North American Tourism and Cultural Geography

Klaus J. Meyer-Arendt and Geoffrey Wall
Guest Editors

Research on tourism is evolving into an increasingly accepted field of scholarly endeavor as the impact of tourism upon the ever-shrinking world is becoming more and more apparent. Already one of the leading generators of revenue in the world today, tourism has been seen as the panacea for depressed economies in both developed and lesser developed countries. Over the last several decades, we have discovered that there is much about tourism that we do not understand. Social scientists—including anthropologists, sociologists, historians, psychologists, and geographers—have stepped up their research efforts into various aspects of tourism so that we not only better understand the nature of tourism but also that we have a better foundation for decision-making in tourism planning and development. Although the spectrum of research associated with tourism and its impact is quite broad, the cultural component is very significant. A particularly fertile field of inquiry has been the impact of tourism upon native cultures, and anthropologists and sociologists have been at the forefront of this research frontier. Geographers, as members of an eclectic discipline, have been less focused in their research efforts, but culture is an integral aspect in at least four of the ten major research thrusts identified in the subfield of recreation/tourism/sports geography.

This special issue of the Journal of Cultural Geography on North American Tourism is offered to present examples of geographic research on tourism that incorporate culture as an integral component. In 1980, the very first issue of the Journal of Cultural Geography contained a review article and bibliography on tourism by journal editor Alvar Carlson. Although the article documented growing concern with tourism by geographers, few articles on tourism have appeared in the journal during the subsequent decade. This special issue partly reflects efforts both to offset this paucity of contributions and to strengthen the links between tourism research and cultural geography. Although not all major research thrusts of cultural geography—including cultural ecology,
cultural landscape analysis, cultural/historical studies, material culture, and cultural impact studies—are represented herein, the following articles represent geographic and methodologic diversity. The historical approach is a popular one, yet the diversity of articles ranges both from academic to applied on the research spectrum and also from the past to the future on the time spectrum. It is anticipated that the focus of geographic research on international tourism, which will constitute a second special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Geography* in 1992, will differ somewhat from the focus presented by this issue's collection of articles.

One of the origins of North American tourism is found in the Romanticist movement which developed in late 18th-century England and Germany in response to the Industrial Revolution. Kenneth Johnson in his article notes how the Catskills, situated close to the colonial urban centers of the Eastern Seaboard, developed into the first locus of North American wilderness tourism. One might argue that Catskills tourism provided the testing ground for the 19th-century National Park movement in the United States, and Stanford Demars traces the role of Romanticism in shaping human attitudes toward wilderness and parks.

In addition to the wilderness experience, modern resort development is also rooted in the seaside and springs traditions that re-emerged in Europe in the late Middle Ages. Perhaps the oldest seaside resort in North America is Cape May, New Jersey, and Charles Stansfield discusses how historic preservation of a decaying resort has led to a revitalization of tourism. The recreational business district has been identified as a key component of the resort landscape, and Klaus Meyer-Arendt discusses the persistence of this land-use component in his article on Gulf of Mexico seaside resorts. Janet Valenza examines the uses of space and time at health resorts in Texas during the waning years of the springs tradition in North America. Historical changes in cultural preferences partly explain both the changing meaning of "resort" as well as the distribution of resorts in the United States, according to the article by Wesley Roehl and Carlton Van Doren.

Tourism and Native Americans is the theme of Stephen Jett's article, which chronicles the "discovery" of the Navajo by Anglo Americans and the evolving role of tourism in Navajo culture. The approach taken is a combination of cultural/historical research coupled with more recent planning-oriented issues.

The roles of culture in tourism planning and promotion are themes in the articles by Peter Murphy and Clare Mitchell. Murphy cites several examples in British Columbia of attempts to promote cultural and historical resources for tourism development, and Mitchell examines arts festivals as mechanisms for stimulating tourism and economic development in small Ontario towns.
The final article is concerned with Metatourism. This provocative analysis, authored by Dianne Draper and Herbert Kariel, addresses issues relevant not only to North America but also to the world by viewing tourism holistically and prescribing new approaches for future touristic development. It serves not only to summarize many of the themes presented in this issue's anthology, but it also serves as a springboard for the forthcoming issue on International Tourism.

Notes


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