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In *A World Away: The British Package Holiday Boom, 1950-1974*, Michael John Law argues that “the 1960s were a boom period when Britons from lower-middle-class and working-class backgrounds began to take flying holidays abroad in great numbers” (p. 4). These flying holidays abroad were overwhelmingly package holiday tours, which included charter flights, food, accommodations, and ground transportation, all for a single ticket. Law investigates these package holidays as part of a wider change in postwar British habits of leisure, consumption, and travel. What factors, he asks, led to the replacement of the British seaside holiday, relatively accessible by rail, with Mediterranean resorts in consumer consciousness? And how did that shift materially influence the travel industry and figuratively influence the place “travel” and “tourism” held in British culture?

To explore these questions, Law takes an episodic and thematic approach through ten relatively short chapters. The first half of the book profiles who chose package holidays, where they went, and how they got to their destinations. In particular, Law uses media coverage of charter flight accidents supplemented by geographical investigation to argue that contrary to previous analyses that suggest that air travel was a middle-class pursuit, it was working- and lower-middle-class Britons who chose all-inclusive holidays. Once turboprop airplanes were introduced in the 1950s, previously unattractive destinations rocketed to popularity because charter flights could get there without refueling. Spain, especially Mallorca, was “like catnip” because it was inexpensive, relatively undeveloped, and climatically appealing, and so enterprising tour companies, some of which became powerful enough to put pressure on conventional travel agencies, rushed in to take advantage (p. 57). The second half of the book is more focused on the cultural influences that shaped the desires, choices, and experiences of holiday-makers themselves. It was nearly impossible to avoid Elvis crooning in *Blue Hawaii* or Ursula Andress’s bikini in *Dr. No*, and Law points out how these “mass media sources were promulgating the
idea that taking a beach holiday should be exotic, hot, and rain-free,” a stark contrast to the dreary British seaside (p. 111). But as soon as they boarded their charters, working- or lower-middle-class Brits were met with a highly curated experience: English-style pubs, group excursions to inauthentic “authentic” castles and barbecues, and tour company representatives “immunising” them against the world outside the resort (p. 146). The insulating nature of the package holiday was ripe for derision by the mid-1970s as a combination of rapid, uncontrolled expansion, state and business regulation, and changing tastes revealed cracks in the industry, and the questions of what makes a travel experience authentic are still deeply embedded in twenty-first-century discussion of tourism culture.

Law explicitly states that A World Away is designed as a survey text, but even as a survey, it is not quite sure what it wants to be. Is it a business history of travel agencies and charter companies? An oral history and auto-ethnography of British tourists abroad? A class analysis of travel habits? A media study of how film, music, and fashion influenced British tastes for different destinations? This apparent indecision works both for and against the efficacy of A World Away. On the one hand, these quick dips into different aspects of package holiday culture act a bit like an appetizer platter. They’re small bites that work together to reveal a bigger picture, almost as filling as a meal, of the midcentury British package holiday approached from nearly every conceivable angle. Not to mix metaphors, but as a bird’s-eye view of what it looked like to take a package holiday to Mallorca in the 1960s, A World Away shines.

On the other hand, the “bigger picture” is sometimes hard to parse out; discussions of sunbathing culture in the 1960s and airport growth in London feel like they’re barely skimming the surface. Perhaps if Law had rethought his decision not to “expound on or extend theoretically grounded interpretations” (p. 8), he would have been able to more explicitly and deliberately connect his work to a larger body of historiography that looks at air travel, tourism, technological change, and holidaying as part of larger systems of modernity and postwar identity.[1] This would have helped make A World Away more useful for historians looking to embed package tourism into its larger context. Perhaps too some more analysis of what separated package holidays from other forms of air tourism in this period would have allowed Law to make a more powerful argument about the “dramatic effect” package travel had on working- and lower-middle-class Britons; surely those who flew on scheduled airlines also saw Dr. No (p. 170). It is also worth noting that this is very much not an environmental history. It is certainly about environments, insofar as dazzling Mallorcan resorts, dreary British seaside, and airports are environments, but Law does not explicitly engage with the environmental humanities in any meaningful way. This is not a flaw of the book, but should be pointed out given the venue in which this review appears.

Despite these small stumbles in argumentative sharpness, A World Away presents a compelling picture of holiday culture in Britain at mid-century. Law successfully shows that the British package holiday “boom” was the result of a confluence of cultural, social, political, technological, and economic factors, and that the Britons who took package holidays sought communal experiences reflective of their working- and lower-middle-class lifestyles. He also effectively outlines how those factors shaped what it was like to take one of those vacations, and how those vacations in turn shaped what it meant to be a “tourist” in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

Note

[1]. For example, Chandra Bhimull, Empire in the Air: Airline Travel and the African Diaspora (New York: NYU Press, 2017); Guillaume de Syon, “Lufthansa Welcomes You: Air Transport and Tourism in the Adenauer Era,” in Selling Modern-

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