

EDITED BY JIM BUTCHER

TOURISM'S HORIZON

Travel for the Millions



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Tourism is the focus for so many cultural and even political debates these days. We – experts, writers, holidaymakers, workers in the industry – ought to address them. *Tourism's Horizon: Travel for the Millions* facilitate that with style and substance, online, and now in print.

David Gillbanks,
Publisher of TH:TM's partner
The "Good Tourism" Blog



Tourism's Horizon: Travel for the Millions, supported by ATLAS, is a thought-provoking project that challenges and extends conventional knowledge about tourism. This publication, building on this online blog, provides a diversity of reflections on important aspects of tourism. It promotes much-needed debate on the future of tourism, addressing critical issues from overtourism and sustainability through to tourism transportation and post-pandemic recovery. It is essential reading for anyone interested in progress in the tourism and leisure sector.

Corné Dijkmans,

Chair of ATLAS (Association of Tourism
and Leisure Education and Research)



**Tourism's Horizon:
Travel for the Millions**

Reflections and viewpoints

Edited by Jim Butcher



Goodfellow Publishers Ltd



Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited,
26 Home Close, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PS
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: on file.

ISBN: 978-1-917433-36-5

DOI: 10.23912/978-1-9174333495-6152

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Design and typesetting by P.K. McBride, www.macbride.org.uk

Cover design by Cylinder

Photo: Rob Ball, 'Benidorm', Hoxton Mini Press

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Why Tourism's Horizon: Travel for the Millions?

In January 2023, I, with the support of a number of colleagues and acquaintances dotted around the globe, established *Tourism's Horizon: Travel for the Millions* (TH:TM). The initiative was prompted by a number of things, some of which are often discussed in the universities and beyond, others less so.

First, whilst the people supportive of TH:TM cover the full gamut of social and political views, we shared the view that writing and commentary about mass tourism, as a staple of modern culture, often paid scant regard to the humanity or agency of tourists themselves. Whilst Raymond Williams emphasised that masses are made up of individuals, individuality is often written out in caricatures of mass behaviour and consumption. That is characteristic of discussions of tourism today, certainly in the universities, and all too often elsewhere too. We'd like to find the individual in the mass, and challenge the stereotypes.

Second, tourism associated with 'mass tourism' is not infrequently written out of leading academic books and journals, in favour of analyses of volunteer tourism, regenerative tourism, ecotourism and so on. Some forms of tourism enjoyed by the public – beach holidays and cruise ships being two examples – are often considered damaging and less than ethical, or at best passé, in some quarters. Mass tourism features, implicitly or explicitly, first and foremost as a problem to which experts seek a partial solution, or at least a degree of mitigation.

Whilst those of us close to the project don't all share the same view of modern tourism, we feel that greater consideration of the progressive legacy of mass leisure travel is important as we consider issues in the present and an uncertain future. Thomas Cook, the 'father of modern tourism', once wrote: *'These are the days of the millions [who can] o'erleap the bounds of their own narrow circle, rub off rust and prejudice by contact with others, and expand their sails and invigorate their bodies by an exploration of some of nature's finest scenes.'* He struck an optimistic note, and was criticised for doing so in his day. Some question whether optimism can be justified today. Yet we inherit a legacy from the past with many progressive features, culturally and economically.

Notwithstanding 'overtourism' and other putative problems associated with tourism, we could do with a modern-day Thomas Cook, willing to stand firm on the benefits of mass tourism.

Third, we felt that there was the need for a bridge between some of the ideas and perspectives from the universities and experts on the one hand, and an intelligent public on the other. For us, the bridge between experts and public can be accessed from both sides. In that spirit we publish articles by people outside of the universities, and by undergraduates too, some featured in this volume. These have been read, commented upon, cited and invoked in discussions by colleagues and experts 'higher up' the ladder of expertise. And for the expert class, there is great merit in presenting ideas to the public. It involves testing out how we present those ideas, and the substance of the ideas themselves. For anyone wanting to sharpen up their arguments or test out their views, amongst the public is exactly the place to do it.

Engagement with the public through popular writing should not and need not involve 'dumbing down'. In fact, precisely the opposite. A strong essay, or even an interesting short blog post, often involves deep reading, contemplative thought and a wealth of experience. We would like to encourage people – students and the public – to write 'long form' and read widely. The crisis of reading is a phenomenon of our times. Many universities and educational establishments have contributed to the crisis by lowering the status of reading and moving away from assessment that makes demands on students' ability to communicate ideas and arguments in written form.

Fourth, and relatedly, I've long thought that good academic writing can and often should strive to present complex, abstract ideas simply, without doing so simplistically. Blogs posts and essays are one way to do that. George Orwell advocated for good writing that avoided 'jargon words' where there was a perfectly good equivalent in everyday usage. Some seem to have reversed Orwell's advice, looking for complex language where it is not warranted, leading to the all too common 'word salad'.

That is not an argument against the usage of specialist language and concepts, or fora aimed at experts – there is such a thing as expertise,

albeit often contested. But equally there is an intelligent public, and 'the wisdom of the crowd' often acts as a corrective to highfalutin' theories uninformed by or unmediated to the reality of how most people live.

Finally, Cook's claim that through experiencing the diversity of the world through travel, we can '*o'erleap the bounds of our own narrow circle, and rub off rust and prejudice by contact with others*', applies equally well to discussing and writing about travel, tourism and much else. Given that there is great diversity of opinion, talking to, rather than past, each other benefits all parties. To that end, we support tolerance of, and openness to, a range of views. Some are on offer here, and we hope to extend this on the blog and in other publications.

Critical times

For most people tourism is about enjoyment and relaxation. It has always been so. Holidays for the masses developed as welcome respite from the rigours, regulation and regimentation of working life. Today more people than ever can look forward to a holiday. But it is also true that tourism is subject to strong critique – arguably stronger than ever.

Since 2017 'overtourism' has rapidly emerged as a key part of the tourism-critical vocabulary to describe a range of different tensions – environmental, cultural and economic – associated with the continued rise of mass international leisure travel. Numerous books and papers, international pronouncements and travel writers have adopted the term. The message seems clear – tourism has gone over a limit, and needs to be reined in. That limit may be environmental or social, economic or cultural. Equally it may be local or global. The shared sense of limits characterises much commentary on and analysis of tourism.

This is not restricted to the Ivory Tower of academia. 'Overtourism' is debated around the word, in the media and, to a degree, among the public. Sporadic protests and other expressions of dissatisfaction remind us that holidays are not without significant problems.

A focus for critique in the universities has been the growth of the critical tourism studies school of thought (see Mary Mostafanezhad's article in this volume). The Frankfurt School of theorists that this tradition draws upon were originally focused on the politics of class: the failure

of working class movements to prevent the horrors of world wars, and later the influence of mass consumption on class and human solidarity.

Looming larger than social class in today's critique is the politics of consumption. What, and how, we consume has become established as of a moral focus of people's lives. This is reflected in the growth of ethical tourism since the 1980s, which has spawned a number of other prefixes on tourism: eco, green, regenerative, community etc. Each can be looked at in two senses: as niche products for people appreciative of a particular experience; and as a moral stance in favour of the environment or the disadvantaged. The latter in particular feeds a sense that there is problematic tourism (cruises, AirBnB, stag weekends ...), and there are virtuous attempts to address the problem through travel (regenerative travel, ecotourism, volunteer tourism). This moralisation of tourism is, for better or worse, the cultural context of today's debates about tourism.

But there are other features of the contemporary moment that shape these debates too. We know that millions more people, principally in Asia, will become part of the traveling set in the coming years, following the historical experience in wealthy regions of the world. Increasing numbers of people in the poorer but economically developing continent of Africa, too, will be able to join. Pontificating about various small scale niches, worthy or not, will not cater for the new masses doing what the old masses have done for a few generations now – sating their desire for international travel. Therefore it is perhaps important to look at the categories adopted by some critics – sustainable tourism, regenerative tourism etc – in the context of continued growth and development, rather than as necessarily antithetical to it. There is a clear contradiction between the arguments for reining in tourism on environmental and cultural grounds on one hand, and the desires of consumers on the other. It's a contradiction more often avoided than confronted.

Tourism need not be envisaged as a zero-sum game, with millions more people descending on a limited number of destinations, exacerbating tensions associated with 'overtourism'. Part of economic advancement could be the development of new infrastructure, facilities and resorts to enable more people to travel to different, rather than the same, places. Can we envisage a future in which millions more people travel

to thousands more places? Is the solution to overtourism in Venice and Barcelona for there to be more Venices and Barcelonas (or more Benidorms and Cancuns) and for the currently non-leisure mobile masses to be able to access these places using new efficient 'clean' forms of transport paid for through economic growth?

Indeed, this is what is happening in some cases, Chinese cities have become major international tourist draws, alongside the growing domestic and international tourism of their own expanding middle classes. New coastal and ski resorts have been built, mirroring developments accompanying industrial development in Europe and North America in the past. The paucity of new infrastructure projects in these latter places today is not replicated in China and other countries in Asia, where mobility, including for leisure, continues to expand. Problems, certainly, but should we not view this as progress and cause for some optimism too?

One of the fascinating things about studying the industry is that tourism is a focus for so many wider cultural and political issues. There are few issues that hit the news headlines that do not have a 'tourism' angle. Climate advocacy, the housing crisis, regeneration and much else – and for some even political themes around coloniality and privilege – have become themes associated with tourism. The title of a book published a while back, *The tourist as a metaphor of the social world*, sums it up nicely. This makes tourism an interesting topic – you can write about something specific and even personal in the context of, and with reference to, wider cultural and political trends. There is surely scope for developing this mode of writing about travel and tourism.

When we are thinking about debates to do with tourism, it is also worth also thinking about the language we use to frame these debates. It is imprecise to say the least. Take 'Sustainable tourism'. Following on from the 1992 Rio Conference (the oft cited keynote United Nations Conference on Environment and Sustainability), sustainability has become a fundamental principle adhered to or rhetorically supported by almost everyone. Has anyone ever argued 'I'm for unsustainable tourism'?. Sustainable tourism is tourism that leaves something better for the next generation. It is also defined in terms of the triple bottom line – the need to factor in environment and culture alongside the economy.

But what is 'better'? Isn't that the stuff of politics, of democracy? And what should the balance be between economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts? What criteria and categories do we use? Perhaps more importantly, who gets to decide? The truth is that sustainable tourism is more of a question than an answer. It is the terrain on which differences of view can be expressed.

These are all debates that people interested in the future of tourism should be open to. The adage 'two ideas can be true at the same time' is apposite when we do: there are significant, serious challenges facing the industry, but also the legacy of mass travel is worth celebrating; the platform economy has caused significant problems regarding housing crisis, but it may also benefit economies and culture and provide an income for some who need it; tourism can place a strain on water and other local resources, but it also contributes to economic growth, enabling societies to address these problems at higher levels of development. Nuance and engagement across the various views is important, and is something TH:TM seeks to cultivate.

The book

The book has two main sections: we conducted a series of interviews across 2023 and 2024 with a number of leading experts who have been studying and writing about tourism for many years. We reproduce these here as the 'Reflections'. As the participants were asked similar questions, the interviews are mostly set out here question by question, in the form of a dialogue. This is a timely reflection on the field of study, with much food for thought looking towards the future. The interviews created much interest when published online, and we feel provide a great resource for anyone researching or thinking about tourism. Students thinking about the evolution of the ideas scholars and others draw upon when discussing tourism – past, present or future – should find the interviews valuable, helping them to situate their own thinking, research or writing in a wider tradition.

The second part is a collection of articles from the TH:TM blog, themed under a number of headings: freedom; the people; development; academic affairs. These are the 'Viewpoints'. Each theme carries

its own short introduction for some context. The aim is not a comprehensive textbook or monograph, but a series of insights, think-pieces and polemics. These are interesting, topical articles in their own right, but can also be used as prompts for seminars and other discussions for those studying. More fundamentally, they are indicative of the public conversation about holidays that we should be having, both inside and outside the professional class of experts and academics to which some of us belong or aspire to belong to.

Overall, this novel publishing experiment hopes to contribute in a small way to an ambitious aim: good writing that bridges expertise and the public discussion of contemporary mass tourism.

Enjoy the book, contribute to the debates.

