

Book review

Tourism and Humour

Edited by Philip L. Pearce and Anja Pabel

Channel View

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Is tourism a Mickey Mouse subject? In this case "Yes". Professor Philip Pearce and his then doctoral student Anja Pabel of whom this book is based on her PhD thesis, explore the Mickey Mouse syndrome of tourism that is the role of humour in tourism. I wish this topic had been my PhD thesis. This is a book that comprehensively explores, structures and reflects upon the history, metaphors, explanations and theories about humour applied in a tourism context. The book is structured cleverly with six chapters. Chapter 1, "Better to laugh than cry" provides the fundamentals of humour theory and connects tourism to humour and vice versa. Introducing the chapter with laughter and smiling, whether laughter is spontaneous or fake, that is, either involuntary and without restraint, or composed and contrived for a variety of personal motives. For spontaneous laughter, it is a quick reaction, a response to something quirky or other sensation. But laughter is also about when people are laughing around you and you are not. There are many dimensions. Humour is an elusive term, defined as encompassing both the production and perception of a communication or act which includes an emotional state of mirth or exhilaration. What Pearce and Pabel set out to do is advance the conceptual understanding of humour theories linked to tourism examples and material. There is no one single theory of humour, but a number of mini-theories. For example, superiority theory, which is expressed in several forms has a long history and credibility as an approach to understanding humour. Superiority is associated with the jokes about others i.e., Brits laughing at the Irish or Australians making jokes about Poms (British). Incongruity theory involves humour bringing together two

unrelated ideas, concepts or situations.

Relief theory is used from a laughter perspective to release built-up nervous energy including sexual or aggressive feelings. These three theories do not compete but compliment each other. Chapter 2 "It will be a laugh" examines the role of humour in pre-departure information and travel preparation drawing upon the examples from tourism promotions. For example, the promotion of Iceland with Emilia Torrini (<https://youtu.be/Ql52dp3r2o0>) – a video which features a close up focus of an attractive, softly spoken, young Icelandic lady who teases viewers with "You're not going to believe where I am now". She then abandons her serious tone and lets everyone know in a distinctive accents and flourish of laughter "Yeah [...]. Iceland, amazingly really". The promotional effort was generated following the 2010 eruption of volcano Eyjakkalaokull, which caused air traffic problems across Europe and reduced subsequent tourism travel to Iceland.

Chapter 3 "Joking our way through the day", shifts to tourists on site experiences, with original data being incorporated to illustrate cases of humour in adventure and nature-based tourism. Pearce and Pabel give the example of Craig the Tour Guide whose voice, mannerisms and most unlikely figure of a guide in the Arctic circle making comparisons to Jon Pertwee as something out of Dr Who or an eccentric scientist.

The manner of the tour guide in this context brings aesthetic labour, in which looks and character of Craig are an important aspect of tourism experience. Chapter 4 "That's a funny story" covers both the communication efforts by tourists and recognition by others. Here, the skills of the travel communicator as well the empathetic perceptiveness of the listener jointly influence the success of the travel tale. Examples include the a "tour guide living in rough conditions finds himself sharing his toilet with a buffalo" or the unimpressed tourists finally laugh at a guide who, bitten in the groin by a tsetse fly, comically falls out of the safari vehicle. The chapter also outlines a range of

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conceptual frameworks to structure good humorous stories in a tourism context.

Chapter 5, "Not funny" considers unsuccessful or inappropriate humour in tourism situations whether there are ethical considerations, inappropriateness or just not humorous. Addressing the issues of sex, gender, death, disease, stupidity, drunkenness, avarice or someone else's misfortune as all the vices of humour. Drawing the example in the Darwin Awards (www.darwinawards.com) of the safari tourist in Tanzania who left the tour bus for a better photo and was trampled to death by a furious elephant. The comments about the story included "keep your arms and legs inside the vehicles at all times". Humour also goes wrong, Tourism Australia's "Where the bloody hell are you?" campaign received mixed messages as the words "bloody hell" was perceived as rude by some. For example, British tourists found the word "bloody" a problem whereas Canadians found the word "hell" problematic. Furthermore, the Japanese version of the commercial "So, why aren't you coming?" fell flat with Japanese people. Tourism Australia apologized by saying that no offence was intended but that instead they were trying to provide a hospitable welcome. When using humour, sometimes it gets lost in translation.

Chapter 6 "In it for the laugh" brings the whole book together looking at the positive aspects of humour and tourism thus identifying the original contribution that research makes. Central to the theoretical contribution is epistemology, technology and change aspects. As travel is so mobile in a modern society, technology induced change both shrinks and expands the travel experience.

For example, good humour stories are quickly posted online via Facebook or YouTube. One important aspect is the role of humour in enhancing the holiday experience so putting humour as a central feature of the experience economy. Humour significantly contributes to enjoyment of holidays, putting humour in the positive psychology domain. As *Tourism and Humour* is based upon Pabel's doctoral studies, the analytical framework used was Flyvbjerg (2001) "Framework of Phronetic Social Science". Flyvbjerg poses four value-rational questions to appraise the direction of research, hence the future values of going, gain and loss, desire and action. Overall, Pearce and Pabel concur that humour creates a positive future of tourism as an essential ingredient, the use of humour is a plus for destination marketing and tourists through bringing places alive. Humour significantly contributes to tourism experiences, thus it is desirable and the design of humour as a conceptual framework relates to tourism context, tourist's individuality and tourism presentation overlaid with comfort, concentration and connection.

Overall, this is a great book, which investigates an underresearched topic in tourism and makes an essential contribution to conceptualising the tourist experience economy. The book is easy to read, does not require prior knowledge and is structured in a logical manner. I highly recommend it to the researchers in tourism.

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