

Unravelling Travelling

THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

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Unravelling Travelling: Uncovering Tourist Emotions through Autoethnography

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Author

Prof Beeton is a Travel and Tourism Researcher and Writer who became involved in tourism in the late 1980s through guiding horseback tours in the mountains, many of which were themed around the movie, *The Man from Snowy River* environments, and wrote her first book on adventure horse riding. Here she witnessed the growth of tourism and its effects on small, local communities as well as fragile alpine environments. For over a quarter of a century, she has conducted tourism-based research into community development and public land management, along with film-induced tourism and pop culture's relationship with travel and tourism. As well as producing numerous academic papers, book chapters and reports, she has published a range of research-based books on those topics, along with developing her interest in autoethnographic research.

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I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I live and have written this book, The Wathaurong and Yorta Yorta peoples of the Kulin Nation. Cover artwork is a representation of Jizō, a Japanese deity who is the guardian of 'lost' children and travellers. They are often found in temples and along sacred walking trails wearing red bibs and hoods, where travellers and parents leave small gifts of coin, food and toys.

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Introduction

I am writing this book during a time of enforced ‘no travel’, which in itself is challenging for many, including myself. We find ourselves in a liminal space, not unlike an airport, but one with less certainty and more dread. I have always found airports to be places of transition and transformation, where I step in at one place (and mental state) and out at a completely different, often foreign place and state of being. After over a year of confinement in my own home and state, I feel strangely out of touch with the world, yet there remains the possibility of some sort of transformation as I sit here reflecting on my life of travel. As I began this work, I wondered whether, in fact, I would move from one state of being to another, as at the airport, which I believe has happened.

We may remain in such liminal limbo in our (post-)COVID world, which we are all navigating, and one that I believe will change us and the ways we travel for many, many years. What is telling though is the massive uptake of domestic travel that I have been witnessing as I write the final sentences of this book – while Australia’s international borders remain closed, travel within my country, particularly to our more exotic and remote destinations, is booming. What has not changed is the crucial role our experiences, emotions and memories play in our lives.

For over 50 years, my pre-COVID-19 world extended way beyond my own place of residence, at times even challenging my notions of ‘home’. I love that delicious shock of being foreign and the challenges it brings. It focuses the mind and clarifies one’s sight with a hit as sharp as the light of a cold dawn. My current lack of foreign travel leaves me feeling discombobulated, angry, bored, sad, nervous and lonely in spite of the good people around me.

Is this simply due to a lack of movement, or something much deeper? Something I need or am searching for and cannot find if I remain here? What is it that this place I call home cannot provide?

This leads me to ponder why ‘travel’ is so central to my being, be it domestic or international, and why one cannot replace the other – for me, it is not an ‘either/or’ situation, with both playing central roles in my life. Albeit domestic, my first flight for over 14 months filled me with a sense of ‘coming home’, while I long to sit in an international departure lounge once again. I feel that there is something deep and innate going on, which I need to explore and, of course, share. Namely, I want to look at what have been my own emotional travel experience/s over the years and whether this is something to which others can relate. But how to do this in a rigorous, thoughtful and realistic way?

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This brings me to the primary aims for this book:

1. To explore why travel matters by looking at our deep emotional responses to our experiences as tourists via my own emotional experiences.
2. To examine the efficacy and power of a research method that utilises our personal, private emotional experience, namely autoethnography.

This book is based on a strong theoretical background which situates my work within the context of the Tourist Experience and, accordingly, this series. After introducing the theoretical concepts that support my work and tie our travel emotions to the Tourist Experience, I present a range of very personal emotional travel experiences as stories and poems. While they have been written to stand alone without analysis, I continue to undertake a more critical analysis of my emotional experiences. This enables me to then assess and critique the theoretical approach I have adopted. Finally, I examine the applicability of autoethnography, questioning if it actually 'works'. In other words, I am looking at whether it adds to our understanding of the emotional tourist experiences and subsequently contributes to the body of knowledge in travel and tourism.

I have also taken the liberty of adding a few 'Digressions' in some of the early chapters, where I indulge in an occasional rant or additional explanation of something that is important to me, and that I believe may be important to your (the reader's) understanding as we journey together through this book. As you delve more into my discussions of autoethnography, the need for this may become clearer.

As the actual practice of writing this book is part of the research process itself, I have been on a profound personal journey where I have uncovered some deep personal 'truths' about how I live in the world, and why I need to travel to foreign places, returning to them time and again. While writing has always been a reflective (and therapeutic) process for me, I did not expect this to be such an emotional and rewarding exercise, and I dearly hope that it may connect with at least one of my readers. I have certainly emerged from this in a very different place and state of being.

Section One

The Theory

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Chapter One

From Experiences to Emotions

When I was a mere five years old, we moved from the town of my birth, Adelaide in South Australia to Melbourne in the neighbouring state of Victoria. While not an uncommon move within Australia, at that young age, I had not even heard of Melbourne. For me, it was something I simply could not conceive – my world did not extend beyond the tennis court and walnut tree of our backyard. We travelled back to Adelaide two to three times a year for the next 10 years, either as a family in our car or on the Overlander (overnight train) with just Mum. I loved these journeys – when driving we would leave at 3 a.m. and drive with the rising sun at our back, the Western plains of Victoria stretching out before us. When taking the train, the clickety-clack of the wheels on the tracks rocked me to sleep in our tiny, magical sleeping berth. I could not sleep for days before out of anticipation of the journey. During those long hours on the road, I would look, think and dream, reflecting upon afterwards ... These experiences founded my love of the Road Trip and overnight rail. As I recall this now, what I remember most are those feelings of excitement and anticipation, combined with a sense of the vast spaces we traversed that allowed my mind to stretch out. I recall little of our sea-side holidays and the family gatherings we were part of – it is the emotional sense of the journey itself that stays with me.

Emotions connect us to our experiences and are often a more potent element of our recollections rather than simply a physical space or activity. While we may not always talk to others about them, as we recall and recount our travel experiences, we feel those emotions once again, sometimes even more powerfully than at the time. Our emotions stay with us long after the activity itself fades.

The term *tourist experience* is one that is used often in both the academic and tourism marketing realms, and while we all have an innate recognition of the term, its complexities are rarely fully understood in spite of the high level of scholarly attention it has received. This is particularly so in relation to our deep emotional responses to those experiences that not only drive our travel decisions but also our selves. In this chapter, I explore the theories underpinning tourist experiences and emotions and how they are intrinsically related.

The Tourist Experience

The *tourist experience* has been of major interest to scholars since the 1960s (Uriely, 2005) and received a great deal of attention over the ensuing decade in the social sciences literature, moving into the broader realm of general tourism research and marketing soon after (Quan & Wang, 2004). In spite of this interest, the study of tourist experiences remained somewhat constrained by conventional 'wisdom', until 1979 when E. Cohen (1979) endeavoured to move the discussion forward by identifying five primary experiences of tourists, namely recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential. He described these five modes as a journey from a focus on pleasure (recreational), ultimately through to a search for meaning that some travellers may undertake as they gain travel experience, not unlike Maslow's oft-cited *Hierarchy of Needs* where we move from basic requirements of safety towards self-actualisation or peak experience (Maslow, 1954). However, he is at pains to point out that not all tourists start at number one and move through progressively; in fact, we can experience all these modes simultaneously, as I can attest. While E. Cohen admits that much of this work was speculative, it served to broaden and deepen the ways in which we look at the tourist experience, remaining relevant today.

Further to these five **modes** of journey, after reviewing the literature up until the early 1980s, Fridgen (1984) identified and outlined five **phases** of the individual tourist experience, namely anticipation, travel to the destination, onsite behaviour, return travel and recollection. As with E. Cohen's travel modes, these phases contribute to a basic outline for understanding the tourist experience. What I am most interested in are the internal emotional elements of the onsite experience and recollection, which can reflect E. Cohen's existential mode.

Over the ensuing decades, many scholars took up the study of the tourist experience, producing a large body of work under this broad topic. Navigating such a body of work is not an easy task, so I am indebted to those who have taken on the role of reviewing the literature. While some reviews have more efficacy than others, C. Ryan's (2010) extensive review of the work to date is not only comprehensive but also critical. He examined the concepts around the tourist experience, and how tourists experience places, concluding that the experience itself is shaped by numerous elements, including '... motive, past experience, knowledge of place, persons with whom that place is shared, patterns of change at the place, the images induced about place and activities, individual personalities ...' (C. Ryan, 2010, p. 44). He presents a strong case for the need to consider individual stories as important sources that contribute to our understanding tourists' experiences, which supports the approach I am taking in this work.

Published around the same time as C. Ryan's review, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) took a more process-oriented perspective, providing additional analysis of the literature of the time. They grouped the literature into four broad approaches to studying the tourist experience:

1. The definitional approach, where scholars identified elements and dimensions of the tourist experience, which is often how knowledge is first developed in a 'new' field.

2. A post hoc satisfaction approach, examining motivation, satisfaction and assessment of the experience, relying more on psychological outcomes.
3. The immediate approach, where the focus is on the nature of real-time onsite experiences.
4. A business or attraction approach where consumer theory, the product and managing (or enhancing) tourist experiences is applied (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010).

So, what we can see from the work of E. Cohen, Fridgen, C. Ryan and Cutler and Carmichael is a sketch of the experiences of tourists and how we study them. This ranges from E. Cohen's individual (motivational) modes of recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential searching, to Fridgen's travel experience phases of anticipation, travel to the destination, onsite behaviour, return travel and recollection, and C. Ryan's more internalised elements of motive, past experience, knowledge of place, companions, change, images and personalities that shape the experience (E. Cohen, 1979; Fridgen, 1984; C. Ryan, 2010). Finally, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) provide us with theoretical approaches that have been adopted when studying the experience, which tends to sit with various disciplinary modes of study, from sociology and anthropology to marketing and management. Their combined work provides us with models and frameworks that take us from the outside (etic) to inside (emic) of the tourist experience.

As with all human endeavours, there is no strictly linear progression from the etic to emic approaches, with scholars from different disciplines often focussing on different elements of the experience. As Scarles (2010) explains:

[...] the tourist experience is no longer identified as a series of linear, static and dislocated spaces made knowable through a series of predetermined actions and behaviours, ... rather a fusion of fluid and dynamic mobilities and materialities, embodied and affectual encounters. (p. 905)

In an effort to uncover such complexities, Ingram, Caruana, and McCabe (2017) applied participative inquiry to their study of the tourist experience. This presented a less linear and more collaborative approach that they argued can address and understand the non-linear nature of the experience as noted by Scarles (2010). In this manner, '... [p]articipants are actively encouraged to be involved in decision-making and agenda-setting throughout the research process ...' (Ingram et al., 2017, p. 16). By introducing and testing this qualitative research approach, they demonstrated its validity as a method that can contribute to our understanding of the complexity of the tourist experience (Ingram et al., 2017).

Tourism marketing has a long history of studying the tourist experience, which I will not go into detail here, but it is worth noting the concept of *experiencescapes*, first appearing in 2005 in the book, *Experiencescapes: Tourism, Culture, and Economy*, by O'Dell (2005). Undertaking a review of the literature on experiencescapes in relation to the tourist experience, Chen, Suntikul, and King (2020) examined a range of articles, books, theses and conference papers relating to the topic. They outline the nature and development of experiencescapes,

summarising that it is a concept that can function analytically to help understand the diverse nature of tourist experiences as well as operationally in terms of developing such experiences.

When studying the co-production of tourism products relating to the creative and tourism industries, Mossberg (2007) found that the experiencescape, where the physical environment, souvenirs, products, themes and stories along with people (including other tourists), is highly influential. While this work is from the marketing perspective, seeing the tourist as consumer, and is not my preferred lens from which to understand the tourist experience, it is relevant nevertheless, it is relevant to this discussion. In fact, Mossberg (2007) presents a strong case for the industry to develop its products (experiences) in line with this, reinforcing the importance of experience and the interrelationships between environment in which it operates.

Chen et al. (2020) conclude their experiencescape review by stating that:

The term currently appears open, experimental, innovative, and somewhat resistant to categorization or terminological precision.
(p. 1421)

I agree that there is more going on regarding experiencescapes than simply managerial and operational elements, and that this concept can also apply to the tourist's deeper emotional experiences by also being a more internal, psychologically based phenomena, not simply a physical scape.

As we can see from the studies and selected reviews outlined above, there has been (and continues to be) a wide range of work around the Tourist Experience. This is such an expansive term, encompassing not only aspects of tourism from the perspective of the tourist but has also been embraced by many disciplines. My aim here has not been to present a comprehensive review of this massive body of literature but to provide a road map and that links from the broad Tourist Experience to the work on the more specific tourist emotions that are the focus of this book. Consequently, the work cited above is deliberately a cursory representation of the extensive study into the tourist experience, providing a basis for the ensuing discussion on emotions and the tourist experience.

The Tourist Experience as Emotional Experience

When discussing the tourist experience, Wearing and Wearing (1996) argue that tourists emotionally engage with the physical elements of spaces during the experience in an effort to determine what they mean to them. They argue that the nature of the tourist experience needs to be studied on a micro as well as macro level, a point we come back to and one that C. Ryan (2010) also noted. Nevertheless, J. Wilson (2021) bemoans the lack of studies into the emotions that tourists experience *in situ* (during their stay), arguing that a significant majority of the work on tourist emotions is about travellers who are driven to travel by their current emotional needs. This could include push factors such as the need to move from a stressful life to a relaxing experience, a boring life to something