

TOURISM GEOGRAPHY
CONTEMPORARY TOURISM ISSUES
VENICE: A CASESTUDY

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See also:
[Virtual tour of Venice & Venice Images](#)

Venice experiences a type of invasion of some 12 million visitors a year and most of these converge on the Rialto, the main island of the Laguna Veneta with its 117 islets. Today, the population of Venice proper is less than 70,000. It is a community in decline, once having a population of some 200,000. Venice, in many ways, is the tourist destination *par excellence*. Linking together an alluring romantic conception, an exotic and quite unique urban environment, a history evoked in a powerful and well-known mythology, a stage for the rich and famous and a familiarity born of countless feature films and brochures, it is a destination that remains a consumer's delight; it is simply a 'must-do'. However, Venice is also a site that exhibits many of the issues that are indicative of, and which confront contemporary tourism: environmental degradation; heritage management problems; conservation issues; major impacts on, and implications for, the host community¹. I would go as far as to suggest that Venice is heading towards a day when it *may* become the first major city on the planet that is transformed from a once vibrant mercantile city into a historical themepark or a tourist resort: not a built themepark or resort like Disneyland or Club Med, concocted on a drafting table, but one that emerges because it no longer has within its buildings and piazzas a living, viable host community and yet remains a major international tourist attraction. I hope my prediction is unfounded.

1. The desire and lure of a tourist destination

"Ah, Venice", sighed the ticket seller when, in Thomas Mann's famous novella *Death in Venice*, he sold the protagonist his passage across the Adriatic. It is not only the sigh of dreamers and romantics, it's also the sigh upon which tourism feeds. Without the myth of Venice, continuously conjured by all manner of utterances - and here I include the literary, the filmic, and the popular (everything from advertising to Madonna's videoclip *Like A Virgin*) - without this constant conjuring, there would be no tourist destination at all. Tourism didn't, of course, invent the 'myth of Venice', but it continues to stage it,² because at the heart of the myth is desire and anticipation, the twin, interlocked strands that are the vital life-forces in a commodity culture. There is another reason for beginning with the myth of Venice: at its core is a rich visuality. The Italian writer, Andrea Damiano describes Venice in this way:

¹ A survey of contemporary tourism issues in an Australian context can be found in Rowe and Lawrence, 1998.

² MacCannell's term. MacCannell, 1989 (1976).

"No name is so magical as that of Venice, none evokes more directly the idea - and the ideal - of consummate perfection. Other cities may be more elegant or more glorious: none of them is so miraculous as Venice. To work the miracle, Venetians, it would seem, had to take upon themselves a new nature, an aquatic, marine nature. Only thus can we explain the creation of such an unheard-of-city, of this jewel-casket filled with dazzling, awe-inspiring beauties. Venice is all the colours, all the music and, pre-eminently, all the dreams of the world."

Dreams, mystery and magic³. This is the very stuff of mythology. But it's also the stuff of the imagination, of desire and anticipation. In tourism parlance, it is a matter of being there and not here. But note how powerfully this desire/anticipation doublet is informed by the visual. Damiano's description depends for its efficacy on a visual knowledge of the place. Damiano writes with the visual either before him or in his mind's eye. And we hear the words in the same way.

2. Tourism and the 'consumption of places'

Imagine two picturesque views of Venice: a view from the centre of the Grand Canal looking towards the Lagoon in late afternoon with all the palaces glowing a soft orange and the eye drawn past the splendid Church of Santa Maria Della Salute to the Lagoon beyond, and a view framed by a window of the Doge's Palace looking out, on a hot sunny day, towards the island of San Giorgio Maggiore with its magnificent, brilliantly shining Palladian architecture. Here, the term 'picturesque' is used in a double sense: the literal sense of the view being 'like a picture' and in the sense of a pictorial practice which informs what constitutes a recognizable image of Venice (and, equally, informs what does not constitute a recognizable view of Venice).

For a place to be produced for tourist consumption it has, firstly, to be in some way marked out⁴, or defined, and then, secondly, commodified so that it can be consumed by the tourist as either a discrete existential experience⁵ or as a photograph or in the form of some other record⁶. 'Place', in this sense, is not some material entity that exists autonomously, but is a praxis whereby the material place - its geography, if you like - is defined by a series of discourses that then become inseparable from the place itself.⁷ In other words, the physical terrain of place is like a blank canvas upon which a series of representations are layered producing a 'place' that is uniquely identifiable. In the case of Venice, the physical morphology of the city intersects with a battery of representations: Venice as evoked in poetry, painting, film, travel writing, history, postcards, fictional works, journals & diaries, maps, guide books and so forth. Eventually these all coalesce to produce the dominant and iconic sense of 'Venice' the place. In the 'real' world of the Venetians, 'Venice' is not a static sense of place and is one that changes with time, and context, but for the tourist, 'Venice' the place, *is*, falsely, a static entity. This is the pre-requisite that allows Venice to be captured and possessed over and over whether in writing or, in visual forms. But especially in visual forms and,

³ On 'dream chasing' and tourism see Ryan, 1997.

⁴ MacCannell, 1989 (1976).

⁵ Urry, 1990.

⁶ Taylor examines the relationships between landscape constructions and appropriations by tourists and photography in England but the principles can be applied here. Taylor, 1994.

⁷ Duncan and Ley, 1993.

in particular, photography⁸. The poet and the writer can, of course, be crucial in the process but their works are also fundamentally implicated in our visual sense of Venice, or at least, in an edited visual sense of the city which, on the whole, excludes the ordinary and excludes 20th century modernity. Rarely, if ever, does the Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art, for example, feature in any visual construction of Venice.

The place of tourist consumption must, therefore, be produced as iconic (the word iconic denoting a strong sense of the visual, and meaning, literally, power-laden image). To produce the iconic, Venice the place must be reduced to metonymic characteristics that stand in for the city as a whole (for example, the gondola or the Rialto Bridge) and it has to be always, already, in representation so that it can be staged, over and over, by the tourist visit and reproduced, over and over, in either souvenirs or photographs. All of these processes are intrinsically part of the way western visual culture operates⁹ and it is through such processes that 'Venice', the invention, is consumed, and consumed with what Damiano called 'consummate pleasure'¹⁰. Comparing two images can be instructive: imagine a photograph of the Rialto Bridge stretched across the Grand Canal in mid-morning with the waters of the canal sparkling and alive with reflections and imagine another photograph of a church called San Aponal. Both are located in Venice, both are important for different reasons, but only *one* can be linked to the production of the place 'Venice'. Only one of these pictures evokes the dream of being 'there' and not 'here'; only one of them evokes a sense of the magic and the mystery associated with the name 'Venice', and only one anticipates the possibilities of adventure, or misadventure. For most readers, San Aponal simply draws a blank. That it is an important 15th century church, with significant 13th century sculpture, is irrelevant when it comes to a sense of 'Venice', the place.¹¹

3. The Tourist Gaze

As John Urry's work has convincingly shown, tourism is predicated on a particular type of gaze. His analysis focusses on the socio-cultural dimensions of the tourist gaze or, as he puts it, the tourist gaze is a 'constructed gaze' that is 'socially organized and systematized'¹². Urry's assertion is accepted here, without qualification, but it is possible to take the analysis of the tourist gaze further. This can be illustrated by examining just two aspects of the tourist gaze that have been addressed in recent theories of the western gaze.

The first has to do with a spectatorship that is focussed on the distinctive and the second has to do with the visual processes of the picturesque¹³. A spectatorship of the distinctive is, of course, intimately linked with the production of 'Venice' as a place. But it is also different in that the tourist gaze has a tendency to *follow* the process of place formation while never being independent of it because the tourist gaze replicates and reinforces the iconic sense of place. This is what perpetuates the tourism/place interrelationship. One of the keys to tourism's interventions is the marking out of distinct elements in the landscape - distinct elements which make it worth going there

⁸ While it can be argued that painting and photography freeze the world seen into a series of static moments, the techniques of pre-modern painting and photography *seek* the static as a precondition of representation. Taylor, 1994.

⁹ There is an enormous and growing literature about the way visual cultures work. For example, see Mirzoeff, 1998.

¹⁰ Urry, 1990.

¹¹ Urry described this as an aspect of the 'collective' or 'signposted' tourist gaze. Urry, 1995.

¹² Urry, 1990.

¹³ Urry recognises the import of both of these but does not explore the ways these processes work. Urry, 1990. Urry, elsewhere, does explore the relationship between the aesthetic and subjectivity. Urry, 1995.

to *see* and distinct elements that make a place like 'Venice' something that is quite unlike, say, Sydney; that is, physical markers that make Venice distinct from the normal place of abode, or the normal place of residence and work¹⁴. However, these iconic locations are iconic for reasons other than tourist interest: they are significant and iconic for the Venetians themselves. Tourism, then, does not necessarily invent the distinctiveness¹⁵ but being, itself, a cultural process of difference *par excellence*,¹⁶ means tourism is deeply implicated in the perpetuation of the distinctive, the iconic and the significant¹⁷. Consider the Basilica of San Marco and the Grand Canal. One can hardly imagine going to Venice and never seeing these two distinctive sights. In fact, it is only a perverse possibility. The tourist gaze then, can be thought of as the intersection of 'site' with 'sight'. This gives the tourist gaze a strong spatial and geographic dimension. But, equally, such images point to another aspect of spectatorship: the absent, disembodied and, therefore, all-powerful gaze of the viewer who, in a sense, takes momentary possession of the sight. This 'magisterial gaze' as it has been usefully called¹⁸, reinforces the distinct nature of the sight by holding it frozen in time. The gaze is, therefore, unlike the glance which is a rapid, ever-moving action of the eye that roams, unceasingly, around the viewer's surroundings. The glance lacks fixity and thus conventional photographic possibilities. The glance is what we do all the time. Certainly, since the advent of western Modernism, the glance has been the subject of visual representations. We only have to think of 19th century Impressionism, the use of the glance in cinema and in *avant-garde* photography.¹⁹ However, the gaze, in contrast, remains a conscious viewing of a static object; a viewing which is epistemologically grounded and ideologically charged²⁰.

But that is only half the story. What is the point of going to Venice if there is no record of you having been there. Fundamental to the tourist gaze is the reproducibility of the sight/site; in other words, making a visual record of one's presence²¹. Susan Sontag has written that the tourist photograph is about the possession of space; it can be regarded as a rite of possession²². Imagining tourists without a camera is almost impossible except, once again, perversely²³. However, for a tourist sight/site to be photographed it must conform to the rules of pre-Modernism picture-making; that is, in both the literal and aesthetic sense, it must conform to the rules of the picturesque. The tourist gaze is not *avant-garde* Modernism, represented, for example, by Brett Whiteley's *The Jacaranda Tree (in Sydney Harbour)* (1977); nor is it informed by the types of visuality that operate in, say, the Indigenous Australian community of Pupunya²⁴ represented by Tim Leura

¹⁴ MacCannell, 1989 (1976); Urry, 1990; and reiterated in Urry, 1995.

¹⁵ The qualification here is with regard to destinations like Venice which do have a history of inventing distinctiveness as part of its own identity formation. Tourism, as a cultural force and a capitalist endeavour can, of course, invent attractions/destinations that consciously seek to be different.

¹⁶ To use the phraseology of Hollinshead. Hollinshead in Ryan, 1997.

¹⁷ See MacCannell's work on tourist attractions. MacCannell, 1989 (1976). This visual process, as Urry notes, is sustained by a number of other visual media in concert with tourist practices, for example, TV, film, magazines, travel brochures, advertising, videos, coffee-table books and so forth. Urry, 1990. See also Selwyn, 1996.

¹⁸ Boime, 1991.

¹⁹ Taylor claims, unconvincingly, that the glance and the blink do have a place in the looking of tourists/travellers but his distinction depends on the veracity of the classification travellers/tourists/trippers. Taylor, 1994. Urry introduces the notion of the glance, along with scanning, in his table of a tourist gaze typology but does not define the terms in relation to the gaze. Urry, 1995.

²⁰ Bryson, 1983. The 'magisterial gaze' has also been subject to feminist critique. See Foster, 1988 and Deutsche, 1991.

²¹ Taylor, 1994.

²² Sontag, 1979. Sontag regarded this possession as a means of overcoming an insecurity of temporary/invasive occupancy. This adds to rather than mitigates the point about photography and possession.

²³ Urry gives an excellent summary of the characteristics of tourist photography. Urry, 1990. Also see Rojek and Urry, 1997.

²⁴ Sutton, 1988.

Tjapaltjarri and Daisy Leura Nakamarra's *Possum Ancestor Dreaming* (1981)²⁵. Instead, the tourist gaze relies on the operation of Albertian²⁶ regimes of seeing: a panoramic view layed out before the (absent) observer with the subject centred within a frame; it is about constructing pictures as though "looking through a window"; it is about the application of the rules of geometric perspective; it is about the aesthetics of the picturesque and the Claudian rules of landscape painting²⁷. Ultimately, the tourist gaze is an example of what Joel Snyder calls 'pictured vision': the seeking, by the viewer, of the already composed picture in the landscape²⁸. But not just any picture will do. The tourist gaze is constantly being directed towards those features of Venice that are already known before the tourist departs on his or her travels. In other words, those sites of distinctiveness and significance, the icons of Venice, the power-laden views. Particular picturesque views are, therefore, already widely known and one of the tasks of the tourist is to seek out and replicate those views.

The picturesque view has a long history in Venice. Painted scenes by the 18th century landscape artist Canaletto produce what can be called the 'set-piece' picturesque views of the city²⁹. A cursory study of the paintings reproduced from a 1989 exhibition catalogue could, almost, be late twentieth century tourist photographs of Venice³⁰. It is possible, in fact, to produce a sequence of photographs of Venice that approximate the views depicted in Canaletto's images. The traveller's replication of the picturesque, via the camera, can be regarded as a powerful motivation verging on the obligatory³¹. How could one go to Venice and not take pictures of such scenes? Distinctiveness and being able to see as though the object were already composed as a picture are, therefore, two of the central dynamics of the tourist gaze.

4. Tourism is a signifying practice.

If distinctiveness is crucial to the tourist gaze, what is it that produces 'distinctiveness'? This is where MacCannell's work is important because he defines tourism, after Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss, as a signifying practice. What, for example, makes San Marco distinctive for the tourist? Why is it both iconic and metonymic whereas the Romanesque camponile or bell tower is not - although a common enough sight in Venice. Basically San Marco has become, over time, both the signifier and the signified. As MacCannell suggests the physical building - the signified - has become marked or 'marked out'. This marking is a cultural process.

In turning to the guide books of Venice it quicklyly becomes apparent what marks out San Marco. Firstly, there is the style of the material building - this fussy and highly decorated domed building is unusual in Italy; somehow the architecture of Byzantium had found its way to Venice; it's a 'west' meets 'east' story. Secondly, there is a grand myth associated with the building. This is the final

²⁵ Nor in pre-modern Chinese landscape painting. See Cheng, 1994.

²⁶ Alberti was the first writer to systematically describe western geometric perspective as it was developed in 15th century Florence. In some form or other this system became the way the western eye perceived and represented the world pictorially and eventually became almost universal within western pictorial practices. From its inception, these pictorial practices became epistemologically grounded. Thus the term 'regime of seeing' - it is more than picture-making, it is a way of knowing. See Kemp, 1990.

²⁷ The 'rules' of the Claudian landscape are summarized in Barrell, 1979. Also see Cosgrove, 1985.

²⁸ Snyder, 1980..

²⁹ English aristocratic interest in Canaletto's art seems to have been stimulated by the 'grand tour'.

³⁰ Baetjer & Links, 1989, plates 5, 8, 9, 15, 22, 23, 27, 31, 33, 35, 39, 41, 42, 44, 49, and 54.

³¹ Technically, the camera was designed to mechanically reproduce pictures that followed the rules of western image-making thus the correlation between Canaletto's paintings and tourist photographs. On the relationships between seeing, painting and photography see Snyder, 1980.

resting place of the Biblical St. Mark, the Evangelist, whose remains were mysteriously removed from Alexandria [in Egypt] & arrived in Venice where he became the patron saint of the city. This makes Venice an Apostolic city - one to rival Rome. Thirdly, the building is full of treasures that the Venetians pinched when they sacked Constantinople in 1204. In that year the Venetians side-tracked the Fourth Crusade & instead of liberating Jerusalem, attacked Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium. Two trophies of this act of piracy are displayed at San Marco - the four famous bronze horses that date back to Roman Antiquity perched ostentatiously above the main door; and the bejewelled Pala D'Oro which stands behind the high altar inside the basilica. This intersection of myth, historical narrative and the architectural distinctiveness of the building mark the site/sight semiotically. The task of the tourist is to visit the place already heavy with semiotic significance and decode that significance through guided tours, guide books etc. This task of making meaning via the staging of San Marco's as an authentic experience of the original has led Umberto Eco to designate tourists as proficient semioticians³². Other cultural theorists have declared that tourists are the consumers of signs. Tourist photographs would suggest that this is indeed the case.

5. Tourism depends on the packaging and consumption of the grand narratives of History

By the grand narratives of history I mean those western practices of subsuming everything into a continuous historical narrative where the geographic entity of the place provides a stage-like setting for a drama about the rich, the famous, the infamous, the powerful, the exotic, the bizarre. Venice is, of course, full of such stories - they in fact they are crucial to Venice's distinct identity - and I really only have time to mention a few of the strands of this history - in essence a meta-narrative - which is then conveniently packaged for the tourist³³.

One strand has to do with the physical environment - that this city was built on wooden piles, sunk into the mud banks of the lagoon which, in turn, created the famous canals. It is a story of the sea, of water, of Venice's maritime power, and of Venice's spectacular mercantile wealth³⁴. This story is everywhere & not just in the guide books. It is celebrated in Venice's art - in, for example Carpaccio's *Lion of St Mark*, reproduced over and over in books and documentaries about Venice - and it is proclaimed by every existential encounter with Venice's watery world. There is even an annual grand regatta of historical boats that re-enact that peculiar Renaissance ritual when, each spring, Venice symbolically married the sea³⁵.

Another strand is the Venetian Empire and her contact with central European and exotic non-European cultures. This historical narrative is - to quote John Ruskin - told in the very 'stones of Venice'. Her architecture is then read as the incarnation of Venice's role as occupying a crossroad between east and west and so the Arabic influence is noted, along with the Gothic, along with the Byzantium. This rather exotic mix of styles is then given its own taxonomic designation - Venetian Gothic. Mix this with Venice's claim to being a multi-cultural state and we have an itinerary in the making: Venetian Gothic architecture and a visit to the very first Jewish ghetto. Gentile Bellini's portraits of a Turkish poet and Sultan Mohammed II, simply layer the story of Venice's unique heritage.

³² Eco, 1986.

³³ On the place/narrative relationship see Schama, 1995; Potteiger and Purinton, 1998 and for an Australian context, Haynes, 1998.

³⁴ Documented in Lane, 1973.

³⁵ A lengthy description of this ritual and its symbolic significance is given in Muir, 1984.

Another well known strand is a later addition: Venice as the 'prostitute of Europe'. This 18th century invention has to do with the myth of Venice as a virginal city - a pun which refers to the Virgin Mary's special protection of the city and the fact she resisted all would-be conquerors [until Napoleon]. However, in the 18th century Venice became associated with decadence - it was *the* place for gambling; brothels were common-place; it was a centre of Italian opera and it had its famous - or should I say infamous - *Carnivale* with its masked balls and sexual dalliances. This was the time of Casanova. Venice became a vital travel destination for English aristocratic and youthful men on their 'Grand Tour'. It is this heady mix of the Virgin Mary's protection, resisting occupation & the later rather tawdry reputation which makes Madonna's *Like a Virgin* such a clever video-clip!

Venice's history is, therefore, see-able, do-able and a constant. It is converted into itineraries which can be easily represented in guide books. History is then a mode of presenting Venice to the tourist and, at the same time, enriching the consumption of signs.

6. Tourism feeds off a canonical view of western culture, particularly western art as a history of masterpieces

One of the very interesting aspects of 20th century tourism is its significant relationship to the project of high Modernism. If Modernism has made the 'original' a sacred object in an age of mechanical reproduction, then one of the by-products has been the way tourism feeds off both the original masterpiece and the cult of the [male] genius. Some art works have become synonymous with particular places [for example, Michaelangelo's *David* and the city of Florence] but for this to happen, the art work must have gained the status of undisputed masterpiece with unquestionable aesthetic value. This, oddly enough, makes the relationship of the tourist with modernity a peculiar one. It ritualizes the worship of the artistic masterpiece by an artistic genius but, at the same time, in places like Venice, it disavows the avante-garde. In New York and Paris, of course, this is not the case, but in Venice the 20th century avante-garde disrupts Venice as an historical icon. I know there are two 'famous' exceptions, the Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art and the Venice Film Festival, but more about those later!

So how is the western canon of art fetishized in Venice? What masterpieces have become "must see" attractions on a visit to Venice? The guide books are very explicit: Venice's art reputation revolves round just two artists, one a painter and the other an architect, although there is a second tier of genius for the art-historically informed or the art historically adventurous. The "big" two are Titian and Palladio, for example, Titian's the *Assumption of the Virgin* and Palladio's facade for his church of San Giorgio Maggiore. A visit to Venice's Accademia - the city's unrivalled collection of Venetian art - is an interesting guide book exercise: room after room of art is ignored and a handful of 'masterpieces' is highlighted for tourist consumption. They include Gentile Bellini's *Procession of the Relic of the Cross*, Carpaccio's *Legend of St. Ursula* - they both have obvious Venetian settings - Giorgione's *Tempest*, one of the most enigmatic and much discussed paintings in western art and Tintoretto's *Miracle of the Slave* for its drama and its Venetian subject-matter. Few tourists are directed to the astounding works of Giovanni Bellini or the sculptural works of Tullio Lombardo. They are perhaps not distinctly Venetian enough and they lack the semiotically rich associations that tie the other works to the myth of Venice and to the city's iconic status. In terms of the western canon, Bellini is, in fact, a star turn and some cognoscenti would go to Venice just to see his works - I certainly would - but in general terms Titian and Palladio provide the art focus. It is interesting to think that the western canon of art masterpieces is reinforced and given a renewed

source of power thanks to the intersection of tourism and the art museum³⁶ and at the very time when the genius/masterpiece view of art history is under such sustained attack within the academic discipline of art history.

³⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998.

7. Tourism draws upon & replicates the strategies of western colonialism, particularly the way it produces space/place & history

This is a vast area to be tackling and I will only touch on the subject here. Extreme examples give an inkling of how the link between western colonialism and tourism operates. If we can assume, for the sake of brevity, that western colonialism was about the possession of non-European lands, then it can be shown that one of the mechanisms of dominance was the construction of a colonised 'other'. Edward Said's highly influential study of Orientalism exposes this idea rather starkly³⁷. And one of the most powerful elements of this construction of the colonised 'other' was fantasy. In Said's study, the fantasy of the Orient - a fantasy where the exotic, the erotic and domination - was yoked to the formidable apparatus of political and cultural imperialism. I think all this re-emerges, for example, when western tourism "invades" south-east Asian destinations: think of Bali, think of Thailand, think of Fiji³⁸.

The complexity of all this is too great to un-pack here, however, there is one aspect of the colonialism/tourism nexus that I want to briefly touch on. Of fundamental importance to western colonialism has been the role of cartography³⁹. However, the map is equally crucial to tourism. This can be illustrated by looking to the maps in the *Blue Guide Venice* or the *Eyewitness Travel Guide to Venice and the Veneto*. Maps are not just documents that enable people to get from A to B; maps are also cultural constructions that are semiotically saturated. Here are some ideas about maps which are common to both colonialism and tourism:

1. Maps order space by describing the spatial relationship between a given set of material entities. In this sense, maps assume empty homogenous space which can then be filled. The things that fill the space are, in the process, spatially described. By homogenising space, map-makers attempt to render space culturally neutral, but this is an illusion.
2. Maps turn horizontal seeing into vertical seeing. Therefore maps can be said to involve a particular way of seeing the world or, in the case of western maps, they assume an imperial or magisterial spectatorship over the landscape. To this extent they are ideologically charged.
3. Maps apply mathematical order to that which is unordered and dynamic. They therefore provide the phenomenological, symbolic and discursive loci of place.
4. Maps create paths of movement and then they choreograph movement along those paths.

Western tourism is predicated on all these ideas: the negotiation of space and place; magisterial spectatorship; an order and a focus within the existential randomness of a city like Venice; the choreographed paths of the itinerary. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the map configures tourism itself.

8. Tourism has, at its core, the anthropological 'other'

³⁷ Said, 1985 and Said, 1994.

³⁸ For a study of colonialism, culture and travel/tourism in Fiji and the South Pacific, see Thomas, 1994 and Stephen, 1993.

³⁹ Cosgrove, 1999.

This is another fairly complex area to traverse and so I really only want to open it up for consideration. Tourism works on the spatial separation of being here as opposed to being there; of being at home as opposed to being away. This binarism is absolutely necessary; it is the potential energy between two points which enables movement from one point to the other point. Now in all of this, the 'other' is especially significant. After-all, it is the 'other' which is the locus of the travel fantasy; it activates desire/anticipation. What makes this 'other' anthropological, however, is that it is an entity that has already been studied in depth - the anthropological gaze, if you will, has already prepared the tourist destination: it is semiotically over-determined; it is a beacon beckoning and, most importantly, it is also an entity which is known before it is encountered existentially. Venice is a tourist destination precisely because we already know so much about it. The myth of Venice has cast its spell long before we ever leave home. Even if you've never been to Venice, images of the city are instantly recognisable and they can seduce⁴⁰.

The notion of the anthropological 'other' is not, however, just about the studied object of our desire. In the case of Venice it is also about freezing Venetian culture in the past - in much the same way as the anthropological gaze tends to freeze Aboriginality in the Dreamtime. Everything that is Venice, as a tourist destination, demands that Venice reject modernity - there is no present in Venice, only a glorious past. The tourist images say it all. That's why, when a picture of the Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art is suddenly included in a series of pictures of Venice, it jars so much. Yes, the Guggenheim and the Venice Film Festival etc. are extremely important to Venice and to the Venetians, but these very eruptions of modernity simply reinforce the tourist myth of Venice. For the tourist, they are radically out of place: this is not the Venice of our dreams. As in anthropology, the indigenous voice is silenced; the contemporary lives of the Venetians are partially suppressed - unless they run restaurants or row gondolas. What counts - and any travel brochure is a powerful reminder - is a Venice that is preserved in formalin. This 'other' Venice exists both, in the timeless realm of fantasy, and in the 'real' time of tourism. What a powerful partnership: the timelessness of fantasy and the 'real' time of tourism.

9. Tourism and Heritage Issues

The Changing Conception of Heritage

- Initially, the literature tended to distinguish between 'natural' and 'built' heritage, but increasingly it has been recognised that the issues are overwhelmingly the same and so in recent years the concern has been with *natural* and *built or made heritage*. In this presentation, however, the built/made heritage is being emphasised.
- The 1983 National Heritage Conference in the UK defined Heritage as:

“... that which a past generation has preserved and handed on to the present and which a significant group of population wishes to hand on to the future.”
- This definition focuses on the preservation/conservation of material culture. This is the traditional role of Heritage in western cultures.

⁴⁰ Selwyn, 1996.

- Such definitions fail to address the why of preservation/conservation and who is doing the deciding. Such definitions were framed at a time when historical knowledge - that is, the study of history - was central to school and university curricular.
- Today a sense of nostalgia for the past is more potent than a deep knowledge of that past.
- Recent definitions of Heritage are less narrow, for example, Herbert's definition (1995):

“Heritage places include historic buildings or monuments which bear the distinctive imprint of human history. Their interest may derive from architecture or design, from historical significance, or from a combination of these attributes. Heritage places are linked with people, events, activities and, in a wider sense, with cultures, societies and economies.”

- In this definition, Heritage sites would, potentially, include galleries, museums, archaeological sites, historic buildings, theme parks, seaside resorts, regions of significance, even entire cities like Venice.

Tourism and Heritage

MacCannell has claimed, evocatively (and provocatively), that:

Tourism is not just the aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs⁴¹.

This suggests that tourism can, and does, influence the heritage agenda because of the ongoing significant inter-relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘tourism’ to the point that, in contemporary societies, ‘culture’, ‘society’ and ‘tourism’ are not discrete entities but are totally fused⁴². Herbert has produced a list of positives and negatives on the question of heritage places as tourist attractions⁴³.

Positives

1. There is a need to generate funds to allow preservation and conservation strategies and programs because increasingly governments are not assuming this responsibility especially in terms of funding.
2. It is desirable to motivate local interest in heritage because heritage has come to be associated with community identity in a postmodern world where ‘community’ is a highly contested notion. Local service providers in conservation are increasingly seen as more effective and more sustainable.
3. Public heritage agencies have a conservation brief and this can better ensure a balance between preservation and tourist access.
4. On-site heritage conservation can become a tourist attraction in itself and a means of educating visitors about heritage conservation.

⁴¹ MacCannell, 1992.

⁴² See Rojek and Urry, 1997. Also Nuryanti, 1996.

⁴³ Herbert, 1995.

5. Heritage places have assumed economic significance. They can generate local employment and wealth. Heritage tourism is often viewed as stepping into the void created within a post-industrial/manufacturing age.

Negatives

1. Authenticity one. Tourism distorts the history of a site. It commodifies/packages the past and, in the process, simplifies it and produces an inauthentic 'version' or explanation of things. The counter argument is that history is always about simplification and interpretation.
2. Authenticity two. Heritage is about the re-creation of a perceived but illusory 'real'; that is, heritage is about simulacrum and in the words of Umberto Eco, 'the completely real becomes identified with the completely fake'⁴⁴. With the tourism/heritage mix, in an age of themeparks and cyberspace and computer generated images in movies, the fake can be preferred because pleasure and nostalgia has displaced historical knowledge. Conversely, the hyper-real, like the film *The Gladiator*, can increase tourist interest in the Colosseum.
3. The problem of selectivity. Heritage tourism sanitises place. Heritage rarely, if at all, deals with noxious smells or suffering or horrible sounds or extreme poverty except as a stage part of the presentation like the tour of the dungeons (via the Bridge of Sighs) in the Ducal Palace in Venice. Heritage tourism tends to shun the ordinary for the extraordinary and so stately villas are preferred over attempts to preserve, for example, the make-do accommodation of migrants in blighted inner-city neighbourhoods.
4. The impacts on local environments and local communities: the possibility of the invasion of privacy (and the danger of local communities becoming the 'spectacle' of tourism) and threats to the natural and built environments by tourist numbers and insensitive behaviour and attitudes⁴⁵

Heritage Tourism and Venice: the problems

- The decline of the host community. In 1950 there were 150,000 people living in the city but by 1994 this was down to 70,000 with about 2000 dying every year and a mean age of 50 years. there are very few children being brought up in Venice and many schools have closed.
- In contrast, Venice hosts 12 million visitors a year. These visitors tend to focus on a relatively small number of sites/sights.
- There have been significant changes to Venice's economy since World War 2. It now survives on tourism. Rents have sky-rocketed as the 'rich and famous' have bought Venetian real estate. But while fortunes are paid for water-side villas, the landlords tend to be absentee or itinerant. Consequently, in winter Venice is all but deserted, except for the dwindling local population and tourists.
- Heritage values. In 1987 the entire city and the lagoon were added to the World Heritage List. There are strong heritage rules in operation about the external appearance of city buildings. Keeping a whole city restored, especially given the exceptionally difficult and unique physical environment, is extremely difficult and made more difficult by severe financial restraints.
- Decay and subsidence. There is a water-table problem (partially solved by the capping of all wells); the silting of the lagoon is a problem; air pollution from nearby industrial Mestre (now the home of many Venetians escaping crippling rents); king tides and sewerage problems.
- The problem of being a heritage city - there is a demand to freeze the city in the past. Modernity is either consciously expelled or hidden on the outside but all the creature comforts of tourists are demanded on the inside of hotels, museums etc.
- Restoration. An international effort in the late 1970's ended in scandal when millions of dollars 'disappeared'!

⁴⁴ Eco, 1986.

⁴⁵ For an Australian and New Zealand perspective see Hall and McArthur, 1996.

- There are significant planning problems. Just who is in charge? The sheer number of regulatory bodies form a tangled web of local, regional and national government agencies often in conflict.
- Commodification and interpretation: the ‘myth of Venice’ has become a marketable attribute of the city. Historical time is squashed - the Madonna of Byzantine culture becomes the ‘Whore of Europe’ becomes Madonna’s *Like A Virgin*. Postmodern tourism seems at odds with historical veracity and the views of the remaining Venetians⁴⁶.

Conclusion

As we move into the 21 century CE, tourism and travel have become not only a major economic player with some 700 million people making international airtrips in 1998, they have become significant cultural phenomena. The older tourism models of tourism/host, of discreet attractions of destination lifecycles, of functional definitions of tourism (like travel from home that is greater than 45 kms and an overnight stay of at least two nights) now all seem inadequate. Tourism and travel have become embedded in a contemporary spatio-temporal moment where consumption has emerged - at least in the techno-industrial nations of the west and the east – as a way of life; where mobility has become a daily norm; where the idea of community is being re-shaped by a number of dynamic socio-cultural factors, not the least being the communications revolution; where issues of identity (national, regional, ethnic, racial, gender, sexuality, class) have emerged as crucial socio-political processes, and where in recent decades, the world has witnessed the emergence of a potent mass/popular culture that is often driven along global vectors (whether the Internet or Hollywood).

What constitutes ‘tourism’ in the new millennium is something more powerful, more complex and more culturally embedded than in the pre-Boeing 747 world (that is, before 1970). And so, the impacts of tourism on national economies, on cultural landscapes, on natural resources, on host communities, on urban and natural environments and so forth has never been so great. However, even ‘impacts’ has become a problematic notion largely because tourism is so knitted into the socio-economic and cultural fabric of many places whether we are considering Australia as a whole, or the Hunter Valley, or islands like Bali or cities like Venice, Bangkok, Sydney or New York. Rather than an external force impacting on places, tourism has increasingly become a way of being, a way of living, a way of seeing, a way of knowing and, at the same time, has the potential to help destroy (natural and cultural environments) and to help create (communities, conservation alliances, regional economies, modernity). The issues of contemporary tourism are profoundly complex and multifaceted and a study of Venice begins to reveal this. “Ah Venice”. Indeed!

⁴⁶ On postmodernism and heritage see Hollinshead in Ryan, 1997.

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