Itinerario (2024), 1–7
doi:10.1017/S0165115324000305

Check for updates

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

AFTERWORD

Afterword: Tourism and Empire

Eric G. E. Zuelow

University of New England, Biddeford, ME, United States
Email: ezuelow@une.edu

Abstract

This afterword provides a critical examination of the historical connections between tourism and empire. To contextualise this discussion, a concise overview is provided of the history of tourism, its entanglements with empire and expansion into a truly global industry in the modern era. This is followed by an analysis that draws on the articles making up this special issue in order to highlight their contributions and connections to the most recent wider literature and in particular the significant themes raised that have thus far been underrepresented in the nascent historiography on tourism and empire. The afterword finishes by providing a strong argument for the necessity of continuing this line of investigation further, with a particular emphasis on the need to understand the double role of tourism as both an instrument of imperial oppression, as well as a site of localised forms of agency and contestation.

Keywords: tourism; empire; global history

In their introduction, Andreas Greiner and Mikko Toivanen express their objective for this special issue: to critically assess the " 'colonial baggage' of tourism" and to "demonstrate that tourism, far from being a mere curiosity, played a crucial role in shaping imperial and trans-imperial relations around the world." Scholars of empire should take note.

Tourism and empire have long been closely linked. Leisure travel went global on the backs of imperial regimes during the second half of the nineteenth century. They used it as a means of exercising power and of both promoting and justifying their rule. At the same time, indigenes also utilised it to create a sense of common purpose and to exercise resistance. Following decolonisation, the mark left by empire tourism remained. The image sold to tourists frequently changed little. Power tended to reside with the same groups. And yet, postcolonial governments often used tourism to promote economic development. Tourism workers were sometimes able to parley skills earned before independence to attain leadership roles afterward. On a more negative front, some developers created sites celebrating nostalgia for the colonial era, selectively forgetting inconvenient truths.

Shaping Imperial Relationships

By the mid-nineteenth century, modern tourism was well established. There were guidebooks telling people "what ought to be seen," a belief that tourism promised self-improvement and that people should engage in it, and even a deep connection between tourism and politics that dated to the start of the Grand Tour. What's more, tourism and nationalism enjoyed a symbiotic bond, each promoting the other in ways that imperialists

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Leiden Institute for History

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

would ultimately find very useful and that indigenes would utilise as well.[1] Indeed, the growth of modern European empires during the nineteenth century turned the politics of tourism to new purpose. Leisure travel had the potential to create identities, to fuel support for political ideologies, to teach people about the nation-state and its activities. In imperial settings, it further magnified differences between self and other while helping forward a narrative that justified colonial rule. The Belgians, whose actions in Congo were horrific by any standard, even tried to use it to "recover its tarnished reputation."[2] Tourism showcased what Europeans perceived as progress: the construction of railways or the introduction of new agricultural techniques, for example. It highlighted difference and sold a narrative of white superiority.

Until quite recently the historiography of empire tourism in English was limited, yet evocative. Without any pretension to being exhaustive: there was excellent work on hill stations,[3] engaging stories about the Thomas Cook and Son travel agency,[4] studies of the Orientalising role of guidebooks,[5] small literatures exploring tourism experiences in French,[6] Italian,[7] and Belgian[8] colonies, along with a few other bits and bobs.[9] For the most part, narratives depicted power that flowed in one direction, assuring that Europeans were aware of the barbarity of those they ruled.[10]

Laith Shakir's contribution to this issue certainly illustrates that such a focus on the imperial uses of tourism is important. His essay shows the critical role of infrastructure in the colonialist imaginary by making clear "how empire lay at the heart of transportation infrastructure." Just as with railways roughly a half century before, the development of air routes had considerable promise. Imperial Airways' "empire route" would

---

[1] Eric G. E. Zuelow, 'Tourism, Nations, and Nationalism,' in Eric G. E. Zuelow and Kevin J. James (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Tourism and Travel,* (online ed., Oxford Academic, 21 June). 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190889555.013.27, accessed 25 Jan. 2024.

[2] Andrew Wigley, "Against the Wind: the Role of Belgian Colonial Tourism Marketing in Resisting Pressure to Decolonize from Africa," *Journal of Tourism History* 7:3 (2015), 193–209.

[3] Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley, University of California, 1996); Eric T. Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[4] Piers Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 Years of Popular Tourism* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1991); M. Christopher Low, "The Infidel Piloting the 'True Believer': Thomas Cook and the Business of the Colonial Hajj," in *The Hajj and Europe in the Age of Empire* ed. Umar Ryad (New York, Brill, 2017), 47–80. See also John Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015).

[5] Kathleen R. Epelde, "Travel Guidebooks to India: A Century and a Half of Orientalism," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004); M. Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* Second Edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

[6] For example: Nadège Chabloz, "Tourism and Primitivism: Initiation to *bwiti* and *iboga* in Gabon," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 193/4, nos 1–2 (January 2009): 391–428; Ellen Furlough, "*Une leçon des choses:* Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 441–473; Sopie Dulucq, "Discovering the African Soul: Difficulties Faced by Cultural Tourism in French Colonial Africa (1920s-1950s), *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 193/4, nos 1–2 (January 2009): 27–48; and Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

[7] For example: Stephanie Malia Hom, "Empires of tourism: travel and rhetoric in Italian colonial Libya and Albania, 1911–1943, *Journal of Tourism History* 4, No. 3 (November 2012): 281–300; R.J.B. Bosworth, "Tourist Planning in Fascist Italy and the Limits of Totalitarian Culture," *Contemporary European History* 6, No. 1 (March 1997): 1–25.

[8] Gerrit Verhoeven and Nina Payrhuber, "'Les pèlerins de la saison sèche': Colonial Tourism in the Belgian Congo, 1945–60," *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, No. 3 (June 2018): 573–593.

[9] The following represents a key moment in the flowering of scholarship exploring the importance of empire tourism (to which this special issue promises a significant contribution): Shelley Baranowski et al. "Tourism and empire," *Journal of Tourism History*, 7, no. 1–2 (April-August, 2015): 100–130.

[10] Manu Goswami, " 'Englishness' on the imperial circuit: mutiny tours in colonial South Asia," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 9:1 (1996), 54–84.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"frame colonial development as exciting for tourists," yielding political and economic benefits in the process. From a British perspective, it was also "morally sound" because it would "improve" the Iraqis by dragging them into modernity. Imperial Airways would make Iraq a vital hub, a "transit node," and a point of connection with the wider world. This imperialist message was spread widely through advertisements, articles "in specialist and general interest periodicals," as well as through both textual and visual ephemera. As tourists gazed down on the ruins of 10,000 years of human history, they could reflect on Britain's benevolence and its role in bringing the ancient world up to date.[11]

The symbolic role of modern technology extended beyond transportation; it could even help make places deemed unhealthy healthy. As is widely known, for most of the nineteenth century much of Central and South America represented a "graveyard for white folks," with diseases such as dysentery, malaria, yellow fever, typhoid, yaws, dropsy, and distemper resulting in as many as 121.3 deaths per thousand among British troops stationed in Jamaica between 1817 and 1836.[12] According to Elliott Sturtevant, one important means of making the tropics safe for white people was "thermal colonization," utilising refrigeration to cool both bananas and tourists so that they might safely cross the "heat line." As with transportation technology, air conditioning offered the "use of a sense of temperature to justify colonial expansion and inhabitation." It would combat economic backwardness, drawing a contrast between white industriousness and Jamaica's Black inhabitants who stood as examples of the primitivism being vanquished by modern technology.

As much symbolic power as tourism held for colonisers, it was not a one-way street, a simple binary of oppressed and oppressor. Indigenes had agency. They were exploited, but they could and did use tourism as well. Sometimes this meant creating narratives celebrating their own culture and history, sometimes it meant pushing a political agenda, and sometimes it meant using tourism as a site of resistance. This should not surprise. Travel created, as Mary Louise Pratt noted many years ago, a "contact zone" in which different groups confronted one another.[13] Those interactions generated a lot of messy complexity.

Empire tourism in Java yielded just such a contact zone with various results. Dutch authorities, much like other colonial regimes, used tourism to help legitimise their rule, "maintaining colonial hierarchies of race, class, and gender." As Arnout van der Meer recounts, the story did not stop there. Javanese tourism workers had their limits. In one instance, a guide, angered by mistreatment and "meagre pay," extracted revenge by killing one of his bosses.[14] Things were not usually so stark. Tourist spaces represented a liminal space where colonial norms were transgressed, despite coloniser concerns about racial and cultural purity. This reality evidently held true in many colonised areas. In a recent book, Todd Cleveland notes that while racial divisions were usually strictly

[11] See also: Laith Shakir, " 'A land made fit for tourists': Thomas Cook, tourism promotion, and colonial development in Iraq, 1920–1932" *Journal of Tourism History* 16:2 (August 2024), 133–150.

[12] Frank Fonda Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise: A History of the Jamaican Tourist Industry* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 13–16. See also: Catherine Cocks, *Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[13] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992, 2008), 3, 8.

[14] Maurizio Peleggi recounts less deadly forms of resistance by tourism workers who engaged in theft, gossip about guests, physical confrontations, and threats while working at hotels in Singapore and British Columbo. See "The social and Material Live of Colonial Hotels: Comfort Zones as Contact Zones in British Columbo and Singapore, ca. 1870–1930," *Journal of Social History* 46:1 (October 2012), 144.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

enforced in Mozambique, in tourism spaces Blacks and whites interacted in "highly unconventional ways" that diverged significantly from "prevailing colonial standards."[15]

Tourism sometimes offered an opportunity for colonial subjects to exert agency in ways that might not have been possible in other arenas. Thus, Candida Keithley describes how Māori guides in New Zealand constructed "an imagined Whakarewarewa." They selected sites and constructed narratives which deviated from that of British imperialists, not to mention tourists. Their efforts "challenged the government's material maps and the exotic fantasies of tourists … undermining the supposed substantive sovereignty of the Crown and the cultural processes of colonization." The "Crown believed it should be the one in charge," but this act of Māori resistance demonstrates that tourism placed unique pressures on imperial hegemony.

Until recently, scholars largely seem to have missed the agency that van der Meer, Keithley, and Cleveland describe. There was perhaps too much acceptance of Gayatri Spivak's declaration that "the voice of the colonized subject can never be recovered" for "it has been drowned out by the oppressive collusion of colonial discourses."[16] While imperialists undoubtedly hoped to silence their subjects, they were not nearly that powerful. Even the Raj was never "an administrative monolith, a leviathan that was capable of repressing all opposition (and certainly of suppressing any ethnic assertion)."[17]

The challenge is to listen carefully for subaltern voices. Because of the liminal zones it created, tourism represents an intriguing place to do so, and it provides a variety of previously underutilised sources for exploration. As is clear in the essays included here, oral histories, passed-down oral traditions, and even tourism-related material culture and publications offer fruitful opportunities. To further illustrate the point, in India, for example, there is a trail of source material beginning with "Company" paintings produced by Indian artists for sale to members of the East India Company. These images were designed to satisfy a European gaze, but they contain details that showcase a local interpretation of culture.[18] Later, Indian authors wrote their own guides, careful readings of which illustrate a multiplicity of interpretations of religion, history, and landscape demonstrating the complexity of Indian politics on the sub-Continent at the *fin de siècle*, not to mention narratives of India's past and people that are separate from the imperial gaze.[19]

In this collection, Susie Protschky seeks clues about the lives of subaltern tourism workers in Indonesia using yet another source: photographs taken by Europeans that include porters and guides. Although these tourism workers do not generally turn up in European writing, they do appear in tourist images. According to Protschky, "It is chiefly in photographs that we get a sense of what the labour of Indonesian tourism workers who facilitated these activities entailed." The images, which tend to strike "a more intimate register" make "subalterns 'visible'." We find porters and guides acting as body servants, providing protection, carrying Europeans and their gear up steep mountains, cooking meals, and so on. It was often backbreaking, and yet, at least some workers appear as "members of a travelling household." They are presented in a different light

[15] Todd Cleveland, *Alluring Opportunities: Tourism, Empire, and African Labor in Colonial Mozambique* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2023), 28–9.

[16] Paraphrased by Dane Kennedy in *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 16.

[17] John Darwin, 'Empire and ethnicity', *Nations and Nationalism* 16:3 (July 2010), 384.

[18] Crispin Branfoot, "Painting processions: The social and religious landscape of Southern India in a 'Company' album", *Orientations* 38 (November/December 2007), 76 and 78.

[19] Eric G. E. Zuelow, "Negotiating National Identity Through Tourism in Colonial South Asia and Beyond," in *The Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism* eds Cathie Carmichael, Matthew D'Auria, and Aviel Roshwald, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 640–660.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from other Indonesians "whom photographers frequently cast as exotic members of groups discernible by the styles of their hair, ornaments, clothing, and accoutrements." Put another way, the photographs show tourism labourers given insider status, transgressing more ordinary barriers.

Colonial Baggage: Tourism and the Legacies of Empire

Tourism is also part of the story of collapsing empires. Tourist infrastructure clearly had symbolic significance for both colonisers and colonised. For example, while hotel workers were almost always unwelcome when not working, patrons enjoyed every luxury. As Blake C. Scott puts it: "As 'bastions' of privilege, yet dependent on racialised and exploited labour, hotels evolved into battlegrounds between the colonial past-present and an undecided future. They were, in the words of scholar James Clifford, " 'crucial sites for an unfinished modernity' .... A site not only for luxury but also protest."[20] Thus, hotels in Panama, Egypt, and Cuba were the target of extreme violence.[21]

Other tourism sites also became focal points for anti-colonial struggle. In Mozambique, the Gorongosa park drew the attention of freedom fighters who recognised that it was a source of significant income and positive publicity for the Portuguese regime. The result were violent altercations and a number of deaths.[22] The story in India is more nuanced; at least some Indian guidebook writers used their books to direct Indian tourists toward an understanding of "all India" as a singular nation—an important stage on the path to Independence and a direct swipe at the divide-and-conquer strategy used by the Raj.[23]

Violence aside, the increasingly altered composition of visitors to colonial resorts reflected a coming change. In Java, the Javanese "embrace of mountain resorts and colonial tourist itineraries" equated to what van der Meer describes as "a remarkable and telling moment in (post)colonial history." Something similar happened in India when South Asians began adopting hill stations at Darjeeling and Shimla, for example, as their own, driving their colonial rulers out.[24]

Following the ultimate collapse of empires, tourism represented a viable development strategy for newly independent postcolonial states. Industries created for both economic and political reasons during the colonial era were repurposed for a new age. In her article, Dörte Lerp discusses the differing approaches to tourism adopted in Tanzania and Kenya. In each case, the "myth of wild Africa," complete with impressive and unique wildlife, was the predominant product. Tourism facilitated wildlife conservation as well as employment and income. According to Lerp, however, the emphasis on conservation "meant that colonial motives and stereotypes remained central to the marketing of East Africa." In Kenya, developing tourism meant opting for "a liberal approach" that opened "the country for mass tourism as well as for private investors." Tanzanian officials adopted a different strategy, "trying to consolidate tourism development with [Julius] Nyerere's vision of African socialism," an idea that was supposed to "overcome colonial dependencies." This required far more state intervention and management. According to Lerp, neither approach was perfect. In Kenya, the sale of "wildlife experiences … led to a further proliferation of colonial stereotypes." Most jobs paid little until government officials intervened to help "African Kenyans to enter high end jobs within the tourism sector."

[20] Blake C. Scott, "Revolution at the hotel: Panama and luxury travel in the age of decolonisation," *Journal of Tourism History,* 10:2 (August 2018), 149–150.

[21] Black C. Scott, *Unpacked: A History of Caribbean Tourism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 74, 137. Also see note #15 above.

[22] Cleveland, *Alluring Opportunities*, 134–138

[23] Zuelow, "Negotiating", 654–658.

[24] Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, 202–222

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In Tanzania, socialism proved ineffective. Infrastructure fell into decline, and privatisation proved necessary.

Further south in Mozambique, the government initially rejected tourism because of its colonial associations, but here too the industry ultimately proved too enticing to pass up. What is interesting is that for those who had engaged in tourism work during the colonial period the postcolonial flowering of tourism meant an opportunity to capitalise. Their experience allowed them to take leading roles, to pass on skills, and to make better lives for themselves and their families. At least in this case, the colonial baggage was a little easier to carry.[25]

The baggage weighs much heavier elsewhere. In at least some former colonies, the product is not safaris, it is colonial nostalgia. In Southeast Asia, former hill station hotels have been renovated and restored. Tourists can now experience the look of colonial sites, not to mention the luxury and service provided to largely white patrons by dark-skinned service staff.[26] The story is remarkably similar in India where government efforts to escape colonial legacies have had little impact on the provision of colonial nostalgia for tourists, including young Indians who, frustrated with the present, seek roles in a past that never really was. The Raj is remembered warmly, "despite the brutal British imperialism."[27] Yet there is an even more disturbing brand of colonial nostalgia, so-called "cannibal tours" in which well-to-do white tourists throw pennies at dark-skinned locals while calling for them to dance.[28] It is an activity little removed from imperialist notions of white superiority to "primitive" natives.

Conclusion

Scholars often view tourism as a form of imperialism, defined by an unequal exchange between host and guest.[29] There is an attractive minimalism to this idea, but adopting it risks oversimplification. A better strategy is to consider the historical connections between empire and tourism, tracing how leisure travel offered *both* a toolbox for imperialist oppression *and* opportunities for more localised agency and expression.

Ireland is a case in point. It is England's oldest colony. In the nineteenth century, tourists visited to see beautiful landscapes, but also to consume views of Irish poverty. During the Potato Famine (1845–52), they came to watch people die, content that what they witnessed confirmed their own superiority.[30] By the 1890s, the story is one of English entrepreneurs attempting to profit from the beauty of newly uninhabited landscapes.[31] Yet, the more remarkable story of Irish tourism development came after the Anglo-Irish Treaty when Irish men and women, both nationally and at a local level, endeavoured to build an industry and to create their own historical, cultural, and scenic narratives that would confirm their own sense of self, while also drawing visitors. As they undertook this process, they engaged with foreign governments and tourist boards, tourists (who

[25] Cleveland, *Alluring Opportunities*, 10–11.

[26] Maurizio Peleggi, (2005), "Consuming colonial nostalgia: The monumentalisation of historic hotels in urban South-East Asia," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint,* 46:3 (December 2005), 255–265.

[27] Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, "Consuming colonial nostalgia in Kolkata, India," *Annals of Tourism Research* 95 (July 2022).

[28] Gethin Chamberlain, "Tourists in India Told to Avoid 'Human Safaris,' " *Telegraph,* 11 September 2015.

[29] Dennison Nash, "Tourism as a Form of Imperialism," in *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, 2nd edition, ed. Valene L. Smith, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 37–54; Freya Higgins-Desboilles, "The ongoingness of imperialism: the problem of tourism dependency and the promise of radical equality," *Annals of Tourism Research* 94 (May 2022).

[30] Melissa Fegan, "Irish Traveller's Experience in Famine Ireland," *Irish Studies Review* 9:3 (2001), 361–372.

[31] Irene Furlough, "Frederick W. Crossley: Irish Turn-of-the-Century Tourism Pioneer," *Irish History: A Research Yearbook*, No. 2 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 162–76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are always free to reach their own conclusions and who exercise their own agency), and other groups as well. Tourism is always a nexus for the interaction of many groups and individuals actively pursuing their own ends and arriving at the table with their own preconceptions. It is never simple. Together all these groups helped to "make Ireland Irish" through tourism after centuries of colonial rule.[32]

This special issue highlights the evolving complexities of the tourism/empire relationship over time and illustrates the promise of future study. There is more to do. The differing experience by place and time needs more work. We need a better sense, as Stanley Fonseca recently pointed out, of "how colonial roots of mass tourism structured and shaped its evolution," not to mention how that connection evolved. This relationship was not fixed but was instead "evolving and fluid."[33] We need studies that show this evolution and that explain why it transpired. This special issue marks an important step in those directions.

Eric G.E. Zuelow is professor of history at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. He is author of *A History of Modern Tourism* (Bloomsbury 2015) and general editor of *Journal of Tourism History* and of the *Histories and Cultures of Tourism* book series (Cornell University Press).

[32] Eric G. E. Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Irish Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

[33] Stanley Fonseca, "*Unpacked: A History of Caribbean Tourism.* By Blake C. Scott," *Journal of Social History* 56:4 (Summer 2023).

Cite this article: Zuelow EGE (2024). Afterword: Tourism and Empire. *Itinerario* 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000305 Published online by Cambridge University Press