

# Tourism and History

**John K. Walton**

## Contemporary Tourism Reviews

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## About the author

John K. Walton, a graduate of Merton College, Oxford and the University of Lancaster, is an Ikerbasque Professor in the Department of Contemporary History, University of the Basque Country UPV/ EHU. He has worked for many years on themes in the history of tourism, especially coastal resorts, and especially in Britain and Spain, and he edits the *Journal of Tourism History* for Routledge. His most recent books are (edited, with Patrick Browne) *Coastal Regeneration in England - 2010* (Lincoln: Coastal Communities Alliance), and (with Keith Hanley) *Constructing Cultural Tourism: John Ruskin and the Tourist Gaze* (Bristol: Channel View, 2010).

## Introduction

The relationships between researchers and teachers in Tourism Studies and History have until recently been intermittent and remote. Tourism Studies, as it has emerged as an academic discipline, has been dominated by economics, and by business and management studies. It has had little time for the humanities, although it has accommodated important perspectives from geography, sociology and anthropology. The important developments in the academic study of travel writing in the past, often with a strong gender dimension, have tended to remain within their own (highly productive) silo, although some contributions from literary historians have made a sustained impact. ([Fussell, 1980](#), [Buzard, 1993](#)) I have discussed the enduring, but eroding, resistance of Tourism Studies to the recognition of History, and of the humanities more generally, in recent publications, which also explore the varieties, ramifications, themes and geographical spread of work in the history of tourism ([Walton, 2009a](#), [2009b](#)).

## Tourism and the Culture of the Historical Profession

Historians, on the other hand, have been very slow to recognise the potential significance of tourism's past for their discipline. They have failed to recognise the global (and globalising) importance of tourism as a transforming set of economic activities as it has emerged as the largest and most pervasive international industry of the new millennium, feeding off and into transport innovation, inter-cultural contact, social transformation and environmental impact, and linking up with traditional historians' concerns such as politics, empires and diplomacy as well as economic development. The enduring preoccupation of British economic historians with the now defunct or moribund industries of the first Industrial Revolution, in the form of cotton, coal, iron and steel, and shipbuilding, or (of much greater current relevance) with the financial services industries, has pre-empted any widespread recognition of the importance of tourism, or the opportunities it presents. Even the economic historians' turn from supply to demand, to consumption and consumerism, has concentrated attention more on retailing and the supply of tangible goods than on the consumption of experiences; and where this has gained ground, the dominant focus has been on entertainment, shows and audiences rather than tourism as a theme in itself. This has been a general pattern: it has not been confined to the British historical profession.

Over the last few years, however, significant changes have been gathering momentum. Isolated works on tourism history go back more than half a century, although three of the pioneering British productions came from a civil servant, a geographer and a poet. ([Pimlott, 1947](#); [Gilbert, 1953](#); [Nicholson, 1955](#)) British professional historians began to take an interest during the 1970s, but the publications that began to appear towards the end of the decade were slow to gain recognition outside a small niche area, and this was also the case with the similarly emerging field of leisure history ([Walvin, 1978](#); [Walton, 1978](#); [Bailey, 1978](#); [Cunningham, 1980](#)). The growing visibility of tourism as a dynamic and economically significant set of phenomena was also sufficient, by this time, to encourage the writing of overviews from outside the historical academy, some of which proved to be of lasting value, such as [Turner and Ash's](#) (1975) coinage of the 'pleasure periphery'. [Gaviria's](#) (1974) contemporary history of the rapid growth of tourism in Spain under the sponsorship of the Franco regime, relating it to the developing literature on neo-colonialism, was also a landmark publication. Over the following two decades outputs

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