Consuming identity : modernity and tourism in New Zealand

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Abstract:
What do visitors to New Zealand seek to gain from their travels, and in what ways are such expectations shaped? This work assesses the relationship between tourism-related discourse and identity, and ideas about distance and difference, by exploring aspects in the promotion and production of tourism products in New Zealand. Travellers to New Zealand often seek the "unspoilt" in nature, that which represents a beauty and "authenticity" seen to be lacking "at home". Likewise, infused with ideas regarding "ethnicity" and the traditional (as well as residual notions of the primitive or noble savage), images of Māori in tourism are situated in relation to the "modern" tourist's self. For many travellers to New Zealand, alongside physical travel with its timetables and ticket stubs is a parallel symbolic journey through Time. Reversing Western narratives of progress and the Fall, the travellers' quest is to "unwind" the coils of technological - and often "intellectual" - Time. This work traces the fundamental ideological components of this world-view from the colonial period through to present-day tourism. What emerged in the early period of tourism development was the production and propagation of a pseudo-knowledge surrounding New Zealand's natural heritage and Māori population. Although the last century has seen changes in styles of tourism, promotion, production, travel and tourist behaviour, it is argued that this prevailing system of representation continues to influence tourist perceptions of New Zealand and Māori in negative ways. The ideas put forward by colonial writers concerning Otherness in nature and culture have remained as essential features of present tourism discourse. These have taken concrete form in a range of tourism related products which tend to promote a specifically modernist perception of place. Such works not only provide potential tourists with practical information about New Zealand as a holiday destination, but they also circulate within wider discursive fields that seek to legitimate ideological projects and further their cause.

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