



# CONTEMPORARY TOURISM HERITAGE AS HERITAGE TOURISM Evidence from Las Vegas and Gold Coast

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**Abstract:** Four categories of contemporary tourism heritage were identified in this exploratory study of Las Vegas (Nevada, USA) and Gold Coast (Queensland, Australia) based on location, originality and scale: (1) in situ representations that memorialize tourism and related phenomena through plaques, statues and/or festivals, (2) ex situ original items displayed and interpreted in museums, (3) in situ original nodes represented by preserved hotels and other facilities, and (4) in situ original corridors represented by preserved tourism strips. All are only partially articulated as heritage tourism, though potential for elaboration derives from its authenticity within tourism cities, its serious and interesting character, possibilities for accurate presentation due to artefact survival and personal experience, and the potential for current examples as foundations. **Keywords:** heritage tourism, industrial heritage, sustainable tourism, Gold Coast, Las Vegas. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism is a burgeoning area of research that was initially construed in simple supply-side terms as visited spaces deemed, usually by experts, to constitute or contain the heritage of a destination. This heritage, moreover, was associated with the more distant past, implicating castles, plantation great homes, battlefields, old churches and similar historical phenomena as significant cultural inheritances worthy of protection and presentation (Yale, 1991). Recent discourses, in tandem with the postmodernist zeitgeist, are painting a more complex picture, emphasizing the subjectivities, vested interests and contestations inherent in the identification, presentation and interpretation of 'heritage' by multiple stakeholders (Apostolakis, 2003). Chronis (2005), for example, argues that sites such as the Gettysburg battlefield are evolving 'storyscapes' co-constructed by marketers as well as consumers, often with the intent of achieving specific social or personal goals (Poria & Ashworth, 2009). The desire of visitors to be emotionally

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connected with their own personal heritage as part of such co-constructions is being increasingly recognized (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006), stimulating interest in ‘hot interpretation’ that is emotive as well as cognitive, and also potentially personalized (Uzzell & Ballantyne, 2008).

In the postmodern imagination, heritage therefore is essentially whatever the visitor perceives as heritage (Poria et al., 2006; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). One implication is the increased operational expansion and diversification of ‘heritage’ (Fowler, 1989; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996), its eroding temporal boundaries indicated in apparent oxymora such as ‘contemporary archaeology’, ‘future heritage’ (Fairclough, 2008), and ‘heritage of the recent past’ (Walton, 2009). These eroding boundaries of time and context greatly increase the potential for phenomena related to such ‘non-traditional’ areas as sport (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005), industrial production (Edwards & Llurdés i Coit, 1996; Xie, 2006)—and tourism—to be recognized as heritage tourism attractions. Already achieving limited recognition in the literature are tourism sites old enough to situate within conventional parameters of heritage. Certain seaside resorts, according to Walton (2009) have established their own industrial archaeology worthy of preservation and presentation. Historic seaside resorts and theme parks are both recognized by Prentice (1994) as legitimate heritage attractions, while Timothy and Boyd (2003), without elaboration, situate ‘historic theme parks’ at the built urban extreme of a heritage tourism continuum. Indeed, local heritage inventories would be expected to include such sites in their site coverage. Concerted academic investigation of these phenomena from a heritage tourism perspective, however, is confined to American boardwalks (Lilliefors, 2006) and the English seaside resort of Blackpool (Walton & Wood, 2009), though other resorts, historic piers, spas, casinos and hotels also qualify for such investigation.

The second and more contestable dimension that more literally adheres to the notion of the heritage of the recent past is the investigation of post-World War Two phenomena, distinguished as they are by their association with popular contemporary culture as well as broadly possessed living memory and personal histories. Relevant literature is similarly lacking, with touristic studies of historic Route 66 in the USA by Repp (1999) and Caton and Santos (2007) being perhaps the only examples. No investigations to date have systematically considered either manifestation of tourism heritage (i.e., pre- or post-World War Two) from the perspective of specialized tourism cities that have experienced most of their growth in tourism and resident population since the mid-20th century. Using Las Vegas (USA) and the Gold Coast of Australia as comparative case studies, this paper considers the extent to which the local tourism heritage is recognized and protected, and subsequently developed and marketed as heritage tourism. The case for and against both levels of engagement is also presented, toward the broader consideration and recognition of tourism heritage as a legitimate form of heritage tourism.

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