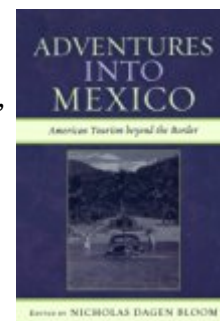


**Nicholas Dagen Bloom, ed..** *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism beyond the Border*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. v + 230 pp. \$25.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7425-3745-3.



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According to a U.S. State Department estimate, the number of American citizens living in Mexico numbers more than half a million.[1] While this statistic undoubtedly includes naturalized U.S. citizens returning to their native soil, the real estate boom in the Lake Chapala District, Puerto Vallarta, and San Miguel de Allende is largely due to an influx of Anglo-American baby boomers who, pushed out by staggering real estate prices in the Sunbelt, have bought retirement property south of the Rio Grande.[2] The gringo onslaught is nothing new; long before the present explosion of gated retirement communities, time-share condominiums, and oceanfront monster homes, Anglo-Americans along with Canadians and European emigres have been seeking either temporary or permanent refuge in Mexico. In *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism beyond the Border*, Nicholas Dagen Bloom has edited a collection of essays that trace Anglo-American "passion for Mexican spaces" back to World War II (p. 1). Moving beyond the honky-tonk border zone and into the heart of Mexico, this anthology explores the varying and complex interactions be-

tween American guests and their host communities.

In the introduction, Bloom asserts the importance of tourism studies, and provides a concise history of tourism from the European grand tours of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the democratization of travel in the 1920s. He argues that since the 1940s, increasing homogeneity in U.S. culture and society motivated Americans to seek difference, which they readily found in Mexico's "unique combination" of "propinquity, value, and exoticism" (p. 7). Despite the topical disparity between the essays, the strength of this anthology rests in highlighting the various ways that the search for otherness motivated many Anglo-Americans to travel to and settle in Mexico; yet once in the contact zone, most discovered how Mexican realities often did not live up to Anglo-American expectations.

The contributions, written by historians, geographers, anthropologists, and peppered with personal recollections, are cleverly arranged according to ever-increasing lengths of stay, as opposed to chronological or thematic organization.

Part 1, "Short Visits," begins with a strong essay by historian Dina Berger discussing the emergence of cosmopolitan nightlife in Mexico City during the 1940s. The Mexican tourism industry had embarked on a concerted effort to reverse unflattering representations of travel to Mexico, associated with vice tourism in the border zone, and to promote inter-American understanding. In addition to promoting "pyramids," that is, ancient civilization and indigenous cultures, tourism promoters and developers emphasized "martinis," recognizing that an active and lively nightlife was a "hallmark of modernity" (p. 15). Next, Rebecca M. Schreiber analyzes the postwar writings of Willard Motley, the best-selling African American novelist, who had moved to Mexico in 1951. Schreiber shows how "My House is Your House" (unpublished) and "Tourist Town," posthumously published in 1966 as *Let Noon Be Fair*, lamented not only the expansion of the tourism industry in Mexico, but also how tourism enabled the transportation of U.S. racial ideologies to Mexico. In deconstructing Motley's uncomplimentary portrait of U.S. tourism, this extremely nuanced essay provides insight into the connections between U.S. cultural imperialism and the tourism industry. The last essay in this first section, authored by geographers Rebecca Torres and Janet Henshall Momsen, discusses the emergence of Cancun as *Gringolandia*, "a transnational *hybrid-space* incorporating elements of Mexican, American, and Mayan culture" (p. 58). The essay traces the transformation of the region from relative isolation to a segregated tourist space geared toward middle-class families and spring-breakers in search of pleasure. The authors also analyze the environmental and social consequences that accompany the region's dependency on global mass tourism.

Part 2, "Cultural Adventures," begins with Drewery Wayne Gunn's "The Beat Trail to Mexico," reprinted from his *American and British Writers in Mexico, 1556-1973* (1974). Gunn outlines the Mexican escapades of such Beat Generation writers as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William

S. Burroughs, as well as Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Repelled by a culture of hyper-conformity, consensus, and consumerism, they were attracted to Mexico as a freer and more authentic society. Mexico City College, the only American liberal arts college south of the Rio Grande, also provided an alternative for American students in the 1950s. Geographer Richard W. Wilkie reminisces about his days as a student there, and recalls his journeys through southern Mexico. These two descriptive chapters contrast with anthropologist Michael Chibnik's complex discussion of the "commodity chains" that link American merchants, Mexican rural artisans, and upper- and middle-class consumers of folk art (p. 116). Rather than seeing the Oaxacan Wood Carving trade as merely exploitative, Chibnik provides insight into the complexities of the relationship between folk art dealers and the wood carvers.

The last section of the anthology, "Colonies," examines permanent or semi-permanent settlements of Anglo-Americans in Mexico. For Diana Anhalt and her family in the 1950s, Mexico was not a tourist destination but rather a refuge from political persecution. Following World War II, left-wing and blacklisted Americans, pushed out by the climate of anticommunist hysteria, settled in Mexico City where they formed an expatriate community. Anhalt describes her sense of alienation and reconstructs how the exile community attempted to adapt to its new home. David Truly then examines bohemian Anglo-Americans who, since the 1920s, settled in the idyllic Lake Chapala Riviera region in order to flee social discrimination and conformity. Unlike the post-NAFTA wave of American and Canadian retirees, Truly contends that these earlier migrants made a concerted effort to adapt to their host community. Finally, Nicholas Dagen Bloom discusses fifty years of American colonization in San Miguel de Allende, and argues that this colonial town "represents the future of many Mexican cities" (p. 191). Dagen Bloom demonstrates how the first American residents, many of whom were artists who settled in

the 1940s and 1950s, made concerted attempts to uplift and improve the community through various philanthropic efforts. As a popular mass tourist and retirement destination, the booming American colony has increasingly imported a suburban, Americanized lifestyle to San Miguel de Allende.

As John Mason Hart has shown, the experiences of Americans in Mexico are marked by intervention and revolution, but also by accommodation and cooperation.[3] Overall, the essays in this volume shed light on this complicated history of interactions as viewed through the lens of Anglo-American tourists, sojourners, and long-term residents of Mexico since World War II. Readers who are interested in learning why American artists, students, political exiles, and retirees have been drawn to Mexico should find this collection useful. However, only the first part of this work actually deals with tourists per se—that is, Americans who travel to Mexico for leisure. The subtitle of the book, *American Tourism beyond the Border* is thus somewhat misleading. While tourism scholars may find the essays touch on issues important in the field, as a whole the anthology does not significantly advance the field of tourism studies. Nevertheless, this collection should be useful to scholars investigating cultural and social relations between Americans and Mexicans south of the border.

#### Notes

[1]. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "Background Note: Mexico," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm> (accessed October 2, 2006).

[2]. Mike Davis, "The Baby Boomer Border Invasion," *AlterNet*, <http://www.alternet.org/story/42133/> (accessed September 27, 2006).

[3]. John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2002).

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