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**A BOOK REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM: A CRITICAL
INTRODUCTION**

Drawing from a critical theoretical perspective, this book explores the contemporary world of tourism by investigating the power relations inherent in, and resulting from, the social structures at play in the consumption and production of tourism experiences. On the basis of post-structuralist philosophy, Hannam and Knox build upon the principle of social construction of reality, thus deconstructing many of the positions that current tourism thinkers take for granted. Using political aspects of tourism development, it lends insight into how culture and power materialize in the meanings of tourism destinations, places and people. Overall, *Understanding Tourism* is well conceptualized and written in a manner that engages readers to think critically about contemporary tourism in an age of globalization. The book will be useful for undergraduate students, with exercises at the end of each chapter, and also valuable for post graduate students as they begin to study tourism more critically.

The authors have longstanding research and publication interest in the social and cultural relations of power in tourism. The lead author of this book, Kevin Hannam, has published widely on tourism matters such as globalization and power in tourism development, nature based tourism, discourses and the power of surveillance in tourism, and critical views of international backpacker tourism. The co-author, Dan Knox, is also interested in variety of issues of critical tourism studies including cultural and youth tourism, embedment and practice, popular culture, and the relationships between natural heritage and identity. Such a variety of research experience of both authors promises good reading on

critical tourism theory while the academic contributions of the authors will be useful for teaching what John Tribe (2005) called “New Tourism Research”.

Understanding Tourism is divided into eleven chapters to discuss the binary relationships between tourism and daily life, globalization and local culture, and familiarity and exoticism. Selected chapters are reviewed in detail below. In the third chapter, the authors discuss the processes of commodification and consumer culture in tourism, focusing not only on how tourist activities are turned into consumable commodities but also on how the production and consumption of tourist commodities influence cultural and economic power relations. The fourth chapter explores the social and cultural characteristics of human bodies in the context of tourism by examining how people present and dress themselves in tourist settings, and how those representations and bodily practices during tourism activities lead to shape tourists’ motivations and experiences.

The fifth chapter looks at the concept of performance in tourism studies, examining how the tourist industry shapes and is influenced by the representations of place, culture, heritage and events that take place on stages to create interaction between tourist destinations and travelers. In this chapter, authors discuss the notion of staged authenticity from MacCanell’s (1973, 1976) front and back stage viewpoints, indicating that tourism performing has negative connotations of presenting a fake version of a culture that may not be a way of satisfying tourists’ desire for authenticity. However, they also point out how a front region can appear like a back region by reconstructing the place that simulates the daily life of people who live and work behind the scenes. Following the chapter of tourism performing, Chapter 6 focuses on the relationships between the mundane aspects of tourism and touristic elements of everyday life. Traditionally, tourism studies have been concerned with the notion of gazing on a set of different scenes which are different from typically

encountered in daily life as an important tourist motivation to consume the unfamiliar and exotic experience (Urry, 1990). Conversely, the authors, using the banality and familiarity perspectives of mass tourism holiday, state that a holiday is not necessarily different from everyday life at home in the aspects of domestic travel experience and touristic aesthetics of contemporary lives.

The eighth chapter discusses the development of nature-based tourism protected areas and the incorporating of the idea of sustainability in tourism development that is primarily concerned with the needs of economic growth, retaining local cultural identity, and minimizing environmental impacts. However, the authors also point out the difficulty of employing a coherent concept of sustainable development in tourism research, because even as growing numbers of researchers are aiming in this direction, e.g. Font (2002) and Duffy (200), there remain ambiguities in defining sustainable development and agreeing upon effective ways to measure it. Further, Chapter nine presents another growing area in tourism research, heritage tourism and the heritage industry, and asks how the concept of heritage can be used to create the meaning and significance to destinations that lead to increased tourist interest. The authors further examine the central component of heritage tourism, asserting that the social interpretation of the notion of heritage provides support for generating destination image and fulfilling visitor satisfaction, thus offering a gateway for communication between tourists and locals to enhance visitors' appreciation of the local community and culture.

In conclusion, *Understanding Tourism* predominantly emphasizes the discursive, symbolic and cultural analysis of understanding the structures and relations of power associated with globalization and neo-colonialism in shaping today's tourism. Certainly, the book presents substantial information on the structures and functions of the tourism industry, but it is stronger in providing conceptualization than focusing on interpretations of underlying

causes and outcomes that may lead the very industry-led institutions and practitioners to challenge. The book does make for interesting reading but as an academic textbook it could bring more relevant illustrations on the basis of actual tourism issues to the classroom for an even fuller comprehension of critical tourism theory.

Understanding Tourism: A Critical Introduction. Written by Hannam, Kevin and Knox, Dan. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010

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