Variability of Tourist Attraction on an International Boundary: Sonora, Mexico Border Towns

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Abstract
This paper explores how and why tourism and tourist districts in border towns vary along a single international boundary. A perception about Mexican border tourism holds that the boundary itself is the primary stimulus to development. While almost every Mexican border town has some tourist function, the nature and extent of that activity will vary with a host of exogenous factors. We argue that Mexican border city tourism is largely a function of these diverse external factors more than simply a presence on the international boundary. Successful tourism in the Mexican border cities is linked to historic advantage and age of settlement, as well as access, degree of promotional effort, and media exposure. To illustrate this assertion, we compare tourist development and the creation and absence of tourist districts at two separate locations along the Sonora-Arizona border: Nogales and San Luis Rio Colorado.

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol17/iss4/3

Although formalities commonly associated with international boundaries are sometimes considered bothersome and often add a perceived distance to certain tourist destinations, borders do, in many cases, function as tourist attractions. This paper discusses the nature of political boundaries in the context of tourism and examines the tendency of various types of international frontiers and their associated environments to attract significant tourist numbers. Situations considered are relict boundaries, boundary parks and monuments, and natural wonders located at international borders. Subnationally The Arizona Sonora border was established as a result of the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. It runs through desert and mountain country, from the western Chihuahuan Desert by New Mexico through a zone of grassland and oak-covered hills to the classic Sonoran Desert west of Nogales. Between these towns stretches the border, for the most part marked by a three-strand, barbed-wire fence and a series of monuments. The border monuments are spaced so that each one is visible from its counterpart to the east and to the west. The fence traverses valleys, mountains, lush thickets, and sparse desert shrubbery. During the 1980s, an international volleyball game was regularly held near Naco. Each team played in its own country, with the chain-link fence serving as the net.