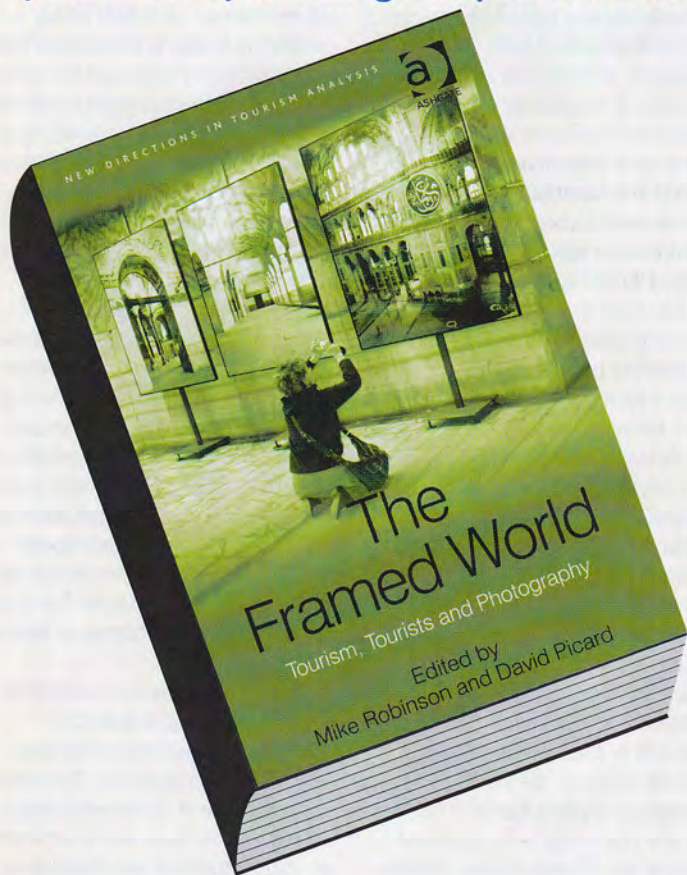


# We take pictures, therefore we are

Laura González on the meanings beneath people's compulsion to capture images of places visited



**The Framed World: Tourism, Tourists and Photography**  
Edited by Mike Robinson and David Picard  
Ashgate, 276pp, £60.00  
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**W**e live in an age where tourism is common practice, whether one travels or hosts. It comes coupled with specific rituals, one of the most mysterious of which is pressing down the shutter button of a photographic camera. Indeed, it seems we can't quite believe that we've visited a place unless it has been visually recorded. Stored in shoeboxes and albums and on hard drives, these banal images are the reminder (and remainder) that we were there. Most of us own such pictures and have bored friends and family with illustrated accounts of visited places (are these ever enjoyable for anyone but the traveller?). We have all

posed or performed in front of must-see sites. We have humoured tourists by taking a photo of them in front of local attractions. And even if we can't quite remember the last time we got away from our usual routine, we have participated in armchair tourism by consuming media images of paradise destinations, by fantasising about the stereotypical empty beach, the palm tree and the blue sea, or by receiving postcards from friends, arousing our imaginary construction of places. Mike Robinson and David Picard's edited volume *The Framed World* shows us that there is nothing innocent in these acts.

The book consists of 14 essays intertwining a number of disciplines, from the most obvious ones of tourism studies and photography (both professional and amateur image-making), to anthropology, history, psychology, cultural studies, and even theology and music. It is the

richness of the dialogue between these, combined with the ubiquity of the practices described, that makes the publication intriguing and accessible.

Two concerns structure the contributions: photographs taken by tourists, and those that are part of the framework of tourism, including holiday brochures, in-flight magazines, getaway advertisements and postcards for sale at destinations. The book starts off with a brief account of the rise of tourism and photography for the masses. Then we are presented with a series of case studies (including the Pueblo people, Ancient Greece, depictions of Africa), followed by discussions of more abstract concepts (race, advertising, holy sites), finishing with an exploration of the slippery "tourist gaze", a constant thread throughout the work. The imaginative charge and the relationships of tourism and photography to space, time and technology are explored, from the idea of photographs stealing the model's soul, to the role of memory and the illusion of time travel achieved by visiting so-called primitive tribes ("going native", "going colonial"), prehistoric sites and ancient landscapes.

The practice of tourism involves economic and social exchanges. What may be more complicated to identify is how they are engaged in projections of the self, identity construction, self-representation and place-making. The writers selected by Robinson and Picard seek to do just that.

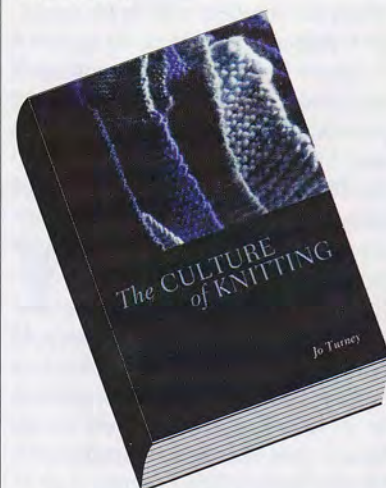
In our world of mass circulation and mass production of visual goods, photography is a tool for, and of, the tourist. But – many of the contributions to this volume argue – it is also a system of knowledge with agency and an ideological apparatus. We are susceptible to its power. It is particularly well suited to shaping images into myths, producing pictures that are apt to being assigned meanings that are not fixed and final, but are negotiated constantly. Our seeing and our photographing of places and of people is socially constructed and institutionally controlled. This is most evident in the texts around ethnic tourism and postcolonial rhetoric. Photographs have historically been used to classify (class, race, socioeconomic status) and this practice is perpetuated today. Our fascination with

otherness, the mythic and lost cultures continues, because our perception of difference is crucial to our definition of self.

The writings here portray the complex and often contradictory nature of tourism and photography, although the volume sometimes reads like an overview, defining the breadth of the area of study rather than its depth, for which a stronger editorial outline and a conclusion would have been needed.

I understand better the intricacies and the social implications of my actions when I appropriate places for my personal consumption, but I am still left wondering what to make of what I have produced, and where to place my holiday snapshots. Whereas this is, in part, accounted for by the conflict at the heart of the object of study (ubiquity of practice but privacy of product) and the emerging nature of the field, a fuller discussion on the nature, purpose and meaning of the photographs themselves would be most welcome. This, perhaps, calls for a second volume.

Laura González is research lecturer, Glasgow School of Art. Her latest published work is a chapter in *Managing Creativity: Exploring the Paradox* (2009), edited by Barbara Townley and Nic Beech.



**The Culture of Knitting**  
By Joanne Turney  
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**A**s a knitter and an academic (although not an academic in the field of visual or textile arts), I found this treatise on the culture of knitting an engaging read. I consider myself