

Making the World Safe for Tourism, by Patricia Goldstone

reviewed by [John C. Raines](#) in the [August 15, 2001](#) issue

Tourists mean traveling dollars looking to be spent. And those dollars (pounds, marks, lire) create an expanding market for aircraft, service jobs and entertainment workers, and the prospect of hard currency deposited into Third World treasuries and available to repay loans to First World banks. Despite this seemingly happy serendipity, author Patricia Goldstone is not at all sure that tourism is in fact safe for the world.

Tourism, she argues, has become a global "one-trick economy." Replacing foreign aid, surpassing international manufacture and trade, tourism is the world's biggest business, generating 10 percent of the global gross domestic product and employing one in nine workers worldwide. But the dark side of this good fairy is that the whole edifice rests upon two distinctly precarious legs: "the nest egg of retiring first world baby boomers and the discretionary income [once] generated by the [now defunct] global bull market."

Even deeper dangers lurk. Goldstone gives a classification of various kinds of tourism: the "commodification of memory" in roots-tourism, as people of various diaspora visit "the old country"; or the good-natured "strip mining of culture" in fast-paced package tours; the voyeurism of war-tourism (France or Vietnam); eco-tourism ("see the rain forests before they're gone"); sports-tourism ("come swim with the dolphins on the Outer Banks"); or, the fastest growing of all, sex-tourism (in Bangkok, Manila, Istanbul, St. Petersburg or . . .).

In this happy or not so happy new world of the jet age, it is no accident that the acronym WTO stands for both the World Trade Organization and the UN's World Tourism Organization. This vision of global corporate good citizenship, the author argues, "is a tantalizing one, but the invisible hand [of the bottom line] is very strong." The empty rooms of five-star hotels around the world today advertise the stark economic reality of "we built it . . . but then they stopped coming"--proof that the kingdom of God cannot be founded upon the ups and downs of credit card

capitalism.