

BORDERLANDS: An Unlikely Tourist Destination?

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INTRODUCTION

By definition, a tourist is someone who crosses a political boundary, either international or subnational. Many travellers are bothered by the 'hassle' of crossing international frontiers, and the type and level of borders heavily influence the nature and extent of tourism that can develop in their vicinity. Furthermore, boundaries have long been a curiosity for travellers who seek to experience something out of the ordinary. It would appear then that political boundaries have significant impacts on tourism and that the relationships between them are manifold and complex.

Nonetheless, the subject of borders and tourism has been traditionally ignored by both border and tourism scholars, with only a few notable exceptions (e.g. Gruber *et al.*, 1979). In recent years, however, more researchers have begun to realise the vast and heretofore unexplored potential of this subject as an area of scholarly inquiry (e.g. Arreola and Curtis, 1993; Arreola and Madsen, 1999; Leimgruber, 1998; Paasi, 1996; Paasi and Raivo, 1998; Timothy, 1995a).

One emerging theme in all this is that of borders and borderlands as tourist destinations. The purpose of this paper is to introduce to the boundary research audience the notion of borderlands as tourist destinations, and to consider the range of features and activities that attract tourists to them. Many of the ideas presented here are taken from the author's previous work (Timothy, 1995a; 1995b; 2000b; Timothy and Wall, forthcoming) and reflect an ongoing research interest in the relationships between political boundaries and tourism.

BORDERLANDS AS TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Tourism is a significant industry in many border regions, and some of the world's most popular attractions are located adjacent to, or directly on political boundaries (e.g. Niagara Falls). According to Butler (1996), borderlands and their frequently associated remoteness appeal to tourists because they provide some of the most pristine natural landscapes in the world and incite a mythical frontier image in the human psyche. Christaller (1963) recognised this early on within the broader context of peripheral regions generally when he stated that "*tourism is drawn to the periphery of settlement districts as it searches for a position on the highest mountain, in the most lonely woods, along the remotest beaches*" (1963: 95).

Borderlands tourism can be viewed from at least two spatial perspectives: tourism that focuses on the borderline itself and tourism that owes its existence to a border location but which does not focus directly on the border (Timothy and Wall, forthcoming). The existence of political boundaries in a region creates unique political, economic and social conditions. These, in many instances, lead to the development of unique forms of tourism, particularly when an activity is permitted on one side of a border but not on the other, where laws pertaining to age limits vary from place to place, and when taxes and prices differ between sides. Activities of this type include gambling, prostitution, 'alcohol tourism', shopping, enclaves, and international parks. The following sections examine these types of borderlands tourism.

Borderlines

For some people, political boundaries invoke a unique type of fascination. Some tourist attractions have even been developed simply because they are a border, such as the Four Corners Monument in the United States, where Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico meet. The Navajo Nation has begun capitalising on this notion by charging an entry fee into the monument and establishing souvenir stands and food

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vendors. Dozens of other examples exist where frontier markers have become significant objects of tourist attention, such as the border gate between Macau and China, an interesting monument at the point where Finland, Norway and Sweden meet, and the Peace Arch, which straddles the border between the United States and Canada in Washington and British Columbia (Timothy and Wall, forthcoming).

Even frontiers between rancorous neighbours can function as tourist attractions. While the demilitarised zone between South and North Korea is still a point of contention, it has become a significant destination. Each week, floods of South Koreans and foreigners arrive in Panmunjom, the village divided by the line where the treaty of armistice was signed (Pollack, 1996). Similarly, even amid a heated border dispute between Egypt and Israel in the 1980s over a small strip of beachfront property (Taba), the border and its related problems were an attraction. According to one resort manager in the disputed territory, the fact that guests could see four countries from their balconies was one of the primary allures of staying there. Also, in his own words, tourists were drawn towards Taba in part “*because we are an international problem. How many people get to stay at an international problem?*” (quoted in Drysdale, 1991: 205).

Several relict boundaries, or former boundaries that no longer function in their original political capacity but are still visible in the cultural landscape (Hartshorne, 1936), have also become significant attractions. Probably the most well-known example of this is the Great Wall of China, which was built as a fortification between China and Mongolia between 246 and 209 BC. The wall is one of China’s most important tourist attractions, and few visitors to Beijing leave the area without having spent a day there (Toops, 1992). Hadrian’s Wall is another example of an ancient relict boundary that has become a major tourist attraction. The wall, which is considered to be the finest vestige of Roman rule in Britain, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, and much work has recently been done to map, delimit, manage and conserve the site (English Heritage, 1996; Turley, 1998).

A more recent example is the Berlin Wall. Soon after its demise in 1989, the wall became the focus of strenuous preservation efforts. While its downfall was a welcome event on both sides of the border, preservation enthusiasts immediately recognized the need to save the structure in some form for heritage purposes; to tell the story of the rise and fall of the Eastern regime. Today, Checkpoint Charlie, perhaps the best-known artefact of the Cold War, is now highlighted in a museum of the same name, which also contains other period artefacts such as parts of the wall itself (Borneman, 1998). Although the former east-west divide is rapidly disappearing from Berlin’s urban landscape, the old border is so important in economic terms that the city “*helps make ends meet by luring tourists who want to catch a glimpse of the cold war and whose first wish is to see where the wall was. So, to satisfy them, the city has devised a new east-west border, a red stripe painted through Berlin’s heart along the route of the demolished wall*” (Economist, 1997: 56).

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Crossing borders may be the primary motivation for some people to travel. Frontier formalities and differences in landscape, language, and political systems add character to a trip. In the words of one traveller, “*I love border crossings. They somehow make me feel as though I’m in a black-and-white movie with subtitles*” (Harris, 1997: 12). Another commentator reminisces as follows:

Borders have fascinated me since childhood. As a kid, I used to imagine border landscapes: dark rivers, watchtowers, and unknown lands lying beyond them... Over the years, as I started travelling, borders have been somewhat demystified, but now again, approaching the Finnish-Russian

boundary, I was feeling that boyish excitement, an anticipation of mystery (Medvedev, 1999: 43).

For some people straddling a border with one leg in two countries can be a memorable experience, and a person driving from coast to coast in North America would most likely observe travellers pulling aside to photograph themselves standing next to welcome signs at state or provincial lines as a way of documenting their trip (Timothy, 1998). At Four Corners visitors can simultaneously straddle the territory of four states – the only place in North America where this can be accomplished. Ryden (1993: 1) argues that this desire is based on the notion that straddling a border provides an experience of being in more than one place at once, something not physically possible in any other context.

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This fascination with borders, according to Butler (1996), is probably grounded in the fact that boundaries are not part of most people's daily action space. It is this contrast from the ordinary that makes borders intriguing. In Ryden's (1993: 1) words:

In a subtle and totally subjective way, each side of the border feels different; in the space of a few feet we pass from one geographical entity to another which looks exactly the same but is unique, has a different name, is in many ways a completely separate world from the one we just left...this sense of passing from one world to another, of encompassing within a few steps two realms of experience, enchants and fascinates.

Prostitution

Prostitution commonly develops alongside tourism, and borderlands are especially prone to its spontaneous growth. Timothy and Wall (forthcoming) suggest that two conditions are the primary cause of this phenomenon. First, while many border areas are becoming heavily industrialised, as in the case of the US-Mexico and Eastern European frontiers, borders generally remain unable to provide enough employment for the masses of people who migrate to them from the national interior. This drives many people into menial service occupations, including prostitution. Second, boundaries are prime locations for prostitution since visitors from neighbouring regions do not have to go far into foreign territory to find their 'dens of iniquity'. This is particularly noticeable when large urban centres lie adjacent to, or within a reasonable driving distance of, the nearest border crossing.

The sex trade along the US-Mexico border fits this description. There, Mexican frontier communities became "*convenient yet foreign playgrounds, tantalizingly near but beyond the prevailing morality and rule of law north of the border*" (Curtis and Arreola, 1991: 340), where Americans could "*provide relief to their sexual needs*" (Fernandez, 1977: 127). This was especially so during the early and mid-1900s when dozens of US military installations were established near the border. However, by the 1970s, prostitution had become so extensive, even beyond the serviceman's fetish, that sex tourist guides were published for the general population. One publication boasts that:

The one entrance and exit is carefully supervised by Nuevo Laredo's finest. Girls come from all over Mexico to work in the four or five nicest places. This is the best on the border...Most unique and pleasing structurally, both in building and clientele, is the Tamyko, a huge Japanese pagoda with outside patio and fishponds spanned by arched bridges, surrounded on two levels by bedrooms. The girls are almost all between 14 and 18 years old (West, 1973: 73).

In recent years, however, many people who previously worked as prostitutes have found more productive employment in the *maquiladora* industry. Additionally,

according to Curtis and Arreola (1991: 343), the growth of nude bars, increased sexual permissiveness, and the increased availability of pornography on the US side, as well as the increasing global fear of AIDS, have decreased the role of sex in the tourism product of Mexican border communities. Yet, prostitution still has its clientele of Americans who are attracted by lower prices and the 'exotic' setting (Bowman, 1994).

Similar conditions have developed in other parts of the world, as certain border destinations have become notorious for attracting sex tourists from abroad. Lesotho and Swaziland are good examples of this, as were the independent homelands, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei, and Transkei prior to their reintegration into South Africa in 1994.

Gambling

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Like prostitution, gambling commonly develops, intentionally and spontaneously, at border crossings when one polity allows it but its neighbour does not. So specific are the border dimensions in gaming that casino parking lots are often bisected by political lines and front doors in some cases lie within a metre or two of the border (Timothy and Wall, forthcoming). In the United States, this is common along Nevada's borders and in similar situations throughout the country (Jackson and Hudman, 1987; Sommers and Lounsbury, 1991). Bowman (1994: 52) observed, "*the Nevada borderlands have, like a magnet, drawn new casinos to lure in gamblers as soon as they cross the state line.*"

On an international level, the same holds true. Monaco is an excellent example of this in Europe. In the Middle East, the casino in Taba, Egypt, is thriving primarily on Israeli patronage (over 90%) (Felsenstein and Freeman, 1998). In North America, casinos have recently been built just inside Canada at important gateway cities like Niagara Falls and Windsor to attract Americans across the line (Smith and Hinch, 1996). These Canadian efforts have been so successful in bringing Americans across, that US border cities, where gaming has heretofore been outlawed, have responded by gaining legislative approval and opening up competing facilities on their side of the border (Eadington, 1996).

'Alcohol Tourism'

In the presence of an international boundary, people will drink.

In the presence of an international boundary, people will drink. People by the thousands cross borders to purchase liquor for use at home or to spend time drinking in bars and taverns abroad. Cheaper alcoholic beverages, lower liquor taxes, longer opening hours, and lower drinking ages, if they exist at all, are the primary motivations for this type of behaviour (Timothy, 2000b; Timothy and Wall, forthcoming).

Matley (1977: 25) termed this 'alcohol tourism' and argued that it is of dubious value, because it attracts the worst type of tourist and results in drunkenness, public disorder, violence, and vandalism. This behaviour is of particular concern when underage youth is involved. Bowman (1994) describes how American teenagers, some as young as 14, cross into Mexico on a regular basis to drink. Until recently, radio stations in Tucson, Arizona, advertised for Mexican bars that targeted Arizona teens. However, owing to public outrage, the city's stations no longer run ads for these types of establishments. Nonetheless, this situation is circumvented by bars paying students to distribute pamphlets at school (Bowman, 1994: 62).

Shopping

While cross-border shopping is common in all parts of the world, most academic attention has focused on its development in North America and Europe (e.g. Asgary *et al.*, 1997; Di Matteo and Di Matteo, 1996; Leimgruber, 1988; Minghi, 1999; Patrick and Renforth, 1996; Timothy, 1999b; Timothy and Butler, 1995; Weigand, 1990).

Cross-border shopping has long been a significant part of international tourism in North America.

Cross-border shopping occurs when economic and social conditions are right. Several causes for this activity have been identified by researchers: favourable exchange rates between currencies, higher taxes in the home region, more efficient distribution channels in adjacent nations, a wider variety of goods in the neighbouring area, and more flexible shopping hours across the border (Timothy and Wall, forthcoming). In addition, the fact that shopping can be as much a pleasurable activity as an economic one, adds an additional motivation for people to shop abroad (Timothy and Butler, 1995).

Cross-border shopping has long been a significant part of international tourism in North America. Canadian consumerism has traditionally been a significant economic boost for US border communities. However, in 1987, numbers and frequency of Canadian shopping trips began to soar, owing largely to the depreciation of the Canadian dollar (Di Matteo and Di Matteo, 1996). That year almost 31 million Canadian shopping trips to the United States were made, but the number nearly doubled in 1991 at 59 million. This phenomenon was blamed for thousands of lost jobs in Canada and billions of lost dollars in profits and tax revenues (Kemp, 1992). At the same time, though, the American frontier communities were thriving.

This trend was short lived, however, because in 1992 numbers began to fall, and by 1997 only 35 million Canadian shopping trips were taken. Today, the advantage has changed directions. Americans now flock north to Canadian border towns in record numbers to shop, dine out, watch a movie, and buy real estate (Bondi, 1998). American jobs are now being lost, and Canadian towns are booming. The present retail climate in US border towns is dismal. Dozens of shopping centres that were built during the zenith of Canadian shopping are now empty and falling into disrepair. Public officials and business owners are scrambling to find creative ways to bring Canadian business back.

Similar situations have existed for a long time at the US-Mexico border, as well as in other parts of the world. Exchange rate appears to be the most influential factor in this phenomenon, and even the slightest shift in conversion rates tends to have notable effects on the flow of shopping tourists (Asgary *et al.*, 1997; Di Matteo, 1999; Timothy, 1999b).

International Parks

While national parks have existed since the 1800s, the concept of international parks began in the early twentieth century with the passing of legislation in Czechoslovakia and Poland to establish binational parks between the two nations. Similar actions were taken in North America in 1932 when Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was created on the Canada-United States border. The primary purpose of these entities was to conserve the natural ecosystems that lie astride international boundaries, although the promotion of peace was an additional concern in the North American context (Timothy, 1999a). Since that time, dozens of international parks have been established in various locations throughout the world, and many more are being considered (Denisiuk *et al.*, 1997; Thorsell and Harrison, 1990). International parks in this context are generally comprised of one or more protected areas that lie adjacent to national frontiers or overlap them.

In many parts of the world, these cross-border parks are a significant component of the regional tourism product.

In many parts of the world, these cross-border parks are a significant component of the regional tourism product. For example, Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park is one of the most important tourist destinations, in visitor numbers and size, in the American and Canadian West. Niagara Falls, Victoria Falls, and Masaai Mara-Serengeti are just a few additional examples with global appeal that attract millions of visitors each year.

Despite their purpose to conserve the environment and promote cooperation between neighbours, owing to their location astride international divides, these parks face a variety of management problems that few national parks rarely encounter (Timothy, 2000a; Blake, 1993). These include the following:

- cultural and political differences on opposite sides of the border often create communications barriers and incompatible administrative practices;
- the cross-border parties involved are rarely willing to compromise in areas of collaboration because it might mean giving up some degree of sovereignty, or absolute territorial control;
- border fortifications and methods of demarcation, such as walls, fences and landmines, disrupt the holistic functioning of ecosystems and scar the natural landscape;
- differing levels of development between neighbouring states often result in varying environmental standards from side to side; and,
- the peripheral location of most borderlands commonly translates into political and socio-cultural marginality, and frontier areas are often excluded from economic development programmes.

Despite these management constraints, numbers of international parks are continuing to grow, particularly as the traditional barrier roles of borders are giving way to higher levels of cooperation and integration (Minghi, 1991).

Enclaves/Exclaves

International exclaves in Western Europe and North America have a unique status as tourist destinations.

International exclaves in Western Europe and North America have a unique status as tourist destinations. In fact, the economic base of several exclaves is comprised almost entirely of tourism (e.g. Northwest Angle, Livia, and Campione) (Catudal, 1979; Timothy, 1996). The primary attraction common to all exclaves and pene-enclaves is their unusual political status. However, each has its own additional appeal. For example, Campione, Italy (surrounded by the territory of Switzerland) is well-known for its Casino Municipale. Livia, Spain (surrounded by the territory of France) is a base for skiing enthusiasts in the Pyrenees, and it becomes a festival centre each spring. Point Roberts, Washington (USA, accessible by wheeled traffic only through Canada), is popular among Canadians for shopping, outdoor recreation, and summer homes, while the Northwest Angle, Minnesota (USA, also accessible only by wheeled traffic through Canada), is home to over a dozen hunting and fishing lodges that offer year-round outdoor activities (Timothy, 1996).

While tourism is an important activity, like international parks, these unique destinations face several factors that make the industry difficult to develop (Timothy, 1996). These include:

- the exclaves are at the mercy of the host state for services and imports;
- small size leaves little room for spatial development; and,
- most exclaves are physically isolated.

Miscellaneous Activities

Other types of attractions/destinations also exist in frontier regions whose appeal is not necessarily linked directly to their borderland locations. For example, several reputable beaches are intersected by international boundaries such as the eastern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, where attractive beaches are divided between Jordan, Israel, and Egypt. Additionally, historic sites exist in several border areas like the case of Preah Vihear, an awe-inspiring ruin that lies only metres inside Cambodia near the

Thailand border (see Bruce St. J). Finally, owing to their often peripheral and frontier conditions, borderlands are ideal locations for the development of nature-based tourism. The rain forests adjacent to the Democratic Republic of Congo-Uganda and Costa Rica-Panama borders, for example, are recognised globally as some of the best ecotour regions in the world (Timothy and Wall, forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

As long as boundaries separate places in political, socio-cultural, and economic terms... borderlands will continue to be a unique venue for tourist activities.

While political boundaries traditionally have acted as barriers to human interaction, they are in many cases becoming lines of cooperation and integration. As nations mend hostile relations that have plagued them for years, as in the case of Israel and Jordan, their borders will become less of a barrier and more of a facilitator of cross-frontier partnership, particularly in areas of tourism and natural resources. These changes will increase access among potential tourists to adjacent destinations across 'the line' and will thereby encourage the growth of tourism types such as shopping, gambling, and in some cases, prostitution and drinking.

Clearly, activities and attractions like these that require people to cross borders will benefit from these developments. However, some hostile and less-crossable borders also function as primary attractions. The DMZ between North and South Korea and the former Berlin Wall are just two examples. These borderlines, which are/were arduous to cross, are/were popular attractions for southern and western tourists respectively. Part of the intrigue no doubt resulted from the tourists' inability to cross. So, it may be that improved relations and how they affect the border landscape may decrease the attractiveness of some borders for tourists.

This paper, although cursory and descriptive in nature, has attempted to highlight some of the areas of research that might be pursued by border and tourism scholars. There is a dearth of knowledge about the relationships between borders and tourism, and research along these lines would make a valuable contribution to the literature in geopolitics, tourism, and economic development. Given the examples and information presented here, it appears that as long as boundaries separate places in political, socio-cultural, and economic terms, and as long as accessibility is assured, borderlands will continue to be a unique venue for tourist activities.

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