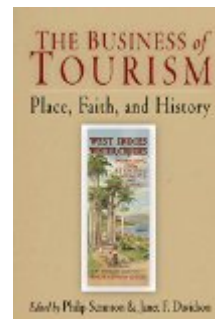


Philip Scranton, Janet F. Davidson, eds.. *The Business of Tourism: Place, Faith, and History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. 312 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-3968-3.



Reviewed by Sasha D. Pack

Published on H-Travel (January, 2009)

Commissioned by Patrick R. Young (University of Massachusetts-Lowell)

If one red thread runs throughout this eclectic volume, it is a conceptualization of tourism as a blend of marketing and infrastructure, without which those who roam would simply be travelers. This is a reasonable definition to adopt, especially in a book concerned with commercial aspects of tourism, though perhaps not one that every cultural historian would accept. This book is, therefore, an opportunity to revisit a canonical question in tourism history: the relationship between cultural practices and the political-social-economic structures that impel and accommodate them (or, to say it more crudely, between demand and supply).

The book emerged from a conference held in 2004, and its constituent chapters are arranged rather untidily into three sections dealing with the commodification of place, religion, and Communism. In part 1, contributions by Waleed Hazbun and Kenneth J. Perkins examine the touristic aspect of European colonialism in British Egypt and French North Africa, respectively.

Hazbun argues that the late nineteenth-century incursion into Egypt by Thomas Cook, the pioneering British travel agent, involved not only the extension of commercial tour operation beyond Europe, but also a qualitatively new business model suited to colonial (as distinct from international) tourism. Cook created tourist “enclaves,” situated in an exotic landscape but tamed to the tastes and comfort of English clients. Like Hazbun, Perkins moves beyond the familiar story of commodification of the oriental exotic, emphasizing in his study the connection of this tourism to the wider French colonial project as it faced rising threats in the 1920s and 1930s. A third “commodification of place” occurs not in a far-off colony, but in the French city of Dijon. Philip Whalen’s chapter on the rise of that region’s annual gastronomical fair in the 1920s depicts the emerging relationship of tourism and regional economic planning, emphasizing the role of culinary heritage in bringing together otherwise disparate or even competing local interests. This local study captures an important twentieth-centu-

ry link between heritage and developmentalism, but it might have benefited from more attention to national interests, such as Michelin, which, as Stephen Harp has shown, promoted similar strategies across France.

The book's part 2 includes three chapters that relate in some way to religion. Brian Bixby presents a compelling story of how Shaker villages became integrated willy-nilly into broader networks of modern commerce by their increasing reliance on tourist revenue to support their utopian villages. The integrative and transformative effects of commercial tourism on marginal populations represent a significant and underemphasized question in tourism studies. The Shakers' meta-historical journey from millenarian sect to museum keepers might remind readers of other social or ethnic groups, such as certain American Indian tribes, whose marketable heritage has threatened to overwhelm other aspects of identity. In a contribution by Molly Hurely Dépret, one detects similar forces at work, *mutatis mutandis*, in Belfast, where the well-known sectarian "Troubles" of the last third of the twentieth century have given way to an unusual kind of heritage tourism in which visitors are taken past the conflict's major landmarks. Not surprisingly, this was not the product of central planning but of enterprising taxi drivers in search of generous tips in the early 1990s. The government tourist bureau later became involved, searching for ways to reconcile the ethical dilemmas of exploiting violence for profit, on the one hand, with the allure of tourist revenue and the surely legitimate touristic practice of battlefield "pilgrimage," on the other. Belfast's experience is certainly worthy of reflection, considering the proliferation of fresh battlefield tours in the Balkans, Middle East, and elsewhere. At Missouri's Silver Dollar City theme park, the subject of Aaron K. Ketchell's chapter, religion played a far more constitutive role in the actual making of the tourist site. In contrast to Shaker villages and West Belfast, where intense

religious identity morphed into a more saccharine type of heritage, Silver Dollar City was created as a setting to integrate Bible Belt values with family leisure. Ketchell argues that the "nebulous religious product" presented at the modern theme park derives from a deep tradition of vaguely pious admiration of the sublime Ozark landscape dating from the late nineteenth century (p. 110). (One wonders how tour guides in Paleozoic Ozark caves explain discrepancies between geological and biblical time.) This legacy of a pious romanticism blending admiration for nature with affirmations of belief suggests another opportunity for comparative study that never quite emerges in this collection.

Part 3 deals with tourism in Communist countries. As occurs in the other two sections, the three authors engage the ostensible theme in quite different ways. Anne E. Gorsuch's fascinating piece on Soviet tourism after World War II examines how the late Stalinist regime attempted to harness consumerism and tourism to the ends of propaganda. Party bureaucrats understood the political dangers of permitting cross-border tourism in either direction, and therefore attempted to encourage Soviet citizens to aspire to something resembling a *petit-bourgeois* holiday within the Soviet Union, where they could be reassured of the socialist state's progress without facing the temptations of life in the West. Tourism functioned quite differently, not surprisingly, in Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, as shown by Patrick Hyder Patterson. Tourists from both sides of the Iron Curtain reached the country's Adriatic shores. Both groups found something exotic, depending on their perspective, in visiting a socialist country; or alternatively, a country where browsing shops filled with Western goods was a leisure activity. This posed a particular dilemma for other Communist nations, where official discourse struggled to balance the valorization of production with the recognition of popular tastes for consumption and leisure. Soviet-bloc travel guides remained vague

about the suspiciously pro-Western Yugoslavia, preferring to highlight the less-developed consumer culture elsewhere in socialist Europe. Evan R. Ward's chapter on the Cuban tourism industry over the past two decades focuses less on attempts to assimilate tourism into Communist ideology than on the paradoxes of assimilating direct foreign investment into a state-managed economy. The research reveals the striking contrast between Fidel Castro's regime's antagonism toward the Havana Hilton in 1959 and its accommodation of--and even admiration for--Spanish hotel management teams in the 1990s. The story captures some of the dilemmas of post-Cold War Communism and, unlike the other two chapters in this section, deals with business rather than with mass culture.

Taken as a whole, this volume suffers from problems common to many compilations: while the essays form a reasonable snapshot of the current state of research on tourism history, it is more difficult to discern larger themes and problems. The chapters quite reasonably address other scholarly discourses--including the histories of European imperialism and mass culture under Communism--but are more tentative in engaging tourism history as a coherent field. Part of the problem resides in the way the editors chose to cluster the chapters. The case of Cuban resort tourism draws out many themes parallel to those in the first two chapters on colonialist tourism in Egypt and North Africa, such as how business practices adapted to environments unsuited to conventional modes of operation. While religion is ostensibly at issue in each of the chapters in part 2, those dealing with the Shakers and Belfast more closely resemble the Dijon experience: heritage was shaped and sold for tourist consumption but over time emerged as a factor in local identity in its own right. The essays on Silver Dollar City, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia all grapple with ways that tourism can affirm or undermine deep beliefs. A more inventive organization-

al scheme, together with introductory comments to each section, would have yielded greater interaction and continuity among the chapters. As it stands, the collection provides a good representation of research in progress in tourism history, and will be of interest to readers looking to sample some of the field's important topics and themes.

the

the

form

O

B

e

the

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-travel>

Citation: Sasha D. Pack. Review of Scranton, Philip; Davidson, Janet F., eds. *The Business of Tourism: Place, Faith, and History*. H-Travel, H-Net Reviews. January, 2009.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=15695>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.