



Tourism, culturalism, and imaginative geographies: the case of US tourism to Mexico

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on cultural narratives and representations of Mexico, Mexicans, and Mexican culture prevalent in US travel books, tourist discourse, and Mexican tourist scapes. It examines US tourism to Mexico through the lens of the imaginative geographies it is informed by and serves to mobilize. After exploring the context onto which contemporary tourism and US tourism discourse to Mexico unfolds, this thesis traces the evolution of contemporary ideas of Mexico and Mexican culture found in popular tourist narratives by looking at US travel books from the nineteenth century to the contemporary period. It then draws from

empirical research data gathered through multisited ethnographic fieldwork conducted at three of Mexico's most popular tourist destinations: San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, and Cancun/Mayan Riviera. Here, I examine the way in which particular tourist spaces – ranging from hotels, tours, expeditions, cultural courses and attractions – interweave elements of local culture into their surrounding, on-site exhibitions, and/or events programming. In addition to examining these spaces, I also consider the voices of individuals from the US who, at the time of my fieldwork, were visiting or living in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, or Cancun/Mayan Riviera. By triangulating the discursive tropes and conceptual frameworks mobilized by tourist books, tourist discourse, and tourist scapes, this thesis illustrates how culturalist readings and imaginative geographies premised on nationalist modes of understanding continue to be mobilized in the context of much of the discourse through which tourism operates.



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Contributors

Author: **Anna Eleftheria Papanicolaou**

Thesis advisor: [Clare Mar-Molinero](#)

Thesis advisor: [Patrick Stevenson](#)

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