

# Book review

**Alan Machin**

**Halifax: Westwood Start**

**2016**

**Review DOI**

**10.1108/JTF-11-2016-0048**

The Beckoning Horizon is the first in a series of three books. This one covers the period from the ancient world through to The Great Exhibition of 1851. The final chapter, "Tourism's coming of age", provides a link into the next book covering the period 1851-1941, with the final book focussing on the post-Second World War period.

The book is the work of a serious, passionate scholar with lots to say. That is clear in the historical vignettes, close scholarship and also in largely successful attempts to compare across historical periods. It is also clear in his optimistic sense of human potential linked to the growth of tourism historically (notwithstanding his major concerns over the excesses of the modern industry).

It is a mine of ideas and insights rooted in a detailed knowledge of the history of tourism and the lenses through which academics have been trying to make sense of tourism, past and present.

As a history, the book is excellent, albeit unconventional. Machin draws on some of the histories already out there – material he is clearly at home with, not just in terms of detail, but also in terms of the sense of history and grasp of historical change. His innovation is to reflect upon tourism's role in education, and on the light it sheds upon themes in today's tourism studies.

His chapters attempt to link the past to the present and to how we look at tourism today. These attempts are, for me, interesting and make the reader think of some of the categories we use to consider the present and the future in a new light. In the spirit of Tourism Futures, if you know where an idea has come from, you may be better placed to judge how it will develop.

Early on he sets out the notion of a tourism "showcase": a place or icon around which a

"tourism experience" is formed. Tourists interact with the showcase and learn experientially, interpreting the heritage and culture they witness. This provides a straightforward model and theme that runs through the book – education and understanding through tourism of all types through the ages.

There is always the danger of ahistoricism when applying a notion like this across history, and I was not initially convinced at using the "showcase" as a way in to talking about everything from the Oracle at Delphi and Medieval churches through to modern holidays. And yet, as Machin explains, there are commonalities, rooted in basic desires to play, to discover and to relax, regardless of whether the trip is a pilgrimage, Roman Imperial travel or trade. I learned that just as today Leicester and Yorkshire argue over which county is the true "Richard III county", back in the 1200s disputes over the location of the tomb of Mary Magdalen had implications for the numbers of pilgrims visiting different towns, and also for the economic advantages of this. Plus a change when it comes to tourism.

Machin identifies the origins and development of "interpretation", and makes reference to Tilden's much more recent original ideas on this. This is a recurrent theme – looking at the historical roots of modern ideas and thinking.

His allusions to tourism as a type of informal education – a theme through the whole book – is an idea I have tended to resist. Today it seems to go with a certain anti-intellectualism that views "experiential learning" through "being there" as superior to being well read, the latter reduced to being "book smart". Yet Machin's balanced and interesting ideas, rooted in historical fact and vignette go some way to convincing even sceptics like me of the educational potential of travel.

Early on in the book he argues that Rojek and Urry are right to suggest that tourism no longer demarcates a distinct social practice today. Machin argues that this is in a sense a return to the pre-modern when leisure travel was interwoven with pilgrimage, commercial and imperial travel. Christian pilgrimages of

## **Making Sense of Tourism 1: The Beckoning Horizon**

© Jim Butcher. 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>

the thirteenth century did necessitate a hospitality industry and tourism of sorts, and Erasmus did accuse some pilgrims of indulgence, advocating a more scholarly approach to travel. The parallels with debates about Gap years are there, but must be treated carefully given the very different character of the societies and meanings assigned to leisure and travel.

A feature of the book, then, is the application of a modern lens, some of it derived from tourism studies, to the history of tourism – not something you would get too often in a history book.

In doing this, Machin has ventured to try something different: to write a history of tourism that doubles up as a reflection upon education and contemporary tourism studies. In some respects the book can be read as a series of connected essays that try to look closely at history to consider tourism's relationship to education and what it reveals about how tourism is analysed today. Such an original project implicitly begs the question for other academics: how do we best look at and write about tourism past and present? It made me think of the gaps between journal, monograph and text book on the one hand, and journalism on the other.

I have reviewed elsewhere Stavans and Ellison's *Travel Cultures* (Ellison and Stavans, 2015), a book that arose from an extended conversation following an essay in the *New York Times* by one of the authors. It is speculative, but rooted in the *Zeitgeist*. Like Machin's book it says something new, or at least in a new way.

These new approaches are to be commended. More blogs (one I am trying myself presently), essays, debates, thinkpieces, opportunities to test out arguments and to float ideas might be other possibilities. Fewer journal articles perhaps. It is worth thinking about what you would read

and write if there was no research excellence framework and no bureaucratic imperative to follow the party line.

The bits I found a little clunky were one or two of the references to "tourism theory", such as Plogg and the other various typologies that pigeon hole individuals. For me what they explain sociologically is usually much less than what they claim to. Who says a week in Torremolinos cannot be an "existential" experience, or that looking for the elusive whisky bar is not "exploration"?

In some ways this book may be the hardest of the three in Machin's project to pull off, as it straddles tourism in societies well before the term "tourism" really existed or had an equivalent. The risk is ahistoricism – projecting today's ideas back onto societies which had quite different cultural, ideological and economic dynamics. Yet the unorthodox approach to what is a detailed history – alluding to the contemporary, and contemporary concepts, as he goes – is balanced and written with insight.

For futurists, the past can be a guide – history repeats itself, although never in the precisely the same way, always in a new context. Machin's book shows us important changes and continuities from the pre-Modern up to 1851. It is an excellent book, and I look forward to the next two that together will complete a noteworthy project.

**Jim Butcher**

*Canterbury Christ Church University,  
Canterbury, UK.*

## Reference

Ellison, J. and Stavans, I. (2015), *Reclaiming Travel*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.