

## **In the Museum of Maya Cultures**

By Quetzil E. Castaneda. University of Minnesota Press (111 Third Ave. South, Suite 290, Minneapolis MN 55401, USA), 1996, vii+341 pp. (appendix, notes, bibliography, index), \$21.95 (Pbk). ISBN 0-8166-2673-1.

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*In the Museum of Maya Cultures: Touring Chichen Itza* is one of the new postmodern ethnographies such as has been called for, but rarely produced, during the last decade of anthropology. It is living proof that ethnography and critique of ethnography can be written simultaneously by one "author ethnographer" as the author calls himself. It is a welcome addition to the "archaeology" of the complex relationship between three intertwined areas of the construction of culture: anthropology, tourism, and the Maya themselves. The author examines the history of anthropology and anthropologists in the area and the ways that they have selected towns and sites and given them meaning. He also looks at the history of tourism and tourists, why they go where they go, what they expect to see, and how they are influenced by the anthropology. Further he examines the Maya, itself a constructed category and not one group, and their interconnections with the anthropology, the Mexican state, the tourists, and each other.

The audience is primarily anthropologists (and probably only those anthropologists intellectually reborn after the 80s). Tourists, undergraduates, and the Maya would be baffled by the heavy argot of post-modernism, at which Castaneda is very adept. The book offers itself as "a guidebook to the invention of Maya culture in the Museum of Chichen Itza" (p. 1) and suggests that "ethnographies . . . are guidebooks that function to reveal a truth about a society" (p. 4). However, it is a guidebook in very esoteric language that mercifully eases off after the introduction (where you would have to check a footnote to find out that the spelling archaeology refers to the Foucaultian concept, whereas archeology refers to the scientific discipline, and then remember this for the rest of the book).

The body of the book is thick with information on the Foucaultian archaeology of the "interplay between local Maya society, tourism and anthropology" as it has "invented the modern ruins of the ancient city of Chichen Itza, Yucatan" (p. 1). When he tells the story of this interplay and invention of culture by Maya, tourist, and anthropologist, the material is gripping. One of the most interesting assertions at the beginning of the book is that "There is absolutely no 'tourist impact' to study". He suggests that the discourse of 'tourist impact' (even the discourse on ecological impact) is an "artifice of modern tourism" (p. 9). This idea he explains in Chapter 2, arguing (persuasively) that the study of impact from tourists or anthropologists is a mythology. Why? His analysis focuses on how Piste, a town without any culture (or so described by anthropologists), and therefore of no interest to anthropologists or tourists, has a complex history that is very similar to the places that were made famous by anthropologists/tourists. Instead he tells the story of how tourism was already inscribed in the anthropological project (Chichen Itza) and how both "were always already interwoven within the social fabric of the regional and local communities" (p. 77).

Chapter 6 is a wonderful story of the event of the equinox at Chichen Itza which has become a tourism ritual, invented in 1984, whose objective is to

promote Yucatan for tourist consumption. The event was invaded by those seeking a “New Age performance of enlightened cosmology” (p. 178). The invaders consisted of a pilgrimage Anglo-Saxon tour under the guidance of a Maya spiritualist and a New Age Californian, the White Brotherhood of Quetzalcoatl, a group of Azteca spiritualists (mestizos from Mexico City who have turned to pre-Columbian heritage for identity), gnostics from Cancun, and the Rainbow Family (neo-hippies/spiritualists). In a wonderful re-enactment of the history of the region, the Azteca spiritualists (who are better organized in ritual performance) battle with the other New Agers for hegemony at the site, thereby enraging the tourists (predominantly Mexicans), the Museum officials, and the Boy Scouts.

Today anthropology is branching out into worlds where they have never gone before, or almost never: globalization, the nation-state, tourism, museums, cultural mega-categories, and themselves. Castaneda’s book is an attempt to cross-cut all of these areas and bring them together in one “guidebook”. The task is formidable, the results a bit disjointed, but the aim is admirable. □ □

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## **The Tourist Image**

Edited by Tom Selwyn. Wiley (Baffins, Chichester, West Sussex P019 1UD, UK), 1996, ix+270 pp. (figures, bibliography, index), \$35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0-471-96309-7.

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Following editor Tom Selwyn’s introduction and summary of issues to be treated, *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism* assembles 11 case studies building on some of the major perspectives put forth in the anthropology and sociology of tourism. The volume takes its title from Dean MacCannell’s proposition that “the tourist goes on holiday in order cognitively to create or recreate structures which modernity is felt to have demolished” (p. 2). These structures or tourist myths are set into dynamic relation with the political, social, and economic processes at work in specific tourism sites by those who promote, “host”, and experience respectively, particularly in the essays on Palestine (Bowman), Malta (Bouissevain), North Cotswold (Fees), and Brighton (Meethan). Other essays juxtapose the specificities of place with the transcultural situating encoded in postcards, brochures, museums, tours, and the behaviors of those involved in producing and attaining such goods and experiences (Brown, Hutt, Dann, Selwyn, Martinez, Edwards, and Golden).

Selwyn’s introduction, while seeking to summarize critiques and continuations of MacCannell’s general theoretical proposition (as formulated by Cohen, de Kadt, Crick, and Urry), ultimately regards

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Not the book you're looking for? Preview *In the Museum of Maya Culture* by Quetzil E. Castañeda. The Maya civilization (/ÉˆmaÉ™/) was a Mesoamerican civilization developed by the Maya peoples, and noted for its logosyllabic script—the most sophisticated and highly developed writing system in pre-Columbian Americas—as well as for its art, architecture, mathematics, calendar, and astronomical system. The Maya civilization developed in an area that encompasses southeastern Mexico, all of Guatemala and Belize, and the western portions of Honduras and El Salvador. This region consists of the northern La Fundaciõn Museo Maya de Amèrica unveils the design of Central America's largest museum of Maya artefacts and culture. The Museo Maya de Amèrica, to be located in Guatemala City, will become a leading venue for the public to view objects, artefacts, artworks, textiles, and information on the history and culture of the Maya civilisation. The institution is among the most ambitious cultural projects in the region, containing approximately 60,000 square metres of program (more than 600,000 square feet) with a construction budget of US\$60 million. Site plan - [click for larger image](#).