Cultural Heritage Tourism: Five Steps for Success and Sustainability
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Cultural Heritage Tourism: Five Steps for Success and Sustainability has a clear focus on the United States and reads as a how-to manual for cultural heritage tourism development. It provides very clear step-by-step instructions for and advice related to all steps of the heritage tourism planning process, and the addition of descriptive case studies at the end of each chapter which highlight the discussed aspects are particularly useful.

The book is organized into five subsections, which are presented in the introductory chapter and developed around the identified steps needed for a successful cultural heritage tourism venture: analyze the potential, plan and engage, develop authentically, market for impact, and manage for growth and sustainability. Section one, ‘analyze the potential’, contains three chapters outlining the preliminary measures required before commencing a cultural tourism project. These chapters discuss the identification and assessment of a destination’s local heritage (Chapter 2), visitor segmentation and needs (Chapter 3), and how to determine when a tourism destination is ready for tourism (Chapter 4). Section two highlights the steps involved in the planning and engagement process. Chapter 5 is of particular note as it highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement, with an emphasis on the inclusion of the resident/local population. The additional two chapters found in the second section focus on the establishment of a tourism plan (Chapter 6) and the development of policies (Chapter 7).

The third section concentrates on the authentic development of cultural heritage tourism with two chapters specifically focused on this topic. Chapter 8 highlights the importance of developing authentic experiences while Chapter 9 emphasizes the importance of interpretation in the tourist visits. This section also includes a chapter on funding (Chapter 10), which would have been more logical to place within the previous planning section. Section four contains only one chapter (Chapter 11) and illustrates the various ways in which a cultural heritage tourism destination can be marketed to potential visitors. The fifth, and concluding, section of the book is composed of four chapters. Chapter 12 underscores the importance of continuous capacity management and brand management, and Chapter 13 details the final steps necessary for providing a sustainable cultural heritage tourism experience, emphasizing the importance of the visitor experience from arrival to departure. Chapter 14 deviates from the general discussion of management and planning by introducing various methods with which a destination can assess the impact of cultural heritage tourism. Finally, the book closes with a very brief summary.

Based on a thorough reading of the text, it becomes clear that this is, in short, a book written by and for heritage tourism practitioners. This does not imply that the work is
not well done but instead is indicative of a greater problem, a disconnect between practitioners and academics. While this book thoroughly discusses the planning and management processes inherent in the development and maintenance of cultural heritage tourism, it barely engages with the large body of academic literature in this field. Given the breadth of this literature, the work could have only been strengthened by its inclusion, particularly in pulling from the extant studies that focus on heritage tourism in the United States. In fact, there are multiple points within the text where the discussion of cultural heritage tourism concepts is either inaccurately or insufficiently clarified. For example, in chapter 8, several terms are identified as potential difficulties for the development of cultural heritage tourism (p. 177). Commodification was one of these, which is consistent with the academic literature. However, the examination of the concept of commodification becomes muddled when discussing the themed casinos of Las Vegas and Main Street USA in Walt Disney World. These are, if anything, examples of Baudrillard’s simulacra and thus an example of the hyperreal. The discussion of these in relation to the problems with the development of cultural heritage tourism based on, as the author continually stresses, authenticity is out of place. Further issues arise in the discussion of another identified potential problem, namely staged authenticity. It is entirely remiss to discuss this concept without at least a nod to its originator, Dean MacCannell, or a mention of John Urry’s “tourist gaze.”

Unfortunately, this text’s lack of engagement with the plethora of heritage tourism literature limits its academic use. It could potentially be of interest for those academics who require a detailed discussion of the cultural heritage tourism processes within a US context. Furthermore, based on the above discussion, this text would be most beneficial for those who wish to develop cultural heritage tourism destinations in the USA, particularly policy makers and planners. Overall, while the work was well done, in the end, it falls short of excellence due to the lack of inclusion of the academic perspective.

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