

A history of modern tourism

By Eric G. E. Zuelow. Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. xii + 290. Hardback
£55.00, ISBN 978-0-2303-6964-1; paperback
£19.99, ISBN 978-0-2303-6965-8.

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doi:10.1017/S1740022816000413

When John Walton implored historians in 1997 to ‘take the history of tourism seriously’, the existing scholarly literature on the topic certainly warranted his assessment.¹ Few historians had given a thorough treatment to a topic that was largely seen as a late-twentieth-century mass phenomenon. While there existed some accounts of tourism before 1945, they formed a motley collection of local studies and pastime writings. They certainly did not have the unity and urgency which Walton saw as necessary for such a commercially, politically, and culturally important global topic. Eric Zuelow’s wide-ranging new introduction to the history of modern tourism makes abundantly clear just how much has changed in the nineteen years since Walton’s appeal. It also reveals how much work remains to be done in this young field of historical research.

The significance of Zuelow’s volume should not be understated. As a textbook for students, it will undoubtedly serve as a trustworthy guide to the development of tourism in the modern world. For researchers of tourism’s history, it will stand as an indispensable handbook. The book proceeds in a conventional chronological manner that should be familiar to those who study the topic. Beginning with the elite grand tours of Europe by British gentlemen in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, Zuelow charts the evolution of a modern tourism ‘profoundly removed’ (p. 12) from the leisure travel that had existed previously. This tourism was a ‘cross-cultural’ experience (p. 7) ever more focused on consuming abroad for conspicuous display and status at home (p. 21). While the grand tours declined in the years after 1789, they left in their wake a cultural repertoire of travel writing which, set against the backdrop of the squalid urban centres of an industrializing Europe, helped inspire the search for the sublime in nature and the quest for health by escaping the perceived ills of modern urban life (pp. 41–2).

From the mid eighteenth century, there was an expansion of tourism to the mountains and the seaside which was largely restricted to elites, except in Britain, where the growth of cities, the development of rail transport, and the emergence of middle-class ideologies of temperance and self-improvement led to a growing and well-organized trade for ferrying the working classes out of the city in efforts to ‘civilize’ them (p. 60). Whether at historical ruins, by the coast, or in the countryside, middle- and working-class tourists had a well-developed and socially stratified infrastructure to rely upon. Indeed, as Zuelow asserts, ‘clear distinctions in leisure cultures ... emerged that can be loosely defined by social class’ (p. 70). Whoever the tourist and whatever the site, by the mid nineteenth century a whole apparatus had arisen for accommodating and instructing tourists about what ‘ought to be seen’² according to their social position. Guidebooks by Baedeker, Murray, and, later, Michelin all tended to entrench social positions and worldviews, providing their target audiences with a tailored ‘catalogue of products’ to be consumed (p. 78).

1 John K. Walton, ‘Taking the history of tourism seriously’, *European History Quarterly*, 27, 4, 1997, pp. 563–71.

2 Rudy Koshar, ‘“What ought to be seen”: tourists’ guidebooks and national identities in modern Germany and Europe’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33, 3, 1998, pp. 323–40.

The growth in world fairs and expositions after the Great Exhibition at London in 1851 helped both to increase the number of tourists and to popularize a modern consumerist, tourist sensibility (p. 94). Also significant in this period were the West's expanding global empires. Imperial tourism gave Europeans and Americans a means to forge exclusive national identities in the face of the radically different imperial 'other' (pp. 92–4). New transportation technologies such as the bicycle, automobile, and aeroplane further stoked this modern *Wanderlust*. After 1918, Western governments at least began to appreciate the ideological and commercial potential of tourism (p. 134). Zuelow highlights here the scholarly work done in the last twenty years on tourism in, among other places, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and France under the Popular Front. Following the Second World War, the pre-war lessons about tourism's economic and political importance were not lost. To begin with in Europe during its economic recovery, and then globally in postcolonial and newly independent states, efforts were made to attract tourists en masse. The advent of low-cost air travel and the continued rise of disposable incomes saw the extension and intensification of tourism worldwide (p. 159), alongside the growth of 'niche tourism' from Disneyland to backpacking to heritage tourism (pp. 165–75). André Rauch once summarized this movement as one from class to mass and back to class again.

The growth of tourism since the 1700s has not been without its deleterious consequences, and it is with these that Zuelow concludes his volume. In truth many, if not most, people still remain the 'hosts' of tourists rather than tourists themselves, which presents ongoing economic, cultural, political, and environmental dilemmas (pp. 176–8). Understanding

and addressing the conflicting needs and desires of tourists and those who receive them into their communities remains a fundamental challenge, and Zuelow discusses this eloquently in this book and especially in its conclusion. More, however, could and needs to be done to take seriously this fundamental and unequal dynamic between tourists and the communities they visit, pivoting on the fact that tourism's history is one of ongoing change, accommodation, and adaptation on both sides of the relationship. The landladies of Blackpool in John Walton's social history of the English seaside come to mind, as do the Vietnamese tourists travelling their country in the final years of French colonial rule (studied by this reviewer). Similarly, Zuelow has written elsewhere of emerging national identities in Ireland and Scotland interpreted through the prism of tourism, which gives pride of place to the changes wrought by tourism for those who lived in the countries of tourists' desires. Such subaltern histories of tourism are possible and our narratives can – and should – attempt to integrate subaltern experiences, to the extent of making them central to our histories of tourism. Indeed, it is in studying how tourism stimulated new understandings of national identities among the colonized and marginalized that Zuelow excels as a historian of modern Britain.

Zuelow's *History* is not the first general history of modern tourism. However, it is sure to be the touchstone for future students of the topic. He has given us a compelling narrative to take as a starting point for future research. Zuelow states that his purpose was to 'inspire curiosity' (p. 7). He will certainly do that for another generation of history undergraduates, just as he has for this historian already knowledgeable of the field.