

Book Review: *Holiday Business: Tourism in Australia since 1870* by Jim Davidson and Peter Spearritt.

Tourism, as *Holiday Business* claims 'is one of Australia's biggest, most important and most interesting industries'. As an industry, it is highly complex, touching on sectors as diverse as transport, accommodation, environmental management, development planning and marketing. It is also a complex social and cultural phenomenon that reflects and shapes national identities and regional cultures. Davidson and Spearritt have defined the tourist industry 'as that which has arisen in response to the convergence of people on recognised routes and resorts' (p. xv). They acknowledge that tourism history is also a variety of social history, and have sought to 'point out how various developments were enmeshed with other social assumptions and practices, with radical changes in transport and technology, and with shifts in taste'.

Their aim is to 'draw attention to the broad trends and meanings in tourism' using a limited number of sites as examples.

From the outset, therefore, the authors make it clear that their approach to the history of tourism in Australia is selective: their definition of tourism reflects their interest in the emergence of holiday destinations and their selection of locations is indeed limited. These limitations sit uncomfortably with the ambit claims made for this book – that is the 'first telling' of the story of tourism in Australia and that it is the first 'national' history of tourism.

This is *not* the first history of the tourism industry in Australia. John Richardson's *A History of Australian Travel and Tourism* (1999) preceded it by more than a year. It gives a more traditional and more thorough treatment of the emergence of the different sectors of the travel and tourism industry than *Holiday Business*, but lacks its wider contextual approach and its lively discussion of current tourism-related issues. Davidson and Spearritt's most valuable contribution lies in their social history approach and insights such as this:

[T]ourism history not only reveals another strand of the past, but also throws into relief, by virtue of its hyper-real quality, certain assumptions of a given period perhaps more clearly than most social activities (p.344).

Their example illustrating this point is that 'the Anglophile assumptions' of Edwardian Australia led to Tasmania, with its lush greens and cooler summers, being Australia's top long-range destination just before World War One.

*Holiday Business* is structured in a roughly chronological order overall, beginning with the origins of tourism, and moving through sea travel and seaside holidays to the rise of the motor car ('Mobility and the Consequences'), 'Packaging Heritage' and 'Air Travel and the Rise of the Resort'. Chapters are internally structured so that they trace the history of the particular issue under discussion from its starting point and, in some chapters, bring it to its conclusion - as with the decline in sea transport brought about by air travel. Other chapters, such as those dealing with Aboriginal tourism, nature-based tourism and packaging heritage, raise a number of issues current at the turn of the twenty first century. The chapter on Aboriginal tourism raises many of the

dilemmas surrounding tourism's consumption of culture and 'the increasing appeal of indigenous cultures in a world increasingly homogenised by globalisation'.

The chapter 'Packaging Heritage' illustrates the diversity of the material covered in the book. It also illustrates some of the difficulties and frustrations for the reader when the scope is so wide and there is not enough space for substantial treatment of major issues.

This chapter briefly discusses the emergence of historic buildings and towns as attractions, touching on the role of the National Trust in passing. Historical theme parks such as Sovereign Hill, Swan Hill Pioneer Village and Old Sydney Town are analysed critically and a few of their imitators are listed, with the dry note that many of these have fallen on hard times. The 'real historical settlement' of New Norcia in Western Australia is briefly described. The transformation of Sydney's Rocks area into a historical precinct where tourism is the main industry is outlined.

Museums and art galleries are discussed in one page. The authors raise a number of questions about the changing role of museums and galleries with the advent of television and the Internet. They conclude that 'The only traditional museums to survive as popular attractions will be those where the primacy of the material object – be it a painting, a sculpture or a kitchen setting – is so special that one still wants to see, and in some cases touch, the real thing' (p. 274). This conclusion is contentious, and certainly warrants a more substantial discussion.

Events and festivals are dealt with next. The chapter finishes with a nod to debate on commodification of heritage, loss of authenticity, the promiscuous use of the word 'historic' and its effective removal from the events of the past.

One major criticism of *Holiday Business* is that the case studies and examples are drawn from a much narrower band than could reasonably be expected for what purports to be a national history. The balance is heavily on Sydney and Melbourne and surrounding areas, with Tasmania and southern Queensland rating moderately. Uluru and the red centre make an illuminating and substantial case study. The rest of Australia gets short shrift. This geographical imbalance became increasingly irritating as the book progressed.

Davidson and Spearritt have written a lively, entertaining history of holiday business (rather than tourism) in parts of Australia. The book is wonderfully illustrated with images of brochures, postcards, posters and photographs, drawn mostly from the authors' collections. Although *Holiday Business* claims wider territory than is justified by the content it is a valuable and enjoyable addition to the literature on tourism in Australia.

J. Davidson and P. Spearritt, *Holiday Business: Tourism in Australia since 1870*, Melbourne University Press. Carlton South, Victoria. 2000. ISBN 0 522 84884 2.

#### *Reference*

J.R. Richardson, *A History of Australian Travel and Tourism*, Hospitality Press, Melbourne. 1999.

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