

# Book review

## **Tourism and the Power of Otherness: Seductions of Difference**

*Edited by David Picard and Michael A. Di Giovine*

*Channel View Publications*

*Bristol, UK*

*2014*

*(pbk)*

*195pp.*

*ISBN-13: 978-1-84541-415-3*

*Keywords Tourism, Travel, Heritage,*

*Authenticity, Cultural change,*

*Ethnographics*

*Review DOI*

*10.1108/JTF-01-2015-0003*

This book is one of a number published by Channel View under their Tourism and Cultural Change series, which is designed to explore the “complex and ever-changing relationship between tourism and culture(s)”. The book covers ten chapters written by 13 authors, mainly by academics based in European Universities, but also with contributions by academics from both South Africa and the USA. The authors range from current PhD candidates to full professors and published researchers, but also include others, such as a secondary school teacher. The authors are mainly from an anthropology rather than a tourism background, and this expertise is reflected in the contents and discussions in the book.

The book itself is split into three self-explanatory sections, namely: Travels into a Past Golden Age; Tourism and Others in Dialogue; Travel, Other and Self-Revelation, with three chapters in each section. The focus of the book as stated in the first line of chapter one is to “explore the paradoxes of Self-Other relations in the social field of tourism” and it attempts to achieve this aim through nine ethnographic case study chapters which explore and discuss topics that range from the politics of heritage in the Catalan Pyrenees, sexual relationships between female tourists and Turkish tourism workers, through to the search for authenticity in new age travel. The case study chapters are

written by academics who naturally draw examples from their own country experience and knowledge, and cover a wide diversity of destinations, including: Spain, Portugal, Romania, Poland, Tanzania, Bolivia, Turkey, Africa and Goa.

It must be stressed that the book is written from an anthropology perspective rather than a tourism futures perspective, and tourism futures researchers may on first reading have some difficulty in understanding some of the concepts and arguments. Much of it is written from what at first seems to be based on personal observations, so quantitative tourism researchers may find this uncomfortable. Also, as many of the chapters used the personal pronoun such as “I saw” or “I believe” it was tempting to reach for a red pen and to start editing the book. However, on further reading this proved to be one of the strengths of the book, which many mainstream tourism textbooks lack, that of projecting strongly held personal opinions and insights, which were developed from a well tried and tested anthropology research technique, that of observational research. Most of the discussions in the chapters were also supplemented by quotes from on-site personal interviews, which greatly aided in understanding the authors arguments, and added a degree of richness to the various debates. This use of quotes from personal interviews of visitors to the various destinations, along with the use of the participant-observer as a research methodology is underused in tourism research. Tourism researchers and tourism futures researchers in particular, could learn greatly from the research methods used in anthropology research.

In terms of ease of reading, the individual case study chapters are coherent and well written, and once the reader has grasped some of the basic concepts of anthropology research and its language, this greatly helps in understanding the

© Brian Hay. Published in the *Journal of Tourism Futures*. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

discussions in the case studies. Although the individual chapters could be read without reference to the other chapters, it is necessary and indeed vital to read the introduction chapter first, as those from a tourism rather than an anthropology background may have some difficulty in understanding the theoretical concepts. However, it is well worth persevering, as such insights help to set the theoretical frameworks for the nine case study chapters.

It is also necessary to understand that the central focus of the book involves much discussion around the concept of "Otherness/Self-Other" from a western society perspective, whether this be around the production of experiences or the different forms of socialisation from a political as well as an economic resource perspective, and how they impact and govern our social life. This concept is explored through the author's observations of both the tourism product and people's behaviours and is used to interrogate how "different people, times and places" try to reveal issues that are concealed or buried deep inside ourselves, so as to better understand how people consume modern culture, and is used to explore and explain their actions within a tourism context. The various author's try to explain and explore how visitors when seeking idealised tourism experiences (romance of Africa, countryside in the Catalan Pyrenees, erotic nature of Turkish males, the magical powers of shamans) to reveal their inner-self, and so satisfy their desires from "Self-Others" to provide transformation insights and the renewal of touristic experiences. It is a core concept of this book that "Otherness" provides "through their subjective power and ability to initiate a temporary disruption of social order". The impact of such experiences do not end when tourist leaves the destination, but continue to affect their social life when they return home. This transformation of the inner-self is developed and explored in most of the case studies, and can be as simple as feeling better about your life, or could be more stronger and lead to an inner transformation and even

emancipation, and so change our relationships with the wider world. In other words, the book tries to show that tourism experiences, can have a deep impact on both the experiences during the trip, as well as post trip behaviour.

This book can be read in many different ways, such as only reading the individual case study chapters, reading the three case study chapters in each section of the book as a set of coherent ideas/themes, or only reading the introduction chapter. However, it would also benefit the reader, in order to better understand the context of any chapter/set of case studies, to first read the introduction chapter, before reading the chapter/set of case studies of interest.

The criticisms of the book are all relatively minor, you have to be prepared to spend time thinking about the issues, and the discussions can sometimes be difficult to understand if you do not have an anthropology background. However, the index provides a useful source of alternative perspectives of similar issues, which may help you to better understand complex issues. As with many edited books with multiple authors, in order to help the reader understand the connections across and between the chapters, it would have been useful to provide a conclusions chapter. Though, the introduction chapter actually does this very well, and perhaps all that is needed is to suggest to the reader at the end their reading of the book, to read again the introduction chapter.

It has to said that this is not a general academic textbook about tourism, but if read selectively will be of interest to tourism academics who are seeking a different view of tourism issues, and to students who may-be looking to understand tourism through a different perspective, so as to help them develop a new angle on their research topic. Although the book is unlikely to be of much interest for practitioners in developing tourism products, it may provide some insights into the unforeseen complexities arising from tourism policy actions. Finally, in terms of

a recommendation to buy the book or not, perhaps the book is best described as an introduction in the use of the anthropology lens to explore tourism, and could prove useful to readers who want to start to explore tourism from a different perspective. As to those who are seeking a better understanding about the tourism futures, the book is perhaps best described as providing

reflective insights into current issues, rather than future issues, and should be seen as a useful supplementary reader, rather than an essential reader.

**Brian Hay**

*School of Management and Languages,  
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK.*