

Book review

Explorer travellers and adventure tourism, edited by Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost, Bristol, Channel View Publications, 2014, 272 pp., £99.95 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-845-41457-3

Explorer travellers have become a large segment of the travel market. Various studies have investigated this sector from different aspects, such as motivations, travel experiences, safety issues, as well as cultures and myths. Based on these studies, the aim of this book is “to examine this phenomenon of travel based on the desire for adventure and the need of explore” (p. 3). In this book, Laing and Frost focus specifically on elite explorers who have well-known written accounts, combining with 39 semi-structured interviews to investigate the myth of explorers and how they influence contemporary explorer travellers.

The book is divided into four parts: *The Hero's Journey*, *Imagining Explorers*, *Tourists as Play*, and *The Future*. Part 1: *The Hero's Journey* adopts the framework of Campbell (1993) by investigating both fictional accounts and first-hand current explorer narratives. Laing and Frost argue that Campbell's structure, which develops from heroic myths, is applicable for today's explorer travellers' journey. Four chapters use past accounts and current interviews alternatively to illustrate the journey of explorers. “The call to adventure” discusses external influences and internal drives of explorer travellers who undertake journeys. “Preparation and departure” examines the importance of the departure. This chapter brings up several pre-journey issues to provide a detailed account of how explorers get ready for the journey and say goodbye. “The journey” is about the stage of the “Trail and Victories of Initiation” (Campbell, 1993). This chapter focuses on three perspectives of initiations: competition and goal settings; overcoming barriers and restrictions; and the apotheosis, which can be understood as a divine state: it enriches explorer's lives and leads to a higher level of self-knowledge. “The return” reveals both pleasures and difficulties after returning home. The interesting point of how re-crossing the threshold mirrors the departure is made.

Part 2: *Imagining Explorers* covers a wide range of literatures and media to examine the way of re-imagination and how current explorer travellers practice re-enactment. Some big names and their well-known works such as Daniel Defoe, Jules Verne, and Henry Rider Haggard have been utilized to support Laing and Frost's argument that some elements of novels and fictional media are stressed whilst some are exaggerated in the explorer myth making. In Chapter 6, "Fiction and the myth of the explorer", Laing and Frost subjectively select various fictional explorers, ranging from heroes of the Golden Age to current plain travellers, in order to discuss the impact of fictionalization as a key element of explorer myths. Chapter 7, "Desert island castaways", focuses specifically on stranded explorers. Lost explorers in this case face difficulties of returning home. Fictional narratives cover both romantic dreams and unknown dangers. Chapter 8, "Reenactments", explores the modern trend of current explorer travellers who undertake expeditions of past explorers. Various reasons of these practices have been examined: many are driven to solve unknown mysteries or reassess past explorers' reputation; for others, it is a way to gain authentic experiences of past heroes.

Part 3: *Tourists at Play* further discusses the influence of the explorer myth in modern tourism. In Chapter 9, "Crossing borders", Laing and Frost introduce the term immersive explorer travellers, who aim to overcome cultural barriers and immerse themselves in exotic societies or cultures. Different levels of immersion are discussed. Some are relatively superficial; their immersion is only limited to dressing and dining locally. Some go deeper, even thinking to disguise himself (herself) as a local to show the level of immersion. Chapter 10, "On safari", focuses on the commercial aspect of adventure tourism, which is an emerging sector in the travel industry. Laing and Frost raise the issue of paradox between modern explorer travellers who seek for authentic experiences and group tour or package expedition driven by planned performance of the Experience

Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Part 4 explores *The Future of adventure tourism*. Chapter 10, "Destination Mars", examines the current trend in space tourism, particularly journeys to Mars. The contradiction between the nature of seeking visceral experiences by explorer travellers

and the high level of regulation by technological requirements is discussed in this chapter. The rationale of space tourism also reflects the drive of explorer tourism being discussed throughout the whole book – the human nature exploring the unknown and looking for new frontiers (Zubrin & Wagner, 1996). Chapter 11, “The explorer traveller: the myth continues”, wraps up the whole book by arguing an endless circle of myth making has been made by explorers’ narratives over generations, and the desire of seeking personal growth and authentic experiences.

Nine themes run through the whole book: (1) explorer myth, (2) Cohen’s typologies of explorer and drifter (3) tendency to the extreme, (4) transformative exploration travel, (5) influences on travellers, (6) impacts on host communities and cultures, (7) Western paradigm of discourses, (8) intercultural communication and translation, and (9) the explorer’s gene. These themes are discussed throughout the whole book and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of current adventure travellers and the circle of explorer myth. Laing and Frost have done an excellent job in this book by linking past explorers’ the explorer myth on current explorer travellers, but also suggests an endless myth-making cycle: explorer travellers continually create their narratives and spread via various media; these accounts, on the other hand, to some extent influence and inspire new generations to undertake their journeys. In addition to this contribution, the book covers a wide range of stories of hero’s journeys, which are very interesting to read.

References

- Campbell, J. (1993). *The hero with a thousand faces* (1993 reprint). London: Fontana Press.
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Zubrin, R., & Wagner, R. (1996). *The case for mars: The plan to settle the red planet and why we must*. New York: Touchstone.

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