



Research Paper

Literary tourism: Opportunities and challenges for the marketing and branding of destinations?

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the phenomenon of literary tourism and explores the means by which destinations can leverage benefit in the form of destination branding and marketing strategies. The paper commences with an overview of the typologies used to categorise the phenomenon and to outline the various forms it takes in the particular geographic context of the UK. The extent to which literary tourism is a sub-set of cultural and heritage tourism is then explored with the migration from niche to mass tourism opportunity an emerging trend. With regard to literary places, the study identifies author-related, fictional-related, book and festival related forms of literary tourism. Thereafter the study critiques further the migration from niche to mass tourism, the move from cultural and heritage tourism to international literary themed development, the collaborative development of literary destination products and experiences, opportunities for destination brand development and finally broader policy and wider local visitor management issues. The study concludes by advocating a collaborative approach to future literary tourism development with collaboration needing to be consistent with the desired target markets of each stakeholder, consistent with existing brands and perhaps most importantly, sustainable in the longer term.

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1. Introduction

Literary tourism occurs when authors or their literature become so popular that people are drawn to either those locations associated with the author (e.g. birthplace, home, graveside) or those featured within their writings (Busby & Klug, 2001). Watson (2006, p. 3) notes that you 'may set eyes upon the very table on which Austen's Emma was written at Chawton', or 'may see the stone by the waterfall upon which Charlotte Brontë is said to have composed Jane Eyre, and on the same walk explore the path up the moorland valley to the place said to be the setting for her sister's Wuthering Heights'. Visiting such places allows literary enthusiasts to interact with the authors they admire insofar as they can see or touch objects or memorabilia associated with the authors (or their literature), an experience which is enhanced by the settings (Busby & Klug, 2001). Literary pilgrims seek 'a physical body to enable their senses to connect with objects read' (Robertson & Radford, 2009, p. 206). Nowadays, it is possible to visit a large range of literary tourism sites, ranging from places where 'your favourite author was born, grew up, courted, lived or

died' over those where 'your favourite books were written', to those places 'where they are set' (Watson, 2006, p. 3).

At least in the UK, literary tourism has grown into a commercially significant phenomenon (Watson, 2006) and as a result of this, places connected to literature are frequently used to promote destinations, such as "Catherine Cookson County" in Northumberland (Herbert, 2001), "Shakespeare's Stratford", "the Brontës' Yorkshire", "Hardy's Wessex" (Squire, 1994), "Wordsworth's Lake District", "Scott-land" or "Dickens's London" (Watson, 2006). As Watson (2006, p. 5) notes: literary tourism has become so 'naturalised as a cultural phenomenon in the British Isles that one sees literary sites detailed in guidebooks and marked on the road map, and expects (and feels expected) to visit the museum shop and to buy the soap, the postcard and the bookmark'.

An indicator of the popularity of literary tourism in Britain and Ireland are the guidebooks on the topic, such as: "Blue Guide to Literary Britain and Ireland" (Ousby, 1999), "Literary Britain and Ireland: a guide to the places that inspired poets, playwrights and novelists" (Struthers & Coe, 2005) and "The Oxford Guide to Literary Britain and Ireland" (Hahn & Robins, 2008), which has been published in its third edition since 1977 and is probably the most popular and extensive guide of its kind. There also now appears to be a thriving industry for products related to literary places other than guidebooks, such as postcards, bookmarks, calendars, and other souvenirs, which can often be purchased in a literary

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destination. Numerous online shops have also emerged, such as “TheLiteraryGiftCompany.com”, “WritersGifts.co.uk” or “BookishEngland.co.uk” – selling T-Shirts, handbags, soaps etc. related to authors and literature, to name only a few examples. There are also numerous websites dedicated to the topic, such as “LiteraryPlaces.com”, “LiteraryTraveler.com” and “LiteraryTourist.com”, which hosts a large searchable database of anything of interest to literary tourists, such as literary destinations, bookstores and related activities and events from all over the world. The website includes virtual literary maps and even a route planner, helping literary enthusiasts to put together a suitable travel agenda. The website also hosts a blog, “literarytourist.com/blog”, featuring podcasts, interviews or literary criticism amongst others. Another example of a blog is “southeasternliterarytourisminitiative.blogspot.com”, which is an organisation that actively promotes tourism through literature, such as short stories or poetry that feature real locations.

Even though literary tourism enjoys great popularity in Britain, it is not restricted to this geographic area. Furthermore, literary places are no longer just those ones connected with the authors of classical literature (Herbert, 2001) – a new generation of writers have appeared on the world’s literary map, such as J.K. Rowling, Dan Brown or Stephenie Meyer. Mintel (2011) has put together some popular destinations linked to well-known authors (see Table 1).

Table 1
Literary destinations worldwide.
Source: adapted from Mintel (2011).

Destination	Literary figure/author
Africa	
Kenya	Karen von Blixen-Finecke
Asia	
Japan	Yukio Mishima
Australasia	
New Zealand	Katherine Mansfield
Europe	
England	Jane Austen, Beatrix Potter, Geoffrey Chaucer, Charles Dickens, John Donne, John Keats, John Milton, JK Rowling, William Shakespeare
France	Albert Camus, Julia Child, Alexandre Dumas, André Gide, Victor Hugo, Peter Mayle, Jean-Paul Sartre, Voltaire
Germany (Berlin)	Bertold Brecht, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann
Greece	Nikos Kazantzakis, Plato, Vassilis Vassilikos
Ireland (Dublin)	Brendan Behan, Sean O’Casey, Roddy Doyle, James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, WB Yeats
Italy	Frances Mayes
Russia	Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy
Scotland (Edinburgh)	James Boswell, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, JK Rowling, Ian Rankin, Sir Walter Scott
South America	
Argentina	Jorge Luis Borges, José Hernández
Chile	Pablo Neruda
US and Canada	
Concord (Massachusetts)	
Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorn, Henry David Thoreau	
Key West (Florida)	Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams
New York	Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller
San Francisco	Allen Ginsberg, Jack London, John Steinbeck, Amy Tan
Quebec	Neil Bissoondath, Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler

However, it needs to be pointed out that the table outlines ‘some popular destinations linked to well-known literary personalities’ (Mintel, 2011) and thus merely gives an overview. It could be interpreted in a way that indicates that literary tourism seems to occur more in Europe and North America. This suggestion could be undermined by the fact that most research around literary tourism has also clustered around those regions, such as, Herbert’s (2001) study on Jane Austen/Chawton and Dylan Thomas/Laugharne (UK), Tetley and Bramwell’s (2002) study on the Brontë sisters/Haworth (UK), Squire’s (1994) study and Busby and George’s (2004) research on Beatrix Potter tourism to Gloucester and the Lake District (UK), Squire’s (1996) and Fawcett and McCormack’s (2001) research on Lucy Maud Montgomery (author of Anne of Green Gables) tourism to Prince Edward Island (Canada), several authors (e.g. Banyai, 2010; Cosma, Pop, & Negrusa, 2007; Muresan & Smith, 1998; Reijnders, 2011) on Dracula tourism to Transylvania (Romania) and many, many more. Interestingly, there rarely seems to be any research on literary tourism in Asia. This does not, however, mean that literary tourism does not occur there. For example, according to Squire (1996), young Japanese women’s interest in literary places in particular was leading to tourist travel, not domestically but to international destinations. For example, to Prince Edward Island, Canada, and the UK; both Lucy Maud Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables as well as the books by Beatrix Potter appear to be very popular in Japan (Squire, 1994, 1996). One Asian example of academic research into literary tourism originates from South Korea, where the home village of popular novelist Kim Yujeong (1908–1937), which was at the same time the setting for his novels, has officially been named “Literary Village of Kim Yujeong” (Lee & Weaver, 2012) and offers an exhibition hall, a walking path and a hiking trail (VisitKorea, 2013).

The assumption that literary tourism in its different forms, which will be discussed in detail later, tends to be more of a European and North American phenomenon could also be supported by the UNESCOs creative cities network, which is an innovative way for cities to highlight their cultural assets and thus widen their tourism offerings (UNESCO, 2013). UNESCO has so far appointed seven cities (which had to go through an application process in order to be appointed) as UNESCO Cities of Literature: Edinburgh, Melbourne, Iowa City, Dublin, Reykjavik, Norwich and Krakow, all of which are European or North American, which could be interpreted as an indicator that European and North American DMOs or other private or public sector agencies are actively trying to promote literary tourism.

Literary tourism is also beginning to find its way into the virtual world of the internet and mobile phone applications. An example of the latter is “Ian Rankin’s Edinburgh”, a free app commissioned by the author’s publisher that serves as a virtual guided tour of Edinburgh and gives background information on key locations to the stories and its characters (Orion Publishing Group, 2011). Furthermore, there are virtual literary maps, such as the one developed by The Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust (2013) amongst many others, which shows writers’ homes and haunts as well as monuments and other places of interested related to literature. The example of Ian Rankin in Edinburgh is an interesting case in point as it reflects a trend toward “living” literary tourism in that the author himself is actively engaged in promoting and implementing the literary tourism product (see for example <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2009/oct/25/travel-awards-edinburgh-ian-rankin>; <http://www.rebustours.com/>; <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/edinburgh/rebus/>).

Literary places attract both general heritage visitors as well as a niche segment of genuine literary pilgrims (Smith, 2003), whom Herbert (2001, p. 313) characterises as well-educated tourists, ‘versed in the classics and with the cultural capital to appreciate

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