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Cultural Tourism: The Partnership between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management.


The central tenet of this volume is that for cultural tourism to be sustainable, partnerships are needed between the tourism and cultural heritage management sectors. The authors argue that ‘the decision to embark on cultural tourism must be based on sound commercial tourism reasons first and heritage management reasons second, [a point] not appreciated by some members of the cultural heritage community who see tourism as a means of achieving other agendas’ (p.6). The book aims to demonstrate why partnerships are necessary and the ways in which they improve the visitor experience and assist the conservation and interpretation of heritage places and attractions, making use of these ‘tourism assets’ sustainable. The book moves beyond the assumption that simply promoting cultural heritage tourism is a force for conservation.

For those who work and teach in the cultural or heritage tourism sector this volume goes some way towards filling a gap in the literature by recognising the limitations of either a tourism-centred or a heritage-centred approach by attempting to integrate the two. This is a welcome change but a major challenge given that, as the authors point out, the objectives of the sectors have been seen as conflicting and relationships between the two have not always been harmonious. Literature in the cultural tourism field has tended to be dominated on the heritage side by the management of tourism at particular types of sites, especially large sites such as castles or town centres or world heritage-listed sites. On the tourism side, the emphasis has been on typologies of tourism or tourists and in particular on issues of sustainable tourism in developing countries.

In taking an approach that seeks to identify key issues in building partnerships the book cuts across these subject areas. Along with its eclectic mix of case studies and inclusion of both tangible and intangible heritage, this makes it of potential value to a wide cross section of people.

McKercher, currently at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, has expertise in nature-based tourism. Du Cros is a consultant who has worked in Australian Indigenous archaeology and heritage management and is currently advising on tourism projects in Asia. The book brings together the authors’ divergent experiences in 14 chapters. Following an introductory chapter 1, some of the challenges to achieving sustainable cultural tourism are presented in chapter 2; chapters 3 and 4 summarise core issues in tourism and cultural heritage management respectively. The remaining chapters attempt to integrate the tourism and heritage management issues presented earlier in planning for successful cultural and heritage tourism.

I have reservations about the success of this endeavour. Ultimately I am not convinced the book fulfils its aim of demonstrating that such partnerships are achievable and valuable. This is not a result of inappropriate or insubstantial content but rather of a lack of structure and integration in the material presented. In the end this acts to differentiate tourism and heritage management rather then bringing them into partnership.

There is so much useful information in this book, it is easy to lose track of the relevance of some of the discussion; it would benefit from some clear sign-posting. Many issues are presented but for those working in or studying heritage tourism these will not be unknown. Translating some of the issues and problems into processes that address them would have made the book invaluable. In this regard the case studies could have provided vehicles if they were integrated into the arguments in a more discursive fashion. It may have been better to focus on a few case studies and follow them through each stage of the processes advocated.

The inclusion of an early chapter on intangible heritage is admirable and balances the emphasis on conservation of fabric in much heritage tourism literature. I feel, though, that the potential impacts and need for planning in presenting intangible heritage as a tourism attraction are not sufficiently followed through in the subsequent chapters.

An interesting point is the authors’ claim that tourists are interested in ‘authenticity’ but not necessarily reality – tourists do not want a romanticised view of the past disrupted. What are the implications of this for heritage managers who seek to present the significance of a place accurately through interpretation? Does tourism potentially mean forsaking accuracy?

Despite my reservations about the overall success of the argument for a partnership between heritage management and tourism, I found the book useful for the many issues it raises. The aims are high – which is always admirable – and this is a work-in-progress towards achieving those aims. As such it makes a valuable contribution to the literature.

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