

## **Book Review - Accepted Manuscript**

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**Destination London: The Expansion of the Visitor Economy, A. Smith, A. Graham (Eds.), University of Westminster Press, London (2019). 266 pp., (Pbk), £22.99 ISBN13: 9781912656264**

Urban tourism used to be a neglected area of research (Ashworth and Page, 2011), but lately it has attracted more attention from academics as a result of the rapid increase in the number of people visiting cities, in particular in world tourism cities such as London, and the role these destinations play in the global economy. Yet, as the authors rightly point out, there is still limited research that looks specifically at the visitor economy in the UK capital, '*a notable omission, given the scale and significance of tourism in London*' (p. 1).

*Destination London: The Expansion of the Visitor Economy*, therefore contributes to filling part of this gap in research by discussing 'how and *why* the expansion of the visitor economy is happening and what effect this is having on the city' (p. 2). The book is co-edited by two well-known scholars from the University of Westminster, Dr Andrew Smith and Professor Anne Graham, comprising 11 chapters that focus on different aspects related to the development of the visitor economy in London, and are authored or co-authored by colleagues from the same institution.

The introduction chapter provides a brief overview of tourism development in London over the years, and sets the scene for the next chapters that look into different aspects of tourism expansion within and beyond the *tourist bubble*. Rather than focusing on the most visited places and traditional tourist attractions in central London, the rest of the book adopts an urban planning perspective and takes the reader on a thought-provoking journey through aspects little discussed in previous studies. The authors thus argue that tourism in cities is expanding not only into new spaces and times, but also conceptually by reaching into new spheres such as private homes and hidden places.

An important contribution of this book is that besides touching on the benefits and challenges brought by the rapid development of tourism in London, it offers an in-depth discussion on how this phenomenon contributes to urban transformation. To start with, in Chapter 2, Robert Maitland argues that in their quest for authenticity and authentic experiences, many tourists, or '*urban explorers*' as the author calls them, are penetrating ever further into the cities they visit, which in time may lead to the commodification and commercialisations of places and neighbourhoods that used to be previously *undiscovered* by visitors. The next chapter, by Clare Inkson, takes the discussion further, and looks at how various digital sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb contribute to the *unplanned expansion* of tourism into the private realm, with the author arguing that this has short-term, as well as long-term implications for the availability and affordability of residential houses in the capital. Chapter 4, authored by Anne Graham, explores the role played by the London airports as part of the wider city destination (i.e. gateways to the city, important transport nodes, and anchors for the development of nearby destination area), but also as shopping and leisure destinations in themselves. The next chapter takes us to the world of sport, where Claire Humphreys argues that London's sports stadiums are important features that attract visitors away from the city centre to more peripheral areas.

While the first four chapters focus on the spatial expansion of tourism beyond central London, the next three look at the '*more subtle extensions of tourism*' (p. 11) in central areas. Thus, Andrew Smith examines in Chapter 6 how the visitor economy is expanding vertically by offering tourists opportunities to consume the London experience from a different perspective, namely from above. The author points out that through the type of activities proposed (e.g. climbing up, sliding down, or traversing tall structures), these attractions open the city to a different market – the adventure tourists, who used to be associated more with rural landscapes. In the next chapter, Claudia Dolezal and Jayni Gudka discuss the work of a non-for-profit social enterprise – *Unseen Tours* that makes an interesting proposition to visitors: tours led by homeless people, who offer an original interpretation of familiar places through their eyes and experiences. The authors argue that although there are some similarities

with slum tourism, these tours should rather be seen as a form of social tourism that could bring about positive societal change in cities. In Chapter 8, Simon Curtis focuses on the River Thames and its changing role over the years, discussing how these days the river has become a *tourist highway* and a visitor attraction in itself – ‘*a place of wonder, refuge and escapism for tourists and Londoners*’ (p. 179).

The next two chapters turn the reader’s attention onto the events industry, an important part of the visitor economy in London. Adam Eldridge and Ilaria Pappalepore discuss in Chapter 9 how extended Christmas celebrations help attract visitors to the capital during the winter season and keep them entertained in the evenings. Andrew Smith changes the register in Chapter 10, by examining the issues that arise from transforming London’s parks into event venues, an initiative that helps bring in more visitors and provides local authorities with extra resources in a time of neoliberal austerity. Chapter 11 concludes the book with a review of the themes discussed, highlighting a number of challenges and implications, as well as recommendations for further study.

The authors note a number of omissions from the book, such as employment issues, accessibility, or business tourism. To these, I would add a section on the governance of tourism in London, some aspects of which are covered in the first and the last chapter. At one point the reader might think that the chapters are somewhat disjoint, but the editors have done a great job in bringing them together under the three aforementioned dimensions of the expansion of the visitor economy.

Overall, the book is a welcome addition to the field of urban tourism research and is likely to appeal to a range of audiences. Its content could prove useful not only to students and academics, but also to policy makers interested in better understanding the implications of tourism development and the expansion of the visitor economy in large cities.

## References

Ashworth, G. J., & Page, S. J. (2011). Urban tourism research: Recent progress and current paradoxes. *Tourism Management*, 32(1), 1–15.

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