

Geographic Research on Tourism in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

Research on Latin American and Caribbean tourism geography during the 1980s has increased greatly over previous decades. Tourism research is an interdisciplinary field of study, and research opportunities for geographers abound. Of the various academic and applied fields that have contributed to the great increase in tourism research, geographers have contributed a greater than proportional share. Of eleven major categories of research identified among the 1980s publications, which include geographic as well as related non-geographic sources, the most popular ones for geographers are tourism development, descriptive studies and historical studies. Tourism impact studies are also quite popular, not only in terms of general impacts but also specifically environmental impacts, economic impacts and socio-cultural impacts. A high proportion of the publications are on specific impacts, economic impacts and socio-cultural impacts. A high proportion of the publications on specific impacts were supplied by scholars in respective related fields. Also, a total of fourteen theses and dissertations were written on Latin American and Caribbean tourism topics, almost half in Canadian departments of geography.

In terms of geographic distribution of the research foci of tourism studies in the 1980s, a map of Latin America exhibits dense clusters in Mexico and at several Caribbean island destinations and vast empty spaces across the South American continent. This pattern may reflect several important points: 1) few researchers are providing a large number of the publications; 2) tourism research is concentrated where English is the native language; 3 the distance-decay principle may keep most North American scholars closer to home; and 4) few Latin American/Caribbean geographers have examined their local tourism industries.

In spite of tremendous increases having been made in the number of geographic and related non-geographic publications on Latin American and Caribbean tourism, the increases have been location-specific. The spectrum of research, ranging from explanatory to descriptive to predictive, is encouraging but the geographic applications of that research need to be greatly expanded throughout the Latin American realm. Perhaps these goals will yet be realized before this decade ends.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of world overpopulation, food shortages, war, and economic recessions, international tourism has become one of the prime revenue generators in the world today. The size of the tourism industry, whether measured by tourist arrivals, revenues derived from tourism, or employment in the tourism sector, steadily continues to expand. Tourism has already become the primary "export" of many lesser-developed countries including several in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1986, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimated receipts from international tourism at 115 billion United States dollars (Pearce 1989). Latin America's share has been estimated at over 10 percent of the world total (Bar-On 1989). As tourism increases year by year, both in the world as well as in Latin America, there is an increasing need to fill research gaps. Knowledge is needed about: 1) the tourist destinations and their historical evolution as such; 2) the movement of tourists to and from and also between destinations; 3) the impacts of tourism, not just in general terms but specifically in terms of economic impacts, socio-cultural impacts, and environmental impacts; and 4) proper guidelines for tourist infrastructure development. Because of the nature of the tourism industry, replete with geographic themes such as population flows/spatial connectivity, perceptions of places, landscape change, environmental impacts, preservation/conservation/management and planning, geographers are

well-positioned to help fill the research gaps in tourism studies.

Ten years ago, Mings (1981) observed that in spite of rapid growth in the world tourism industry throughout the 1970s, a corollary expansion in tourism research was not evident. For the 1980s, the rate of correlation between tourism and tourism studies has improved, and much literature has become incorporated into the interdisciplinary body of tourism research. Geography has been well represented among the contributing [end p. 199] academic disciplines such as anthropology, economics, history, sociology and political science as well as supporting applied fields such as business, hotel/motel management and leisure studies. In spite of tremendous strides having been made in filling research gaps during the past decade, particularly within the realm of geographic research, a review of available publications reveals a continued deficit of knowledge about the patterns, dynamics and impacts of tourism.

PURPOSE

This paper represents an effort to summarize the contributions made to research in tourism geography in Latin America and the Caribbean during the decade of the 1980s. Previous benchmark papers presented at the 1970 and 1980 Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers meetings summarized tourism research from all academic disciplines as well as from government and consulting sources. In view of both the increase in the volume of geographic literature on tourism and also the specific preoccupation with geography, and perhaps also ancillary subfields from related disciplines, this benchmark paper intends to summarize geographic publications and a limited amount of related non-geographic literature. This latter category was subjectively evaluated with regard to its extent of overlap with the field of geography and interest of geographers.

METHODOLOGY

As a starting point in the compilation of bibliographic references, monthly issues of *Current Geographical Publications* were scanned under the "Tourism," "Recreation" and "Latin America" headings, as were several chapters in the recent landmark volume on *Geography in America* (Gaile and Wilmott 1989). The *Annals of Tourism Research*, the pre-eminent quarterly devoted to social science aspects of tourism, was perused to cull articles and also to inspect the contents of the other major tourism journals which were, until last year, published at the end of the journal. The *Proceedings* and *Yearbooks* of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers were also examined, as was the American Geographical Society's *Focus* magazine. This is America's equivalent of the *Geographical Magazine*, which publishes a high proportion of tourism-related articles. Even the popular *National Geographic Magazine* was examined to see if tourism studies were highlighted. Also, to determine the extent of Latin American tourism research conducted at the Master's and Ph.D. levels, the *Guide to Departments of Geography in the United States and Canada*, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, and a summary article on Ph.D.-level tourism studies (Jafari and Aaser 1988) were examined.

Excluded from the survey were: 1) papers presented at professional meetings, many of which were not very professional and therefore unpublishable; 2) clear non-geography references,

which ranged from descriptive pieces in popular publications to highly-statistical input-output economic analyses; and 3) various tourist industry reports provided by individual countries, international organizations and private consulting firms. Mings (1981) made reference to numerous country-wide tourism baseline studies, market analyses, economic analyses and planning documents, but the extent of geographers' inputs was not made explicit. United States tourism consulting firms such as Davidson-Peterson Associates, Inc. of Maine have conducted numerous tourism studies for various Latin American and Caribbean nations, but most of these remain proprietary (T. L. Davidson, personal communication 1990). Tourism reports by inter-regional and international organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and various branches of the United Nations, including the United Nations Environmental Programme, were omitted because of limited circulation and because these often comprise baseline data compilations rather than geographic analyses. The International Geographical Union (IGU) has several working groups investigating world tourism and its impacts and several projects are underway for the 1992 meetings. Past IGU publications did not appear in the *Current Geographical Publications*, however, and time constraints precluded an extensive international bibliographic search.

THEMES IN LATIN AMERICAN TOURISM RESEARCH

The literature search yielded a total of 95 references. Of this total, 50 citations were publications by geographers, 17 were theses and dissertations in geography, and 28 were publications by non-geographers and from non-geography journals but on topics related to research interests of tourism geographers. Although comparison with the earlier benchmark papers is difficult because of different sets of data analyzed, the 50 publications by geographers on Latin America tourism in the 1980s (not including theses and dissertations) greatly exceed the 8 [end p. 200] similar publications cited for the 1970s by Mings (1981). In terms of types of research, eleven categories of studies were delineated: descriptive, historical, perception, spatial, impacts (further subdivided into general, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts), national parks, tourism development and bibliographic (Table 1). The categorization was, by necessity, somewhat arbitrary as the research contents were not always apparent on the basis of title alone.

Table 1: Types of Geographic Research on Latin American American Tourism, 1980-90

Category of Tourism Research	Geog. Publs.	Geog.Theses/ Disser.	Related Publs.	Total
Descriptive	13	1	0	14
Historical Evolution	8	2	3	13
Spatial Aspects	1	3	1	5
Perception	1	0	1	2
Impacts--General	4	1	2	7
Impacts--Economic	5	2	7	14
Impacts--Socio-Cultural	2	1	9	12
Impacts--Environmental	1	2	1	4
National Parks	2	0	3	5
Tourism Development	10	5	1	16
Bibliographies	3	0	0	3

Total	50	17	28	95
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The references included under the "Descriptive" category were all by geographers or published in geography journals. The only two articles culled from *National Geographic Magazine* (Garrett 1989; Grove 1981) fell into this category. Most references were found in European publications, such as German (Eugster 1982; Gormsen 1983), French (Leloup 1988; Pinheiro and Romero 1988) and British (Catling 1980; Sealey 1988). A spatial volume, *Recreational Uses of Coastal Areas*, published in the Netherlands, contained descriptive pieces on Chile and Guyana (Castro and Valenzuela 1990; Lakhan 1990). American geography provided one detailed land use analysis (Bounds 1981), an interesting regional article on Mexico (Casagrande 1987) in which the term "Club Mex" was coined, and one thesis (Hughes 1985). An Argentine monograph described a local attraction in Patagonia (Vasconi 1989).

The historical approach was a popular one in the 1980s, as evidenced by four Ph.D. dissertations, two in geography (Meyer-Arendt 1987; Weaver 1986) and two in anthropology (Cowan 1987; Friedman 1983). The historical approach was used to document both the evolution of the tourism industry (Debbage 1990; Husbands 1983; Nolan and Nolan 1988; Taylor 1986, 1988; Tyrakowski 1986) as well as the tourism landscape (Meyer-Arendt 1987, 1990b; Weaver 1988).

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The spatial approach was utilized in interpreting patterns of growth in resort areas (Weaver 1981) as well as the movements of tourists in those areas (Debbage 1988; Husbands 1984). Curiously, only the Caribbean region was a focus for the spatial approach, and additional studies looked at airline linkages (Gaile and Hanink 1984) and the spread of tourism (McElroy and de Albuquerque 1986).

Perception studies, less popular than in the 1970s, comprised only two references. Dilley (1986) conducted a content analysis of Caribbean tourist promotional literature, and Santiago (1988) examined Puerto Rican tourist attractions. Additional perception studies, including tourists' evaluations of destinations and tourists' vacation decision-making processes, have been presented at professional meetings but not in print. A recent article in *Leisure Sciences*, however, focused on choice simulation of Caribbean destinations.

Economic aspects of tourism have provided a fruitful topic of study for geographers, economists and political scientists. Tourism has been examined in regard to basic economic impacts (Archer 1984; Fish and Gibbons 1986; Seward and Spinrad 1982) but specific studies have been made of impacts on food production (Bélisle 1980, 1984a, 1984b; DeVries 1981), on crafts manufacturing (Pomeroy 1987) and on employment and migration (Monk and Alexander 1986; Yamauchi 1984). The ramifications of economic and political dependency of nations with highly developed tourist industries has been a popular theme, although mostly among non-geographers (Britton 1982; Cobb 1981; Harrigan 1986; Ungefahr 1988).

Social impact analyses have likewise contributed a large share to the tourism literature and, not

surprisingly, anthropologists and sociologists have been the major researchers. Most of the studies have been along the lines of host-guest interactions (Evans 1981; Husbands 1986a, 1986b; Passariello 1983, 1986; van den Berghe 1980) and implications thereof (Dunkel 1985; Howard 1988; Lange 1980). Religion has also been examined in terms of tourism impacts (Glazier 1983; Goldbert 1981). An excellent special issue of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* was devoted to the negative impacts (mostly socio-cultural) of international tourism and several case studies of Latin America were presented (Callimanopoulos 1982).

Environmental impact studies of tourism have been focused mostly on shorelines (Archer 1985; Atherley 1986; McGoodwin 1986). Although the preservation of environment has been cited as a specific goal of tourism development by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (Pearce 1989) this literature search revealed few investigations along these lines. One recent exception is Ewert's (1990) thesis on landscape changes in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico.

Somewhat related to environmental impact analyses are environmental management studies, which all turned out to be centered on national park development in Latin America (Barker 1980; Broadus 1987; Olwig 1980; Place 1988; Tindle 1983). The paucity of publications on parks, conservation and other management issues is partly explained by the fact that these topics are also interdisciplinary and only a small portion of the research is specifically tourism-oriented.

One of the strengths of geographers appears to be in the realm of tourism development. Several of these studies have been mostly descriptive (Benton 1983; Mackin 1987; Potter 1983) or oriented toward the development of specific sectors of the tourist industry (Haider 1982, 1985; Kermath 1988). Others have concentrated on regional inequities in tourism development (Etna 1983; Müller 1984, Rodrigues 1988) or on the role of tourism in overall economic development (Gormsen 1982; O'Ferrall 1989; Pearce 1983; Weaver 1983). The understanding of tourism development processes and corollary impacts has also facilitated the prediction of future impacts, especially at up-and-coming tourist destinations (Ajami 1988; Neblett 1990; Pearce 1984).

A last category of Latin American tourism research is, like this paper, the bibliographic one. Again, surprisingly little has been done in the way of compiling tourism research by discipline. Carlson (1980a, 1980b) looked at the contributions of geographers to international tourism studies, but ten years have already elapsed. A bibliography of socio-cultural impacts was published in the Vance series (de Burlo 1980), but that too is somewhat dated. Probably the best source for tourism research is the British monthly *Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism Abstracts*.

SPATIAL ASPECTS OF LATIN AMERICAN TOURISM RESEARCH

Although the breadth of tourism research must be admired, the geographic distribution of the research foci is uneven (Table 2). When plotted on a Latin America map, clusters of research activity are found in Mexico and select Caribbean islands, notably Barbados, the Bahamas, Jamaica, the United States Virgin Islands, and Tobago (Figure [end p. 202] 1).¹⁴ Mexico is the most preferred location for tourism studies, in large part because of its proximity. The English-speaking West Indies also appear particularly popular for tourism research. Large gaps are found

in Central America and especially in South America. Although research notes on tourism in these areas appear in geographical and popular journals from time to time, professional geographers and other social scientists have been negligent in conducting serious research in these less glamorous tourist destinations. Even the Latin American geographers have been negligent by not contributing more to our knowledge of the development and impacts of tourism in their respective countries.

Table 2: Spatial Foci of Geographic Research on Latin American Tourism, 1980-1990

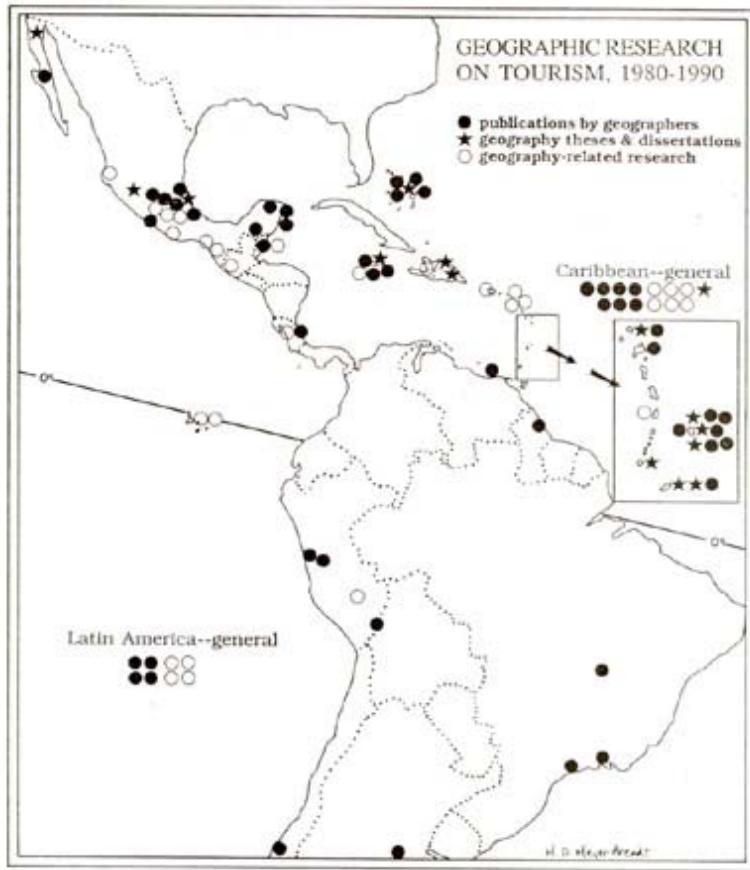
Area of Study	Number of Publications
Latin America - General	8
Caribbean - General	14
Mexico	21
Barbados	9
Bahamas	5
Jamaica	5
Peru	4
Brazil	3
Tobago	3
U.S. Virgin Islands	3
Antigua	3
Belize	2
Costa Rica	2
Dominican Republic	2
Ecuador	2
Argentina	1
Chile	1
Granada	1
Guadeloupe	1
Guatemala	1
Guyana	1
Haiti	1
Puerto Rico	1
St. Lucia	1
Venezuela	1
Total	95

SUMMARY

The literature on tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean has greatly increased in the 1980s over previous decades. Among the academic and applied disciplines that have contributed to this increase, geography has been especially well represented. The 50 *bona fide* geographic research articles and monographs (not counting the theses, dissertations and scattered research notes) are a vast improvement over the eight cited for the 1970s (Mings 1981). And, although the range of research foci appears quite impressive, ranging from explanatory/interpretive to descriptive to predictive, the geographic foci of the research leave many gaps. As skills in tourism geography

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Figure 1



[end p. 204] research techniques are honed in those few popular research and tourist destinations, it is anticipated that scholars will shift their emphases to the tourism research frontiers. There are many blank spaces on the tourism geography map of Latin America that await filling in before the century ends.

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