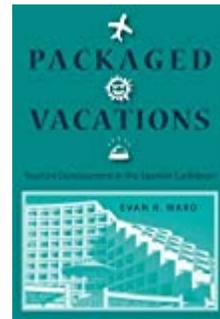




Evan R. Ward. *Packaged Vacations: Tourism Development in the Spanish Caribbean.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xxvi + 236 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3229-0.



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Changing Contours of Caribbean Tourism

In recent years, historians have increasingly considered tourism's important role in Latin American economic development. Evan R. Ward's *Packaged Vacations* contributes to our understanding of tourism and the ways that tourism development and promotion intersected with foreign investment, local governments' development efforts, and environmental concerns since World War II. His significant research ably integrates material gleaned from published and archival sources and interviews in the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.

After World War II, the focus of Caribbean tourism development shifted from cities to peripheral areas. Local governments and foreign investors saw tourism as an effective way to develop these peripheral areas, and it was. This new sun and sand model of tourism development required building not only new hotels but also the infrastructure (especially roads and airports) to make accommodations accessible and appealing to potential visitors. Resort hotels were deliberately packaged to provide modern amenities while highlighting the local natural envi-

ronment and local culture. Ward examines this process in depth as it occurred in Dorado Beach (Puerto Rico), Cancun (Mexico), Varadero (Cuba), and Punta Cana (Dominican Republic).

Throughout the book, Ward considers the interplay between state promotion of tourism, private (local and foreign, especially American) investment, and marketing of decentralized tourism poles to appeal to domestic and foreign tourists. In his introduction, he identifies three themes in Caribbean tourism since World War II: the diminishing role of U.S. investors in developing and managing the region's tourist industry, the increasing role of Spanish hotel and tourism companies, and the increasing need for sustainable development in the region's tourism industry.

In part 1, "The American Caribbean," Ward establishes the early dominance of U.S. investors in Caribbean tourism. With the encouragement of the U.S. government and in cooperation with local governments, U.S. hoteliers, like Nelson and Laurance Rockefeller as well as

Conrad Hilton, began to construct hotels to foster hemispheric goodwill and economic development in Latin America. These investors began the shift of tourism development in the region away from major cities, and infused new hotels and resorts with international flavors by incorporating local, American, and European designs and services. Even when they built in cities, they often situated the hotels away from existing properties, as when the Rockefellers built the Hotel Avila in an outlying part of Caracas, Venezuela.

The Hotel Avila and other U.S. hotels in the region had to contend with social and political disruptions during the 1940s and 1950s. Hilton International Hotels, built between 1949 and 1959 in San Juan (Puerto Rico), Havana (Cuba), and Mexico City (Mexico), had to confront difficult situations. Political upheavals and natural disasters (including earthquakes and hurricanes) damaged and destroyed property. Even when the damage was not serious, these problems discouraged the traveling public from visiting Caribbean resort hotels.

Less-developed parts of the Caribbean were not as likely to be directly affected by political upheavals but often lacked adequate infrastructure and were vulnerable to hurricanes and other natural disasters. Nonetheless, American investors after World War II were very interested in developing these peripheral areas and were often innovative in doing so. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Laurance Rockefeller's RockResorts company developed resort hotels in Caneel Bay (St. John's, Virgin Islands) and Dorado Beach that were adapted to the natural environment and were monumental in the evolution of low-density resort design (p. 16). Rockefeller used existing buildings and local or locally inspired colors, materials, and designs in building these two resorts that gracefully combined modern amenities and local flavor. Due to the difficult social and political circumstances, U.S. investment in tourism in the region ultimately declined in the 1950s and 1960s, and local governments became more directly involved in tourism development.

Part 2, "The Latin Caribbean," examines Caribbean governments' efforts to develop tourism by actively pursuing new projects, researching competitive tourism sites and marketing, assisting clients in financing and choosing hotel sites, and ensuring that adequate infrastructure and services were in place. These strategies were used by the Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO) and by the Mexican Consejo Nacional de Turismo (CNT). Laurance Rockefeller worked closely with PRIDCO to develop the Dorado Beach Hotel. Ward ex-

amines the Rockefeller-PRIDCO relationship and RockResorts' later relationship with Eastern Airlines in great depth to demonstrate the range of factors that determined the success or failure of a development project.

Although Ward addresses the effects of the Cuban Revolution on tourism briefly in part 1, he analyzes them much more closely in part 2. He also considers tourism development in prerevolutionary Cuba, challenging the dominant argument in existing scholarship that it was dependent on American tourists and focused on vice (prostitution, gambling, etc.). Even though Fulgencio Batista proved uninterested in exploring nationalist alternatives to this model, Ward demonstrates that there were nationalist alternatives to Batista's tourism program articulated by both the Truslow committee (for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in consultation with the Cuban government) and by Cuban intellectual Armando Maribona before the revolution (p. 89).

Fidel Castro may have been influenced by these proposals, especially Maribona's. Shortly after the revolution's triumph in 1959, Castro began nationalizing foreign-owned properties that catered to tourists and developing a domestic tourism program and infrastructure. Ward distinguishes between two stages in tourism development in Castro's Cuba. In the first, "revolutionary tourism" (1959-81), the focus was primarily on domestic tourism with a limited international aspect (p. 98). "On both accounts, Castro's program was meant to showcase the achievements and talents of the Revolution, and the beauty and hospitality of Cuba, and to retain valuable foreign exchange on the island" (p. 98). The second stage, according to Ward, began in 1973 and was consolidated in May 1981. This was the period of "postrevolutionary tourism," which muted both the nationalist content and revolutionary content of Cuban tourism and increasingly looked to foreign tourist spending for revenue (p. 102).

Highlighting the environment has been a theme of Caribbean tourism packaging since World War II. After examining successful Caribbean tourist poles like Miami and Jamaica in the 1960s, Mexico's CNT planners decided to focus on both the natural beauty of the region and the unique Mayan culture in packaging the Mexican Caribbean. Ward's analysis of the selection and development of Cancun as a tourist pole provides an excellent example of vacation packaging. Cancun's built environment is one of the first to incorporate "destination themeing," such as integrating Mayan elements

into modern architecture throughout the tourist zone (p. 116). In building Cancun in the 1960s and 1970s and then rebuilding it after the damaging hurricanes of 1988 (Hurricane Gilbert) and 2005 (Hurricanes Emily and Wilma), Mexican officials have demonstrated an increasing awareness of the need for sustainable development.

The notable increase of European and especially Spanish investment in the Caribbean tourism sector beginning in the 1980s is the focus of part 3, "The Global Caribbean." In Cuba, Spanish hotel companies Sol Meliá and Guitart "revolutionized" hotel management and improved economic efficiency and occupancy rates (p. 144). Despite U.S. efforts to prevent European investment there with the Helms-Burton Act (1996), Sol Meliá and Guitart have profited enormously from their Cuban endeavors. European and international hotel groups, including Sol Meliá, also entered the Dominican tourist market in the 1980s in significant ways, and built tourism facilities that featured Punta Cana's natural environment and utilized building materials and styles typical of traditional Dominican architecture. Planning and building regulations that limit building height and recommend local and natural building materials contribute both to marketing Punta Cana as an attractive and unique resort destination and to developing the area sustainably. At the

same time, the nearby Bávaro Beach area has been developed as a destination for mass tourism with a much higher density of hotel rooms and facilities. Ward notes that this development pattern was possible through private investment by international and European investment groups, but only time will demonstrate whether "the experiment of sustainable development and mass tourism in a single pole can continue to thrive" (p. 171).

Although the investors and planners have changed over the course of the last half-century, many of the innovations of the immediate postwar period continue to be important in Caribbean vacation packaging. Laurance Rockefeller's emphasis on natural materials and low-density resort building has been carried through by international and European hoteliers in recent years. Both were encouraged by local governments that have increasingly understood the need for sustainable development. Ward's detailed research considering the intersections of state promotion and private investment in tourism, as well as the contribution of sustainable development to the construction and packaging of Caribbean vacations, is a valuable addition to the history of the region's tourism. For scholars and students interested in tourism, economic development, foreign investment, and sustainable development in Latin America, it has much to offer.

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