Volume 9

Tourismophobia

*From "Mass Tourism"
to "Overtourism"*

Jean-Christophe Gay

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Tourismophobia

*To my parents, Léone and Raymond,
who have tried to be tourists.*

Tourism and Mobility Systems Set

coordinated by
Philippe Violier

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Introduction

Wednesday July 20, 2022, Menton. After a night during which the thermometer did not dip below 28°C, the day is suffocating under the domineering sun. One "tropical night" after another is doing its job of selling air conditioning systems, as are the scorching days. Sunshine and humidity reach record levels, drought too. The threat of fire looms large. The only solution: sea bathing in water at 27.5°C which, by contrast, seems refreshing, provided you avoid the jellyfish. The media warn of heatstroke, and there is much talk of hyperthermia or dehydration. Yet tourists seem to be getting used to this atmosphere. They are everywhere: on the beach, in the pedestrianized streets, in the shops, on the trains, on the roads. Getting around is complicated. Behind the wheel, I resent these hordes who drive slowly, get lost, park anywhere, cause traffic jams, pollute and prevent me from parking. I get angry, I swear, tired of the noise and the heat. All non-southern license plates are hostile to me, and I have no qualms about honking at the first deviation. I feel invaded. I'm trying to show that I'm different from the idiots who come to throw themselves into this trap set by consumer society. In the street, I quicken my pace and walk in a hurry to mark my difference from the indolent, idle masses. My neighbors, like me, have only one desire: to leave, to escape from this crowded furnace, especially as incivilities within our residence are multiplying, especially around the swimming pool, by strangers renting (clandestinely?) studios or apartments. They are watched like a hawk. Everyone vigilant! Airbnb is in the crosshairs. Finally, like many other natives, I flee and take refuge at altitude. In less than two hours, I go from over 30°C to under 15°C, reaching Isola 2000, where there is hardly anyone around, which confirms the

imbecility of the packed coastal crowds. I feel much smarter than them on my mountain peaks.

Friday October 14, 2022, Nice-Riquier station, TER 86037 arriving at 12:41 p.m. from Cannes-La Bocca and bound for Ventimiglia. The platform is packed. The atmosphere is still summery. The sun is out and so are the tourists. English is being spoken more than French on the quay, and it has to be said that the off-season is exceptional. The North Americans are out in force to visit Monaco. The professionals are rubbing their hands, the TER (regional express train) users a little less so, those who are going to work in the Principality or who, like me, are returning from a morning's work in Nice. The train arrives. We let a few passengers off and quickly try to squeeze into the carriages, but it soon becomes clear: this train is packed. We push to get on. Flip-flops, sliders and other sandals collide with loafers and pumps. Board shorts brush up against suits. Backpacks languish alongside beach tote bags. In the midst of such a crush, a small lady in her 50s tries to find a seat and keeps repeating: "What are all these tourists doing here? Make them go home!" The locals, most of whom work across the border and regularly have to deal with delays, cancellations or strikes, nod in silence, me first.

So I'm an everyday touristophobe. However, I decided to write this book to try to understand these reactions and put myself on the tourists' side. For I am one, of course, on vacation in Amsterdam, Ireland or the Massif Central. How could I not feel a little compassion for the queues in front of the ticket machines at Nice-Ville station, which force visitors to wait for long periods or even, on many occasions, to catch the next train half an hour later? Or in the face of all those summertime scams, in the face of all those shopkeepers who raise their prices and treat them like cash cows, in the face of all those natives who do not necessarily welcome them very well, as they come to spend their money here? But do tourists deserve to be defended? Aren't there far more noble and serious causes, such as the sick, the poor, disabled people, suffering children or women, human rights, the victims of terrorism, discrimination, disaster or famine, etc.? All year round, the media cover dramatic events in Bangladesh, Haiti, the Sahel, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Turkey, Syria and elsewhere.

We are constantly stirred to have compassion and, faced with such a spectacle of the world, it is reasonable to think that tourists are not to be pitied the most. They are having a good time, while part of the population is

under house arrest, while in our rich countries part of the population cannot go on vacation. Moreover, there is no humanitarian association, NGO or tourist rights league to defend them; no media action to denounce their conditions; no revolt or rebellion on their part in tourist resorts. While some of the actions of locals can be seen as forms of xenophobia, tourists are in no way in the same situation as migrants, who are criminalized, raped, locked up, extorted or risking their lives. Some even disguise themselves as tourists to cross borders. For example, Ventimiglia's "human rights defenders" "provide migrants with suitcases on wheels, sunglasses, beach towels, tourist guides or French novels, all things that might make them 'pass for' tourists at a checkpoint"[1]. Here, on the French–Italian border, several worlds rub shoulders: that of the border workers who move from one country to another on a daily basis without a care in the world; that of the tourists who cross the border in anticipation of discovery; and that of the migrants who stumble across it, risking their lives. The summer spectacle of tanned, happy tourists crossing paths with resigned migrants does not encourage us to defend the former.

Isn't it a form of quixotism to take the side of tourism and tourists, a word so negatively connoted that it is difficult to admit to being one, or to apologize for having been one? Is this not an untenable and totally irrational position, given that tourism has, since its beginnings, been the target of damning allegations and unappealable judgments condemning or mocking the practices of those who practice it: panurgism, depravity, degradation of landscapes, congestion of places, etc.? To use Hans Magnus Enzensberger's reflections, "there are few things in our civilization that have been so thoroughly mocked and so diligently criticized" (1996). The Covid-19 pandemic only increased the prosperity of tourism bashing, while raising awareness of tourism's influence in our economies. But it is worth noting that 9/11, as well as the attacks in Bali and Mombasa (Kenya) in 2002 had already prompted some, such as Gérald Messadié (2003, p. 11), to question tourism and predict its decline. Turning your nose up at tourism is as old as tourism itself, as Jean-Didier Urbain (1991) and James Buzard (1993) have shown in their remarkable works, as well as, in another register, Pascal Bruckner and Alain Finkielkraut who dedicated a long chapter to tourism in their delightful essay *Au coin de la rue l'aventure* (1979). Their subversive

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1 Selek, P. and Trucco, D. (eds) (2020). *Le manège des frontières. Criminalisation des migrations et solidarités dans les Alpes-Maritimes*. Le Passager Clandestin, Paris, p. 7.

joy in discrediting anti-tourist clichés, through singularly brilliant formulas, demonstrates the thousand ways in which the tourist has been mocked.

Common sense in Western bourgeois culture, perhaps particularly in France (Iribarne 2006), places tourism on the side of the vulgar, the unrefined, the decadent. Associated with hedonism, it has something infantile about it. As an object of study, it is obscene in its triviality, in the crudity and lack of modesty of the bodies revealed on the beaches, in the sexuality which has developed around vacations (Littlewood 2001), supposedly and fantasmatically in the tropics (Cocks 2013, p. 127 *ff.*), by the inappropriateness or inconsistency of many practices (shopping, *lazing about*, etc.). Can we still support tourism, at a time of climate disruption and the energy crisis, which is based on "useless" mobility that jeopardizes our future? The question has become a moral one. Isn't it wrong to travel when this mobility isn't necessary? Wouldn't we all be well-advised today to be Stoics and follow Pascal in his *Thoughts* (1669, Diversion, no. 139), declaring that "all of men's misfortune comes from one thing, which is not knowing how to sit quietly in a room"? The choice to be a tourist has thus become untenable and immoral.

Is the tourist an outsider? In the 19th century, the focus was on train users, who embodied the passivity of tourists and the invasion of territories by the travel industry. Today, guilt has changed fashion with *flygskam*, or flight shame, the shame of taking a plane for reasons deemed futile, associated with the promotion of the train. Tourist behavior is therefore neither normal nor moral, all the more so since tourism is fully assimilated with consumer society, accused of propagating a conformist mass culture and subjected to mind-numbing media (television, radio, magazines, Internet, blogs, social networks, etc.). Today's tourist is thus a mass being within "mass tourism", an expression describing a set of notions, images and myths corresponding to a situation that came into being from the 1950s onwards, although the expression was already attested to in 1923[2]. The creation of the "tourism" class on Air France in 1952 demonstrated the access of a new clientele to air transport, one that was being installed in the back of planes, in denser cabins. The problem at the heart of tourismophobia, then as now, is that of mass.

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2 Rey, A. (2022). *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*. Le Robert, Paris, p. 2636.

And yet, on closer inspection, criticism of tourists and tourism is more than respectable in age. Right from its origins in the late 18th century, tourism quickly found itself in the hot seat, with the establishment of a system of social norms and moral condemnations that have not fundamentally changed in over two centuries. From the beginning of the 19th century, some people, referring to themselves as "travelers", strove to distinguish themselves from the "tourist" or the "excursionist", an attitude that John Pemble sees as a form of snobism based on a repulsion for the British working masses (1987, p. 265).

Over time, many of us have brought about the massification of tourism wherever it suits us, with the idea of democratized tourism emerging as early as the first half of the 19th century in England and in the second half on the European continent. Today, a Europe-centric vision associates it with paid vacations and the economic boom of the 1950s. For France, there is the myth of mass departures in 1936. At the end of the 19th century, it was the railroads and Thomas Cook (1808–1892) that seemed to be behind it, with the double regret of being in the crowd and frequently being beaten to the punch. A century earlier, it was the English mania for spending time abroad that exasperated some, such as Edward Gibbon who, in 1785, complained in Lausanne about the large-scale arrival on the continent of tens of thousands of his fellow countrymen (Buzard 1993, p. 97). It was during the years following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) that hyperboles and unflattering metaphors appeared about British tourists pouring onto the continent, flooding into it, infesting it (*op. cit.*, p. 83), even though there were probably fewer than 100,000 of them crossing the Channel each year at the time (*op. cit.*, p. 88), and neither the railroads nor Thomas Cook yet existed. The history of the discourse on massification shows us that mass is, after all, very relative. Mass tourism is used as a foil to promote distinctive practices of the upper classes, to promote secondary destinations, and to promote other forms of tourism, such as "sustainable" or "durable" tourism, or ecotourism, today.

My work is therefore probably out of step with the times, for while the pandemic does not appear to have been a moment of radical disruption in tourism activity, it did enable the post-Covid prophets, who were very much in the media in 2020 and 2021, and who predicted the advent of a new world, with the "return of travel through human adventure" (Michel 2021, p. 20), to revive aversion to tourism and/or tourists. The cases of Barcelona, Venice or Dubrovnik, with their theme of overtourism, are sufficiently

edifying to raise questions about the future of tourism and its regulation. And even though the doomsayers seem to have been wrong for the time being, with the massive return of tourists to airports and beaches, this phenomenon of catch-up maintains a media-spread mistrust. Furthermore, some people are associating the desire to travel again – which is seen as one of the most important components of happiness in our societies – with something illicit, calling it revenge tourism or revenge travel, a transparent reference to revenge porn, the criminal act of sharing sexually explicit content online without the consent of the person or persons appearing in it, and with the aim of "revenge". Tourism is seen here as revenge, an evil inflicted in return for the pandemic, but on whom? The planet? The tourist destinations? The populations visited? All of these?

If I don't lead the pack, I run the risk of appearing naive and silly, for if a pessimistic attitude is a sign of intelligence, or at least lucidity, not to follow it can be interpreted as an adherence to all the downward spirals of our time, or to a form of blissful optimism, with social sciences that have, moreover, adopted a critical posture. As part of the "MIT" (*Mobilités, Itinéraires, Tourismes*) team, I tackled this subject in *Tourismes 1 : Lieux communs* (2002, pp. 11–77), which I described as an "ordinary social pathology" (*op. cit.*, p. 29) and which, to borrow a neologism from Georges Bataille (1897–1962), can be linked to the multiple heterophobias inherent in humanity[3]. This fear of otherness is widespread, even universal and exists on many different scales, between clans, villages, ethnic groups, nations and so on. If some people exacerbate this feeling, jealousy or hatred through manipulation, heterophobia can lead to genocide, as in Rwanda.

The analyses remain valid two decades later. The terms "tourismophobia" and "touristophobia" that we used did not exist, as far as we knew, at that time, although it is reasonable to assume that they had already been coined. The terms spread at the end of the 2010s. Proof that, as we said in 2002, touristophobia had a bright future (*op. cit.*, p. 74), as well as that the problems generated by tourism had amplified in some places. These terms have since been popularized by the media, first in Spain, which propagated them (Milano et al. 2019). It is no coincidence that it is in this country that these phobias have attracted the attention of journalists, as in a number of

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3 Bataille, G. (1951). Le racisme. *Critique*, 48, 460–463. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12. Gallimard, Paris, p. 95–99. See also the work of sociologist Albert Memmi, including his 1981 article "*Racisme et hétérophobie*", in the MRAP journal *Différences*, 6, 40–42.

Spanish cities where we have seen the emergence and amplification of protests by local residents against tourist nuisances, due in particular to "drunk tourism" (*turismo de borrachera*), the coastal district of Barceloneta being emblematic of these struggles. The Spanish newspaper *El País* used the word *turismofobia* on August 6, 2017 to refer to the cases of certain Spanish cities, from Palma de Mallorca to Barcelona (Ballester 2018). Along with Agence France-Presse (AFP), the Huffington Post, a news website, picked up the term in its headline, translating it into French on August 17, 2017. Things then moved very quickly, because while the French terms "*tourismophobie*" or "*touristophobie*" did not make it into the French dictionaries *Le Petit Larousse illustré 2023* or *Le Petit Robert 2023*, the former has, since 2018, been defined in Wiktionnaire, a free online dictionary, as the "rejection of mass tourism", but what then of the rejection of luxury tourism? As for the latter, it is not yet defined, as if "tourismophobia" were enough to understand the phenomenon.

Yet expert Paul Arsenneault, professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), makes a clear distinction between the two terms. He defines touristophobia as an aversion to tourists, manifested by acts of rejection and even aggression towards them. In his view, tourismophobia is the rejection of the tourist industry and its institutional and commercial partners by local residents, who feel that their rights, benefits and peace of mind have been taken away from them. Rémy Knafou writes in much the same vein, seeing in tourismophobia the consequences of "a tourism system increasingly under the control of a globalized commodification with devastating excesses" (2021, p. 14). He calls himself both a "touristophile" and a "tourismophobe". It is not easy to separate the two, however, as "touristophobia, by embodying tourismophobia, allows tourismophobia to exist" (Equipe MIT 2002, p. 13). They are two sides of the same coin. Today, in many tourist resorts, visitors can be touristophiles without being tourismophobes, because they have not thought through the underlying reasons for the influx of visitors. They can even be touristophobes and tourismophiles, when they would like to have the money from tourism without the tourists, or when they enjoy being tourists – in other people's homes – but not when others come to theirs. There are even people who make their living from tourism, more or less directly, and who do not appreciate tourists. The critics of tourism in the 19th century seemed more at home with the sometimes amusing description of tourists' shortcomings than with denouncing a system that was beginning to organize and rationalize

itself, with the birth of tour operators, the role of railway companies and the big banks.

Counterbalancing my summertime touristophobia (see above), I wish to clarify at this point a form of conflict of interest, because as co-director of a master's degree in international hotel management at IAE Nice Graduate School of Management (Université Côte d'Azur) and as scientific director of the Institut du tourisme Côte d'Azur (ITCA), one of whose ambitions is to contribute to the development of tourism on the Côte d'Azur, I am not entirely neutral and not completely outside the tourism system, even if my role is a modest one. Of course, as a teacher-researcher, I have to look at tourism as objectively as possible, but my mission is also to make the Côte d'Azur destination as competitive and attractive as possible. I must also seek to ensure a bright professional future for our students in the tourism and hospitality industries. So, I too make my living partly from tourism. This book can also be seen as a way of feeling sorry for myself, forcing the point to be made about the state of tourism research, the lack of resources and the lack of consideration, in France specifically. These contradictory elements and biases prompt me to adopt the most rigorous approach possible. One of the pitfalls to be avoided is writing a manual for tourism professionals, enabling them to respond to tourismophobic discourse, by providing arguments and elements of language. I am aware of this potential instrumentalization, but my background is the production of scientific knowledge that distances me from local economic issues and commonplaces, thus feeling bound by a kind of duty of ingratitude.

I would like to start my book by mentioning the damaging effects of tourism – and there are many – as is the case for all other human activities, such as industry, agriculture, livestock farming, trade, transport and so on. Is this choice a guarantee of integrity? Certainly not, but it allows me to get straight to the heart of the matter, without giving the impression that by criticizing those who criticize tourism, I am minimizing the problems posed by this activity. I have also tried to avoid the trap of simplicity by not compiling the innumerable commonplaces denigrating tourism and tourists. That would be easy enough to do. Instead, I have opted for a reasoned use of citations, favoring older texts, to show that this is a phenomenon that needs to be understood over the long term. In an age of fragmented knowledge and disciplinary downturn, I wanted this book to take an extensive look at a far-reaching theoretical question, opening up a variety of avenues from different disciplines and enabling us to understand the roots of this posture

over the long term, because in this field there is a great deal of continuity. However, it is not our intention here to cover the history of this posture, as we have neither the skills nor the time. However, the remarkable constancy of these discourses, despite the fact that tourists are no longer the same, that their numbers are infinitely higher today than in the past, that practices have radically changed and that places have multiplied, challenges me. It is the persistence of repulsion towards tourists, as well as the transgenerational transmission of this obsession and the renewal of these phobias of the other that I would like to dissect, without attempting to exhaust the subject, at most bringing out of the shadows this cultural invariant and this paradox of an activity that, since its beginnings, has encouraged and exploited a rhetoric that criticizes it without really harming it.