



Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West

Hal K. Rothman

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The West is popularly perceived as America's last outpost of unfettered opportunity, but twentieth-century corporate tourism has transformed it into America's "land of opportunism." From Sun Valley to Santa Fe, towns throughout the West have been turned over to outsiders—and not just to those who visit and move on, but to those who stay and control.

Although tourism has been a blessing for many, bringing economic and cultural prosperity to communities without obvious means of support or allowing towns on the brink of extinction to renew themselves; the costs on more intangible levels may be said to outweigh the benefits and be a devil's bargain in the making.

Hal Rothman examines the effect of twentieth-century tourism on the West and exposes that industry's darker side. He tells how tourism evolved from Grand Canyon rail trips to Sun Valley ski weekends and Disneyland vacations, and how the post-World War II boom in air travel and luxury hotels capitalized on a surge in discretionary income for many Americans, combined with newfound leisure time.

From major destinations like Las Vegas to revitalized towns like Aspen and Moab, Rothman reveals how the introduction of tourism into a community may seem innocuous, but residents gradually realize, as they seek to preserve the authenticity of their communities, that decision-making power has subtly shifted from the community itself to the newly arrived corporate financiers. And because tourism often results in a redistribution of wealth and power to "outsiders," observes Rothman, it represents a new form of colonialism for the region.

By depicting the nature of tourism in the American West through true stories of places and individuals that have felt its grasp, Rothman doesn't just document the effects of tourism but provides us with an enlightened explanation of the shape these changes take. Deftly balancing historical perspective with an eye for what's happening in the region right now, his book sets new standards for the study of tourism and is one that no citizen of the West whose life is touched by that industry can afford to ignore.

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