

Book review

Philip L. Pearce & Anja Pabel (2015). *Tourism and Humour*. Bristol: Channel View Publications.

As each person's sandal hits the pier
a sociolinguistic transformation from Cruiser to Tourist is effected.
David Foster Wallace (1996: 49)

In his seminal work on *The Language of Tourism* (1996: 179), the sociologist Graham Dann detected a twofold approach to the use of humour in tourism communication. On the one hand, he pointed to a sceptical and cautious position among scholars who warn tourism stakeholders about the risks of not being taken seriously. On the other hand, he quoted numerous favourable studies highlighting the positive cognitive and emotional impact of humour in tourism contexts. Published almost twenty years later, *Tourism and Humour* is firmly grounded in this second tradition. With a broad horizon, unrestricted by promotional aims, it convincingly argues for the sustained relevance of humour in tourist domains, albeit acknowledging some limits and risks.

Over the last few years, humour has been extensively researched for its use and positive effects in the workplace, in health and education, but has been systematically overlooked in tourism research. This pioneering and inspiring work is, thus, much needed, as it fills a critical void in this interdisciplinary field of research. Mapping and discussing the pervasive and increasing use of humour in tourism exchanges, especially in specific cultural contexts such as Australia, the volume shows that “[h]umour in tourism [...] is more than a laughing matter” (p. 25) and deserves scientific investigation. After illustrating the basic theories of humour and contemporary perspectives in psychology on the study of humour, *Tourism and Humour* explores the use and impact of humour in a range of tourism settings, such as guided tours, travel narratives, and tourism promotion texts. Its focus can be aptly summed up in the authors' own introductory words: “the interest in the following chapters lies centrally in the psychological benefits and social consequences of humour in the large and complex set of encounters made possible through tourism” (p. 2).

A synthesis of academic research in the field, this volume is authored by Philip L. Pearce, Foundation Professor of Tourism at James Cook University (Australia), and by Anja Pabel, researcher and educator at the same university. Hosted within the multidisciplinary *Aspects of Tourism* series by Channel View Publications, it is divided into six chapters.

Chapter one outlines studies on humour from a wide range of disciplines, including ethology, physiology, and psychology. It first discusses the term *humour*, drawing on its Latin origin *humorem*, meaning body fluids. According to the Greek physician Hippocrates, good or bad dispositions and temperaments are related to the balance or imbalance between the proportions of the four fluids—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile—in the human body. Specifically, the dominance of blood results in a positive, optimistic condition (p. 9). The

chapter later presents the three main theories currently applied in humour analysis, namely the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory, suggesting that these are to be regarded as complementary rather than mutually competing. The oldest theory of humour, the superiority theory, claims that people laugh at others' weaknesses, stupidity or misfortunes because of a perceived or felt superiority. The incongruity theory, based on a cognitive approach, postulates that humour relies on the existence of two opposite scripts or schemas, such that switching from one to the other in an unexpected way generates humour. Based on Freudian psychoanalysis, the relief theory sustains that humour and laughter release nervous energy and reduce tensions. These theories enable analysts to examine multiple forms and styles of humour, encompassing irony, satire, sarcasm, and puns, among others. The last section of the chapter illustrates the emotional, cognitive and social benefits of humour, and argues that it establishes a comfort level, assists with concentration and establishes interpersonal connections (p. 21).

Chapter two deals with the role of humour in pre-departure information and travel preparation. Studies in psychology and neuroscience are presented and pinpoint three attention-related stages: engaging, filtering, and sustaining attention. This is, in turn, related to emotion-related research, with humour being an "emotionally engaging mechanism" (p. 28). The role of mindfulness is discussed in relation to tourist-guide interactions, as well as to visitor behaviour in museums and interpretation settings (p. 30). The final part of the chapter outlines successful instances of humour in tourism promotion in different countries, as expressed in various genres, relying on a plurality of forms and styles. Among others, the first is a 2:35 minute promotional video clip about Iceland, with dance performances accompanied by Emiliana Turrini's lyrics and scenic landscapes as background; the second is a promotional campaign for the Bavarian-themed tourism destination of Leavenworth in the USA; the third involves the use of a crasher squirrel cartoon-style character as the Banff ambassador for Canadian social media campaigns.

Chapter three addresses on-site experiences and humour in adventure tour and environmental situations. As a story about the Universal Studios theme park in the United States, told by two participants shows, the use of humour can generate lasting memories of a travel experience. Entertaining tourist accounts produced by tourists themselves show that tourists achieve co-creation of humour, rather than passive enjoyment, in tourism settings. Differences between formal and informal humour, namely intentional involvement and spontaneous creation, are also explored. In some tourism contexts, such as theme parks or urban itineraries, fun and entertainment are often required, creating humour labour for tourism employees. The last section of the chapter reports the results of an empirical study with over 100 participants conducted by the authors on on-site humour. The aim was to explore tourists' perspectives on humour in tourism settings—with a focus on Australian humour—to see how humour can enhance the tourism experience. Attention is given to the profile of the tourism presenter, who needs to have the right look, the right emotions, and master performance skills, such as effective timing.

Chapter four covers communication efforts by tourists and by recognised travel writers in reporting on-site experiences, and in mastering storytelling skills while conveying humorous episodes that occurred during their travels. Storytelling is discussed as an enjoyable process that can make sense of a complex world, and that can easily be followed by listeners. The emotional intensity it implies is related to the narrative dynamics of acceleration or deceleration. Often elaborating on a joke or comical situation, humorous travel stories generally feature "a slowly rising evaluative slope, building the tension and reaching a peak of ambiguity and uncertainty. Typically there is an incident, an event or comment which results in a rapid resolution of the emotional tension" (p. 75). In order to provide evidence for this thesis, nine

humorous travel writers, including Bill Bryson, Mark Twain, and Jack Kerouac, have been analysed. Specifically, 40 stories written in English have been assessed, based on ratings by 12 graduate students from six countries who have identified either an aggressive, superior approach or a connection/common experience. Furthermore, humour stories have been investigated in travel blogs, again illustrating data from an extensive study of 200 travel blogs from four travel-related websites. The comfort-connection-concentration framework developed by Pearce (2009) has been used.

Chapter five centres on unsuccessful humour and considers the limits and disadvantages of humour in tourism situations and exchanges. If humour appreciation relies on certain variables, such as personality, culture, individual taste, and sociability, its failure may also occur due to specific socio-cultural and psychological variables. Overall, jokes should not be used in relation to topics such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, creed, sexual orientation, or physical appearance, where humour may be inappropriate, harmful, or humiliating. Acknowledging risks and disadvantages, one should consider the following: too much humour may be confusing and make tourists feel they are not being taken seriously; humour can sometimes sound unnatural and staged; it may be misunderstood or misinterpreted, due to language barriers or too-literal interpretations; it may be taken as inappropriate or even offensive. As a precautionary principle for public tourist attractions and tours, sensitivity, awareness, and political correctness are needed. Moreover, anticipatory humour research is needed to map and detail the sensitivities of emerging tourist markets.

Chapter six focuses on technology, and the way it has affected social communication and our knowledge of the world, social connectedness and the analysis of experience. Technology-induced changes are relevant for both transport and information transfer, as well as for “digital elasticity” (p. 127), the new connectivity with families and friends left behind. If shared through social media while still on-site, travel stories indeed differ from post-holiday accounts in terms of cohesion, conciseness, tone, style, and epistemology. The last section offers numerous suggestions for tourism research directions. It encourages field-based studies, with detailed on-site observations and the recording of interactions, empirical work using scales and the statistical power of multivariate analyses. It invites questions about how tourists build their appreciation of humour during tours and at attractions, and how tourism industry personnel produce or co-create humour for tourists. Cross-cultural studies are also recommended, with a focus on travel blogs and travel stories. Variables such as motivation, travel experience, trip type, destination and nationality are recommended in examining tourists and their tourist narratives.

An extensively researched and richly documented work, *Tourism and Humour* adopts a serious approach to a pleasurable topic. Organised in an accessible format and written in an enjoyable style, it is an insightful and stimulating work for students at various levels and scholars in both the tourism and humour fields. Undergraduate and postgraduate students may find critical sources and an analytical toolkit, as well as inspiring case-studies. In turn, scholars may find a reliable and convincing theoretical and methodological framework for grounding, questioning, revising, and honing their research on tourism. As tourism involves and affects everyone, all readers will likely find occasion to laugh at themselves, with playfulness and awareness.

Sabrina Francesconi
University of Trento
sabrina.francesconi@unitn.it

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