

## RECENT WORKS ON TOURISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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**Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters.** Edited by Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. xv + 393. \$24.95 paper. \$89.95 cloth.

**Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.** By Amalia L. Cabezas. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 218. \$24.95 paper.

**Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America.** By Dennis Merrill. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Pp. xvi + 327. \$22.50 paper. \$65.00 cloth.

**Packaged Vacations: Tourism Development in the Spanish Caribbean.** By Evan R. Ward. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. Pp. xxvi + 236. \$69.95 cloth.

Since the last half of the twentieth century, tourism has been touted in Latin America and the Caribbean as a spur to economic development, as a way to earn foreign exchange or to offset deficits arising from the balance of payments, and as a means to create employment. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank have made such claims, as have administrations of the U.S. government at least as far back as that of Franklin D. Roosevelt. A number of nations in the region accepted these premises as part of their development plans and received loans to create an infrastructure for tourism from one or more of the already mentioned financial institutions.

Some scholars see the growth of tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean as a post-World War II phenomenon; others date it to plans for modernization and economic development instituted in the 1960s and 1970s; still others, mainly sociologists and anthropologists, study it as a contemporary phenomenon, without consideration of its development. The books reviewed in these pages, which study the history of tourism and its sociology, avoid such errors.

Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood point out in the introduction to their collection that tourism was a “fledgling industry” in Mexico in the

1930s; yet by 2005, it had come to make the third-largest contribution to Mexico's gross domestic product and directly employed 5.5 percent of its labor force. The foundation for tourism in Mexico was nevertheless laid long before the 1930s. Attention to this historical dimension distinguishes many of the case studies of *Holiday in Mexico* from other works on tourism, which tend to neglect the industry's development to focus only on its circumstance today. In a historical vein, Andrea Bradman proposes that the more than 110,000 U.S. troops who occupied Mexico during the war of 1846–1848 can be seen as “soldier-tourists” (25). They cast their gaze on the countryside, volcanoes, ruins, monuments, and cities—Veracruz, Jalapa, Puebla, Mexico City, and others—and on pyramids, bullfights, theaters, and other historical sites and cultural entertainments that would eventually be part of the tourist itinerary. The soldiers sent letters home about their experiences; war correspondents published accounts about Mexico in news media; and, on their return to the United States, some soldiers wrote magazine and newspaper articles, books, and memoirs about what they had seen. Thus, information about the things that Mexico offered to potential tourists was disseminated in the United States, fostering interest in knowing firsthand the sights and experiences available.

Apart from soldier-tourists, the Mexican government attempted to attract casual visitors before the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1917. Christina Bueno writes that it was partly to attract tourists to the celebration of the centennial of Mexico's independence from Spain that President Porfirio Díaz had the archaeological site of Teotihuacán, near Mexico City, refurbished. This was the first official reconstruction of a site with pyramids, and the centennial drew tourists from around the world.

*Holiday in Mexico* also contains essays on tourism in Veracruz in the 1920s, on the U.S.-Mexico border zone from 1938 to 1965, on Acapulco from the 1930s through the 1950s, on San Miguel de Allende from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, and on Cancún and Los Cabos today. Berger dates to the 1920s Mexico's endorsement of tourism as a catalyst of economic growth, a program applauded by the United States as a means to restore economic and political stability in the aftermath of the revolution. Mexico's National Tourism Commission (1928–1934) claimed in a series of articles that tourism from the United States to Mexico would lead to peace between the two nations. Both governments envisioned tourists as “goodwill ambassadors,” as Berger notes in her title, and tourism—despite being primarily one way—was touted as a form of diplomacy and a means to reinforce the Good Neighbor policy, especially during World War II.

For Dennis Merrill, tourism reflected and bolstered U.S. imperialism in Mexico between World War I and World War II, in Cuba until U.S. sanctions were imposed on the government of Fidel Castro, and in Puerto Rico after Cuba fell from grace. Merrill argues that floods of tourists are equivalent to a “soft power” (11) that engages the cultural and racial “other” and

spreads the cultural and normative practices of the United States throughout such tourist destinations. Merrill is quick to point out, however, that not all Americans were willing to respect and negotiate with their hosts, although some indeed did play the part of goodwill ambassadors, pleased to commune with another culture.

While recognizing that tourism did exist in Mexico before the 1920s, Merrill dates its modern foundation to policies established during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940). He points out that, in the 1930s, although symbols of U.S. culture—such as Coca-Cola and tourist buses—proliferated, local Mexicans sought to contain the consumer and cultural power of tourists through such means as work stoppages by taxi drivers and organized strikes for higher wages by laborers in tourist-contact zones. Thus, Merrill maintains, members of the host society also exercised soft power—the power wielded outside of circles of compulsion.

Merrill also explores the development of tourism in Cuba under Fulgencio Batista and the changes made in the direction of egalitarianism by Fidel Castro, that is, Castro's intent to combat discrimination based on race, color, or socioeconomic status. Mass tourism began in Cuba, as in Mexico, during the era of Prohibition in the United States (1919–1933) and burgeoned after World War II. It was heavily promoted during the years that Batista ruled the island, first backstage from 1934 to 1940, then as president from 1940 to 1944, and later as head of the military coup of 1952. In 1953, Batista's government created tax havens for investors in hotel construction, and the Banco Nacional loaned more than US\$80 million to private companies that wished to build tourist attractions, including restaurants and hotels. Most investors were from the United States, where tourism to Cuba was heavily marketed through films, television, and radio. Conrad Hilton opened the Havana Hilton in 1958, and between 1952 and Castro's overthrow of Batista in 1959, a total of thirteen "new ultramodern hotels" were built (124). Merrill underscores the presence of casinos and mobsters, sexual tourism, discrimination against locals, and the great inequality of wealth between guests and hosts.

After the Cuban Revolution, Castro sought to promote more egalitarian tourism, planning sixty public beaches around the island with low-cost hotels aimed at the working class. At the same time, tourism from the United States continued to decline because Cuba was viewed as anti-American. Merrill maintains that Castro was indeed attempting to combat U.S. economic and political hegemony. Relations between the United States and Cuba deteriorated to the point that the U.S. government imposed a trade embargo and restrictions on travel to Cuba. However, even before the revolution, Merrill points out, Puerto Rico was eclipsing Cuba as a tourist destination. As in Batista's Cuba, early tourism to Puerto Rico was exploitative and a "colonial project," according to Merrill, in that it depended on outsiders for capital to build both hotels and infrastructure

(181). Nonetheless, the planning of tourist development lay in the hands of the state.

Merrill stresses the ambivalence with which Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico saw tourists, with both “appreciation and distain” in all three cases (289). He concludes that tourism can be considered an instance of U.S. empire building and that U.S. diplomatic relations depended partially on the soft power of tourists. Yet he also underscores the agency of local people, especially their ability to dispute stereotypes and redirect the gaze of tourists. And whereas some tourists acted disrespectfully and aggressively, others were open to cultural understanding and negotiation. This emphasis on tourism as a form of soft power and as an instrument in the expansion of U.S. empire and the attention paid to the agency of local people in confronting foreign tourists make Merrill’s book an innovative contribution to the literature on tourism.

Beginning with an analysis of tourism’s development in the 1940s, Evan R. Ward looks at the interaction between the industry’s private sector and state policies in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. He concentrates heavily on the roles of Nelson and Laurance Rockefeller and Conrad Hilton in hotel and resort development in the four countries. Although he does not use the terms *soft power* or *goodwill ambassador*, Ward does point out that Nelson Rockefeller, coordinator of inter-American affairs under Franklin D. Roosevelt, wanted not only to promote private investment in Latin America but also to improve U.S. relations. The premise that the construction of hotels would encourage economic growth generally, and provide foreign exchange needed to import foreign goods in particular, was, Ward maintains, popularized by the United States and accepted by countries in the Spanish Caribbean and elsewhere.

Ward notes that when Castro established himself in Havana in February 1958, he used the Hilton Hotel as his residence and base of operations. In January 1959, Castro invited tourists and businesspeople from the United States to return to Cuba. The number of foreign visitors continued to decline, however, and in 1960, Castro announced that the tourist sector would reorient itself to Cuban nationals. In 1961, foreign-owned tourist properties were nationalized. In the 1970s, Cuba again sought out foreign tourists, and in the mid-1980s, when economic troubles led the Soviet Union to cut subsidies to Cuba, Castro emphasized the need for infrastructure development. He turned to Europe for advice. Sol Meliá, a Spanish hotel chain, became a guiding force in this development. At least five other hotel chains based in Spain later joined Sol Meliá. Ward evaluates the impact of the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 and other anti-Cuban legislation on the Cuban tourism industry, identifying among its results that Spanish investors were targeted for trafficking in property that had belonged to U.S.-based investors before nationalization.

Although both Merrill and Ward show how international politics affect tourist development, Merrill stresses the expanding influence and imperial outreach of the United States. In contrast, Ward is concerned primarily with investments by private interests and banks, as well as the work of organizations formed to foment and facilitate development in tourist destinations. He examines the unique configuration of political, economic, and social agents in the origins and development of the tourist centers of Cancún (Mexico), Dorado Beach (Puerto Rico), Varadero (Cuba), and Punta Cana (Dominican Republic), with particular attention to the people and governmental bodies involved in each site.

According to Ward, when the Banco de México created the Fondo de Promoción de Infraestructura Turística (INFRATUR) in 1968, it saw a state-led tourist center in Cancún as a means to overcome unemployment in the Yucatán Peninsula. Funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, INFRATUR was charged not only with developing but also maintaining the city's infrastructure. Until 1982, Cancún received primarily domestic, rather than foreign, tourists.

Ward explains that tourism had little importance in the Dominican Republic until the late 1960s, as a result of political instability. In 1968, under the auspices of the Organization of American States, the consulting firm of H. Zinder and Associates evolved a plan to promote tourism with an eye both to ease balance of payment deficits and to create employment. A commission headed by the Spaniard Juan de Arespacochaga y Felipe mapped potential tourist zones outside of Santo Domingo and proposed the development of 60 miles of first-class and 120 miles of second-class beaches as part of an eight-year program to increase tourist numbers from forty-five thousand in 1967 to eight hundred thousand in 1975. The relatively isolated area of Punta Cana became an important center with the arrival of Club Med as well as the establishment of the Puntacana Ecological Foundation, which aimed at sustainable tourism. Whereas financing depended on loans from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, the national government of the Dominican Republic was charged with developing hotels and other tourism infrastructure. Private companies were left to invest in some elements of hotels and other aspects of the plan.

The Puerto Rican government presented plans for state-led tourism development through the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO) as early as the mid-1940s and was intent on including American-based hotel companies in its projects. In the late 1950s, Laurance Rockefeller built the Dorado Beach Hotel, later selling 80 percent of it to Eastern Airlines.

Amalia L. Cabezas summarizes more than a decade of research, beginning in the 1990s, on "sexualized tourism" in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. She goes beyond sex tourism and prostitution to explore romantic relationships that are sometimes long term and may even end

in marriage, as well as intermittent sex work by women in the hospitality industry. Cabezas contends that the racialized, sexualized, and eroticized bodies of local men and women are basic to tourists' imagination. She outlines how, from the very beginning, the Dominican Republic and Cuba depended on tourism and on the multinational corporations that underwrite it. Building on this idea, Cabezas, like Ward, underscores how the Torricelli Bill of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 were intended to undermine Cuba's economy by attacking its tourism industry. Nonetheless, Cuba remained a destination for tourists and for investment in tourism by European countries, especially Spain.

In the course of her analysis, Cabezas notes several instances when the reality of tourism contradicts official policy. For example, the best beaches in Cuba and the Dominican Republic are racially segregated—so, too, are housing in the Cuban resort of Varadero and the types of jobs available to workers in tourist hotels. Thus, although Cabezas does not explicitly state this, Castro's push toward egalitarianism has not reached fruition. And despite regulations issued by the Cuban government in 2005 advising workers employed in tourism to avoid mingling with tourists, the hotel industry itself encourages such intimacy. In both the Dominican Republic and Cuba, hotel staff often provide sexual services as an extension of the caring or "emotional labor" that they are expected to supply to guests (109). This role is enhanced in Cuba because of the "tourist apartheid" that forbids citizens from entering hotels, resorts, and beaches (106). Thus, hotel staff may be the only Cubans with whom tourists are able to interact.

Cabezas goes on to consider how various women—from poor female heads of household to professionals such as lawyers—may use "tactical sex" to support their families or in the hope of emigrating (137). She speaks of the "intricate accommodations and negotiations" that women undertake in the globalized economy (137), in which the actions of tourists affect their own lives and those of others, and she finds that there are varying degrees of sexual commodification in any heterosexual relationship. Although Cabezas does not refer to soft power, the interactions between tourists and host women that she presents can be envisioned as examples of such power flowing in both directions. Besides adding to literature on the apartheid that often exists in tourist destinations, Cabezas contributes to an understanding of the variety of male and female relations that can occur in tourist destinations. Although she builds on existing literature, her approach to gender relations is innovative.

The four books reviewed bring into focus the development and experiences of tourism in Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, and all have value for both scholars and graduate students. The term *goodwill ambassador* used by Berger and Merrill and Merrill's application of the concept of soft power are particularly helpful and might be adopted to explore other tourist sites around the world.