, similar to completing a real travel itinerary.
- Puzzles based on cultural or natural elements (e.g., reassembling a traditional artifact, analyzing animal tracks) to make players engage with their environment to progress.
- Pacing is crucial:
- After intense fear sequences, offer quiet areas for players to explore threat-free—possibly recovering health near a beautiful landscape.
- This balance mirrors a real trip: moments of adrenaline alternate with contemplative discovery.

For VR, include interactive educational elements:
- For example, let players examine objects in 3D and hear historical explanations.

- Imagine a survival horror set in a museum: after surviving a monster, the player explores a gallery where every item provides both narrative and factual context.

Pillar 4: Emphasis On The Phenomenology Of Place (Sensory Experience)
A key aspect of tourism is the sensory immersion in a place. Horror games can use audio-visual design not just to scare, but to bring the world to life:

- Use local animal sounds (howling at night, birds at dawn), and realistic weather/day-night cycles that slightly impact gameplay—for instance, fog rolling in at dusk, or rain putting out light sources.
- Visually:
- Offer panoramic views and open horizons. After hours in dark hallways, reaching a mountain overlook can produce a feeling similar to a real-life scenic reward.

This sensory design becomes environmental messaging when it contrasts the natural beauty of, say, a pine forest, with the toxic air of an abandoned factory. Even subtle cues—sound and image—can convey an ecological message to the player without words.

Pillar 5: Community Engagement And Transmedia Extensions
Finally, an X-tourism-oriented design approach can include community-driven and transmedia elements.
Examples:

- A rich photo mode already inspires players to share in-game images like postcards.
- Developers can run "virtual photography" contests, showcasing the game's scenery and culture.
- Collaborations with real tourism boards could create dual guides: a game set in the Alps, for instance, could be paired with an e-book about the region's real history and environment.

Transmedia (comics, series, diegetic websites) can expand the lore with educational context. Community engagement also includes collecting player feedback on the game's underlying themes—perhaps via official forums or discussion hubs on environmentalism, ethical science, and cultural heritage.

In this way, the game becomes part of a wider narrative and educational ecosystem, where players are not just consumers of thrills, but informed agents, possibly inspired to take real-world action—from supporting environmental causes to visiting places similar to those in the game with newfound respect.

This framework can be summarized using the acronym TREES (Tourism,

Responsibility, Exploration, Environment, Story) Interestingly, similar ideas are emerging in academia. For instance, the D.R.E.A.D. The model combines Difficult heritage, Horror studies, Serious game design principles, to reimagine how we engage with traumatic historical sites through the lens of horror. This confirms the growing potential for cross-pollination between tourism, education, and horror game design.

Conclusions

The analysis presented shows that survival horror video games, when thoughtfully considered, can go well beyond pure entertainment: they can serve as gateways to places and themes that hold significance in the real world. These games show potential as tools for virtual tourism, capable of satisfying our desire for exploration and learning in immersive and interactive ways. At the same time, thanks to the emotional power of the horror genre, they can strongly imprint messages about environmental sustainability, social responsibility, cultural heritage and historical awareness. By integrating a variety of case studies—from the green reclamation of The Last of Us, to the folkloric echoes of Resident Evil Village, the colonial guilt in Amnesia, and the industrial ghosts of Silent Hill—we've seen how the X-tourism dimension permeates many horror experiences. Sometimes this happens by design, and other times it emerges organically through player interpretation and community discourse. Today's developers and game design theorists have the opportunity to embrace this perspective: to create games that not only terrify, but also educate while entertaining, inviting audiences to travel—both virtually and physically— with new awareness.In a time when physical tourism faces challenges of sustainability and global crisis, digital tourism mediated through video games offers a complementary frontier: a way to explore the world (or possible worlds) through play, while reflecting on our collective fears and our relationship with the planet. As one theme from Silent Hill hauntingly states: "We are living a tourism of the dead." It is up to us to transform it into a journey of life, memory, and growth.

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