

## [Pack on Segreto and Manera and Pohl, 'Europe at the Seaside: The Economic History of Mass Tourism in the Mediterranean'](#)

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**Luciano Segreto, Carles Manera, Manfred Pohl, eds.** *Europe at the Seaside: The Economic History of Mass Tourism in the Mediterranean*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009. xi + 251 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-323-7.

**Reviewed by** Sasha D. Pack (SUNY Buffalo) **Published on** H-Travel (April, 2011) **Commissioned by** Guillaume P. De Syon

There is a compelling logic to analyzing the Mediterranean as a single tourist region. If landscape, climate, and heritage constitute some of the most important tourist draws, the history of Mediterranean tourism might seem particularly likely to reveal some organic unity. This book assembles a number of studies related to this history, with particular reference to its economic aspects since the end of World War II. The contributions address the various business models within the tourism sector and their consequences for regional development. The picture that emerges is one of “southern European” peripheral economic development and commercial integration based on the postwar mass consumption model.

The book opens on the demand side, with a chapter by Peter Lyth on postwar British civil aviation. Lyth describes the rise of the famous charter air services, as Britain’s flag carriers, saddled by politics, were unable to react to the rapidly changing consumer demands and new technologies of the postwar period. Jet engines and all-inclusive tour packages converted the formerly inaccessible fantasy of a Mediterranean holiday into a middle-class rite. As is well known, the rise and consolidation of commercial tour operation was profoundly transformative for the international travel industry. Not only were many receptor areas encouraged to adapt their hospitality models to maximize volume, but the supply chain of transportation, lodging, and entertainment also became ever more integrated. Any littoral area possessing an airport suitable for small jets was a potential resort. With the package tours came considerable finance capital, not least from tour operators, permitting small family-operated inns to expand or improve their services. This mechanism provided a steady flow of clientele for the resorts, as Patrizia Battilani observes in her chapter on Rimini, but left them vulnerable to the exigencies of foreign tour vendors. Rimini, which got a head start on potential competitors in Spain and the Balkans, encountered stagnation in the 1970s as the competition caught up. Carmelo Pellejero Martínez’s study of the Spanish Costa del Sol provides a wealth of interesting comparative statistics, not only on the typical industrial metrics of tourism, but also on the wider labor market and demographic ramifications. Carles Manera and Jaume Garau-Taberner provide a similar analysis of the Balearic Islands, while Philippe Mioche presents a far more skeptical (if somewhat less detailed) appraisal of this process as it has played out on the French Riviera.

The narrative of rise followed by stagnation and reorientation is common to several of the chapters. Outside shocks, like war and oil price fluctuations, posed challenges to touristic businesses, as did

structural shortcomings internal to the sector. According to Luciano Segreto, Alpitour began as a nimble and innovative travel agent in postwar Piedmont, but eventually came to suffer the disadvantages of being a family firm in an industry dominated by large conglomerates. Alpitour is one of several cases that complicate the commonplace notion that powerful northern European tour operators dominate small and medium-sized hotel proprietors of the Mediterranean rim. In their respective studies of Majorcan hotel chains and the French Accor group, Antoni Serra and Hubert Bonin illustrate expansion strategies in hospitality through franchising; forging alliances; and, in the case of Accor, focusing on the grey area (familiar to many academics) between business and pleasure travel. Finally, Ellen Furlough's chapter on the idiosyncratic Club Méditerranée follows up her earlier fascinating work on the subject, showing how this icon of postwar pleasure has encountered increasing trouble competing in the marketplace it helped pioneer. The role of institutional regulatory and finance mechanisms is emphasized in Benedita Câmara's study of the Portuguese hotel business and Margarita Dritsas's chapter on Greek tourism. The former case reveals a surprisingly flexible system that nourished small independent firms while also allowing larger luxury chains to move in. Policy in Greece, by contrast, led to a two-tiered system of large ventures financed by foreign capital and a fledgling class of local firms of suspect quality dependent on state support.

With the exception of the chapter on Greece, the book is limited to Western European cases, including Portugal, which, though not Mediterranean, is germane to the comparative southwestern European model the book implicitly pursues. Although the book contains much useful information, the editors missed an opportunity to introduce other postwar Mediterranean settings, such as postcolonial Tunisia or socialist Yugoslavia. Such inclusions not only would have made the book truer to its title, but also could have strengthened the interplay between diversity and common experience sought throughout the collection.

This book suffers from the problems of many multiauthored volumes ostensibly built around a single theme. While the various contributors bring their own analytical agendas and a good deal of interesting information, the volume as a whole delivers a somewhat anarchic composite that lacks any single ambitious interpretive perspective. It is certainly a useful introduction to many of the issues in the business history of tourism, but it is difficult to discern any overarching contribution to this field. Some of the major questions that might interest a wider audience of historians and policy analysts might include: What were some other plausible paths the postwar tourism industry might have taken, and what decisions or developments were responsible for its taking the path it did? What have been the strengths and weaknesses of different models of state and intergovernmental regulation? Was World War II an interruption in a process of steady development, or did the war provoke structural changes that underlie the postwar boom? What factors determined whether or not tourism was an effective and broadly beneficial anchor for economic development? What is the place of tourism in the larger economic, social, or environmental history of postwar Europe? Many of the raw materials are present to get at these questions in specific contexts, but it will be up to the reader to process them into meaningful comparison and synthesis. The strength of this collection is its reliance on leading experts in a number of important local settings; unfortunately, without a more general attempt at synthesis, the field will remain as fragmented as southern Europe's resort industry.

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