This book is one of many responses to the growing interest in both cultural tourism and heritage studies. It explicitly searches for a better definition of cultural tourism and a more coherent theoretical understanding of the practices involved in it. The authors argue that much related literature focuses on simply describing cultural tourism from a supply-side perspective, with the resultant categorisation of cultural tourists according to their level of involvement in cultural tourism and their worth as a particular growing market segment. Hence this book seeks to redirect the approach by providing ‘a theoretical account of what it means to be a cultural or heritage tourist’.

The core of the book are twelve case studies where ‘cultural tourists’ disport themselves in a range of contexts that are nothing if not eclectic, in time, space, geography and imagination, from the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in deep outback Queensland to Ghana’s slavery heritage sites, Dracula’s castle in Transylvania and gangland Los Angeles. All the world is a cultural stage. Not surprisingly this diversity, the disciplinary diversity of authors, and the range of ways that ‘heritage’ is treated and used within modern societies, ensures a multiplicity of approaches and of individual conclusions that make any overall conclusion over what cultural tourism is quite impossible. Still there are fun moments in not getting there.

The initial assumption that cultural tourism is not a distinct and meaningful category is certainly well-founded and demonstrated repeatedly. In almost every single case study – at least where there are actual data to consider (several studies retreat into those ‘cultural studies moments’ where the author’s own individualistic perceptions and understandings triumph over any need for empiricism) – cultural tourists turn out to be both ill-informed about the particular cultural attraction they are visiting and not particularly interested in discovering much more. While that is particularly true of ‘lesser’ imaginary sites such as Dracula’s castle and Robin Hood’s Nottinghamshire, it is even true at those sites that are part of Ghana’s slave heritage, even for African-American, loosely diasporic tourists. Over and over again the majority of tourists are revealed to be having a day out that may be interesting and informative but is expected to be primarily enjoyable. Just getting there can be at least half the fun. Indeed several of the contributors, including two of the authors themselves (Waterton and Watson) in Cordoba, Spain, are evidently disappointed that many of the tourists know so little, are unconcerned with critical engagement, and are at the site because it figures prominently in the guide book. It is perhaps the ‘moment’ in the title that is significant: the culture in cultural tourism is thin, transient and evanescent.

Evidently many cultural tourists are confronted, challenged and sometimes confused by what it is they have seen and encountered – but whether they are changed by that experience is doubtful, even when they are mainly choosing to visit sites of some minimal significance to them. Moreover, while only three chapters survey ‘cultural tourists’ themselves (although useful information is elsewhere drawn from website and other sources) it is these three particularly that emphasise the diversity of visitors to each and every site. Whatever cultural tourists are they cannot be classified according to the nature of the site.

The authors prioritise notions of embodiment, non-representational theory and affect in examining what cultural tourists do, taking Urry’s tourist gaze into embodied form – although not all the contributors take up these themes with the same gusto. Jeanette Atkinson examines the more serious participants in historical re-enactments, where the desire for authenticity of costume and related artefacts is so all-consuming that their desire for perfection has spilled over into their providing a resource for museums and heritage sites. This at least is Stebbins’ serious leisure.

In so many contexts, absent from this book, ranging from villagers in the Pacific islands seeking to portray the past through ‘custom village’ tourism to Elvis Presley tribute artists trying to provide exact replicas of concerts given thirty years earlier, authenticity must be negotiated, and is of no great interest to most tourists and festival participants. As Munar and Ooi conclude here, through an analysis of tourists at the Forbidden City (Beijing) and the Acropolis, all this poses problems. While tourists both prefer the more or less familiar and predictable, and prefer not to be overly challenged by uncomfortable versions of history that threaten their perceptions, they also want good hospitality, facilities and amenities, and a degree of convenience and comfort. Professional heritage conservationists, tied to presenting a ‘correct’ version of history, may not concur. In Nottingham they detest the primacy of Robin Hood. Heritage is forever contested.

Otherwise few of the contributors suggest that there is much beyond the routine of a trip and looking, or occasional moments of heavily choreographed participation where some imposed ritual demands that. Nonetheless there are always examples of sites that are particularly influential. Thanatourism (dark tourism) is largely ignored by the authors but the horrors of the past, notably in concentration camps and jails, can shake perceptions and complacencies, and be memorable. In a rather over-wrought example Cameron and Gatewood consider numerous experiences at Gettysburg, which both touches and teaches, and Reed examines the experiences of African-Americans in Ghana. Emerging voluntourism and poverty tourism (even what some now call ‘slum tourism’) might have produced similar outcomes. Perhaps the most frustrating chapter is that where Garth Lean examines the ‘lingering moment’ – the impact of tourism years later – where what appears to be a rich trove of information on what tourists remember and feel about earlier travels disappears underneath his own stream of consciousness.

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Few of the authors engage with some of the more important works on cultural tourism Bruner’s seminal *Culture on Tour* (2005) appears just twice and Edensor’s *Tourists at the Taj* (1998) scarcely any more. Equally, apart from Atkinson, they pass over a rich literature on authenticity and festivals where embodiment comes into its own. There is too little sense of who most of the tourists are and most of the authors emote for them – the ‘them’ seemingly being exclusively tourists from developed countries. Studies of Luang Prabang (Laos) and Singapore miss that opportunity to take on cultural difference. Certainly the supposed ‘sense of calm’ (p.176) at some heritage sites may be far from universal. In the end therefore this is a useful collection of case studies of tourism at a range of global sites, but not one that gets us closer to any definition of cultural tourism or one that isolates a niche. Neither seem imminent or likely.

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