

FAMILY TOURISM: MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

By Heike Schanzel, Ian Yeoman, and Elisa Backer. Channel View Publications <www.multilingual-matters.com> 2012, xviii + 199 pp. (figures, tables, index), Pbk. £29.95 ISBN: 978-1-84541-327-9

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Family Tourism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives provides a concise look at timely and important topics related largely to tourism studies, but also brings in ideas and research from family leisure, sociology, gender studies, and marketing. Professors, graduate students, and researchers looking to update their knowledge of specific or niche tourism topics, or to better understand the interdisciplinary nature of their field, will find this to be a useful text.

The main thesis of the book seems to be that “families” are considered a significant segment of the tourism market, yet the notion of “family” can be constructed in a variety of ways, all of which have implications for researchers, marketers, and tourism operators. Chapter authors seek to explore some of the less often investigated constructions of family in order to shed light on the little information the tourism sector has on this variety of families, indicate how this knowledge may be useful to practitioners, and point out gaps in the research, which, when filled, could benefit the industry and families.

The book has three editors—one from Australia and two based in New Zealand. The content has a United Kingdom/Australia tone, but the only time this perspective might hinder readers from other countries is in the way of demographics, or country-specific information such as family or tourism-related policies, laws, or tax structures. Overall, most of the research presented is international in scope and the ideas are certainly applicable to an international audience.

This text presents a multidisciplinary look at family tourism, covering both a variety of family types and travel and drawing literature from a many fields. The book starts with an introduction to how family members perceive their family time and often idealize family leisure, and then gives a brief history of family leisure in the United Kingdom. The second section covers several non-traditional family groupings and locations, recognizing the diversity of family types in the modern world. The editors include a chapter that focuses on fathers, one on low-income or disadvantaged families, and another on gay and lesbians families. The book culminates with three chapters that take an unusual approach to conventional topics. Chapter 10 examines the problem of insufficient marketing to teenagers and young tourists, Chapter 11 investigates the expanding family life cycle model and the challenges that can create for tourism marketers and planners, and the final chapter offers a cognitive mapping approach to thinking about the concepts discussed in previous chapters.

Overall, each chapter is well-written and easy to read. Most begin with a brief literature review or history of the topic, and then present a study, including method, results, discussion/conclusion, and implications for tourism providers. This format makes the book useful in an upper division undergraduate class or graduate level class, as faculty would have a launching point for a discussion about tourism and related literature, research methods, and practical implications. The text might be a bit dry or difficult, however, for undergraduate students.

In each chapter, the authors present brief yet thorough literature reviews—referring to research and ideas authored by many of the “big names” in the family tourism and leisure literature. Wisely, the authors expanded their literature review beyond just family tourism and included a wealth of family leisure research, and relevant research from sociology, gender studies, marriage and family, and sport studies. References are often from research published in the 2000s, however some authors slip a little too far back and base too much of their literature review on work conducted in the 1990s.

The editors should be commended for ensuring that a variety of family types are covered in the text, and for bringing in literature from a variety of disciplines, even when little exists. For example, although there is a dearth of research on gay and lesbian travel, a chapter is included that introduces the reader to this growing trend in family travel and points out where options for such travel and future research may exist. The chapter on social tourism is an interesting beginning, explaining this newer form of tourism and its benefits. However, the authors do not provide examples of “social tourism initiatives” and the reader is left wondering what this might look like in practice. The two final chapters—on the expanding family life cycle model and cognitive mapping—provide new and challenging ways to think about overarching ideas, and would again be helpful when teaching a course, preparing a study of one’s own, or mentoring a graduate student.

Overall, the editors have crafted a book of well-written and sourced, timely, and interesting chapters on topics not often addressed in the tourism literature, but that are important issues and trends in the field.

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