

# H-Net Reviews

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Dina Berger, Andrew Grant Wood, eds. *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 393 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4554-1; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4571-8.

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## Touring Mexico: From Tijuana to Acapulco and Beyond

Since 2008, the U.S. recession and escalating drug wars have caused a major downturn in the Mexican tourist economy, a \$680 million business that ranks third in contributions to the national GDP (p. 2). The U.S. mainstream media has been circulating images of Mexico as a violent country wracked by drug wars, a sharp contrast to those alluring tourism brochures that tout the Mexican Riviera's luxury resorts and ancient pyramids. Given Mexico's current tourism crisis, *Holiday in Mexico* is a timely collection that considers the development of tourism from the mid nineteenth century to the present from a variety of methodological perspectives. Beyond making a worthwhile contribution to historians of Mexico, the anthology is a valuable addition to the growing field of tourism studies.

In their adroit introduction, Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood reflect upon Mexico's dilemma to "reconcile market demand with a desire for national sovereignty" (p. 1). That is, while tourism development has the potential to drive economic expansion, it can also produce a series of undesirable environmental, social, and cultural consequences. Of course, this quandary is not unique to Mexico. Yet Berger and Wood use this as an effective entrée into aspects of the complicated history of tourism to highlight the ways in which tourism promoters have packaged their nation, the complex nature of host-guest interactions, and the costs and benefits of the touristic exchange. In addition to providing a survey of the history of the Mexican tourism industry, the editors also provide

a concise overview of tourism studies that will be particularly useful to students or newcomers to the field.

The anthology, which covers a number of Mexican regions, unfolds in three broad chronological periods, beginning with the nascent tourism industry that emerged between the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48) and the onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910-11. Andrea Boardman, executive director of the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, argues that U.S. troops stationed in Mexico between 1846 and 1848 functioned as prototourists—a "strange kind of hybrid 'soldier-and-tourist'" (p. 22). Using a variety of documentary evidence, including maps and the writings of U.S. soldiers, she explores their "tourist gaze" and makes a compelling case for how the U.S.-Mexican War provided a foundation for Mexico's modern tourism industry of the early twentieth century. Christina Bueno next uncovers the history behind one of Mexico's most renowned archeological sites/tourist attractions, Teotihuacán. The regime of Porfirio Díaz reconstructed the pyramids to coincide with the centennial celebration of Mexico's independence from Spain. As Bueno demonstrates, the event provided the state with an opportunity to present Mexico as a modern nation to foreign investors. At the same time, the discourse surrounding Teotihuacán revealed a disconnect between past and present. In an example of what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia," the Porfirian regime brutalized the present-day indigenous population

while simultaneously celebrating its pre-Hispanic civilization.[1]

The subsequent set of essays moves us ahead to postrevolutionary tourism developments between 1920 and 1960. Andrew Grant Wood explores the phenomenon of domestic tourism by examining how the Port of Veracruz promoted itself as a tourist destination to other Mexicans. Specifically, Wood shows how local business and governmental elites devised a pre-Lenten Carnival to stimulate tourism and economic growth. Conversely, Dina Berger's focus is transnational. She looks at tourism as a form of U.S.-Mexican diplomacy during the era of the Good Neighbor policy from the mid 1930s through the end of World War II. The next essay concentrates on postwar tourism in Baja California's border zone. Eric M. Schantz examines fluctuating local and national power dynamics behind tourism development in the region by tracing the transition of vice-based tourism in such cities as Tijuana to the promotion of family attractions following President Lázaro Cárdenas's ban on casino gambling. State intervention in the development of Acapulco as a modern "sun and fun" destination is the focal point of Andrew Sackett's essay. The shift from a residential municipality to a resort town had a profound impact on the local communities. Similarly, in her study of San Miguel de Allende's tourist industry, Lisa Pinley Covert shows how elites believed that tourism development seemingly offered an international solution to solve local economic problems (p. 183). Unlike Acapulco, local efforts as opposed to state intervention drove tourism development in San Miguel. Moreover, in contrast to Mexico's beach resorts or family destinations, San Miguel distinguished itself as an alternative tourist destination characterized by its bohemian artist colony and promotion of authentic.

The final five essays examine Mexico's contemporary tourism industry. Jeffrey Pilcher demonstrates how tourists consumed Mexico through food and drink. From the late nineteenth century to the present, culinary tourism was imagined as a transgressive act, mark-

ing a "crucial boundary between a primitive Mexico and a modern United States" (p. 236). Our attention then shifts to the tourism periphery—the indigenous communities surrounding Cancún. M. Bianet Castellanos employs the "native gaze" to understand Mayan migrant workers' perspective of mass tourism. Moving away from the excesses of Cancún's tourism industry, Mary K. Coffey critiques President Vicente Fox's promotion of folk art tourism, particularly the organization of blockbuster exhibitions of Mexican art, as a way to stimulate the tourism industry following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Alex M. Saragoza discusses the Fox administration's plans for a large-scale luxury resort complex in Los Cabos, designed to attract wealthy U.S. tourists, to help us understand post-PRI neoliberal tourism policy in Mexico more broadly. The final essay by the well-known travel writer Barbara Kastelein weaves together observations about the contrasting tourism industries in Acapulco, Oaxaca, and Amecameca to explore broader race, gender, and class dynamics.

Despite their temporal and regional differences, most of the essays explore a common theme—how state officials and tourism promoters in Mexico endeavored to transform an image of their nation as "backwards" and "violent" to one that combined the best elements of the modern and ancient worlds to attract foreign tourists. As Berger notes in her essay, the Mexican state privileged the development of the tourism industry because they deemed "it was profitable, modernizing, and democratizing" (p. 108). On the whole, *Holiday in Mexico* is a balanced anthology that does not aim to demonize tourism producers nor proffer caricatures of the "ugly American tourist," but rather adds to our understanding of the complexity of travel in Mexico from its origins to the present, and from the perspectives of promoters, tourists, and laborers. My only criticism, and it is a minor one, is the absence of a bibliography at the end of the volume.

Note

[1]. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon, 1990), 70.

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