

## CHAPTER I

# Destination London: An Expanding Visitor Economy

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### Introduction

No city in the world is better covered by literature – fictional and non-fictional – than London. From Pepys, via Dickens, to Ackroyd, London has benefited from a series of talented historians, novelists and commentators who have provided detailed accounts of the city’s condition. In the past few years a new tranche of books has been published on the contemporary character of the UK capital: with Anna Minton’s *Big Capital*, Rowan Moore’s *Slow Burn City*, Ben Judah’s *This is London* and Iain Sinclair’s *The Last London* notable examples. One thing that unites these otherwise excellent accounts is the conspicuous absence of discussions about the city’s visitor economy. This is a notable omission, given the scale and significance of tourism in London. Over the years, the city has earned various nicknames that purport to represent its essential nature: ‘the great wen’; ‘the big smoke’; ‘the city of villages’. But the epithet that perhaps best represents contemporary London might be: ‘the city of tourists’ or *Destination London*.

London hosts a very significant visitor economy and overnight visitors contribute approximately £14.9 billion of expenditure to the city every year

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(London and Partners 2017). When the city hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 the UK's capital was already a leading global destination, but staging this mega-event instigated a new period of growth. In the period 2011–2016 tourism numbers increased by 25 per cent and over the past few years the city has experienced a series of record years for arrivals. Despite already being one of the three most visited cities in the world – hosting 31.2 million overnight visitors in 2016 – city officials expect visitor arrivals to increase further: to over 40 million overnight visitors by 2025 (London and Partners 2017). Put simply, tourism is already a very significant economic and social phenomenon in London, but over the next few decades it will become even more pivotal and pervasive.

London's status as one of the world's most visited destinations is not universally welcomed. At the moment there is considerable media and academic attention dedicated to the problem of rapid tourism growth and what has become known as *overtourism*. This coverage has focused on various European capitals: from Berlin to Barcelona, Ljubljana to Lisbon. Even though the UK's capital city seems like the ideal case through which to explore the ways that destinations evolve and expand, there has been surprisingly little attention devoted to London in these debates. This book explores how and why tourism is growing in Europe's most popular city destination; and what benefits and problems accrue from expanding the tourism sector in a city already hosting 19 million overseas tourists and 12 million overnight domestic visitors every year. These additional people mean London's population grows considerably every day, especially when one considers the 300,000 people that commute daily to the capital from outside Greater London and the daily influx of 750,000 non-staying visitors. London hosts a residential population of around 8.8 million people, but its 'daytime' population, i.e. that which includes workers, visitors and tourists, is estimated to be over well over 10 million (GLA 2015). Put another way, tourists and day visitors now make up over 10 per cent of the people who inhabit London every day.

The book analyses how and *why* the expansion of the visitor economy is happening and what effect this is having on the city. Contributions from various authors demonstrate how Destination London is developing through the extension of tourism into new spaces and new spheres. The book outlines how parts of London not previously regarded as tourism territories, e.g. residential suburbs, peripheral parks and private homes, are now subjected to the tourist gaze. Tourists are being encouraged to visit places outside the centre and stay in accommodation owned by residents. In a similar manner, London is constantly creating new eventscapes to capitalise on the experience economy and providing reasons to visit at different times – in winter and at night. These types of initiatives feature prominently in London's new 'Tourism Vision', which explicitly outlines the city's aim to grow tourism 'by encouraging visitors to explore the city's outer districts, both in and out of season and around the clock' (London and Partners 2017, 16). This ambition is nothing new. A guidebook published



**Figure 1.1:** Tourism is Expanding beyond London's Tourist Bubble (Photo: Tristan Luker).

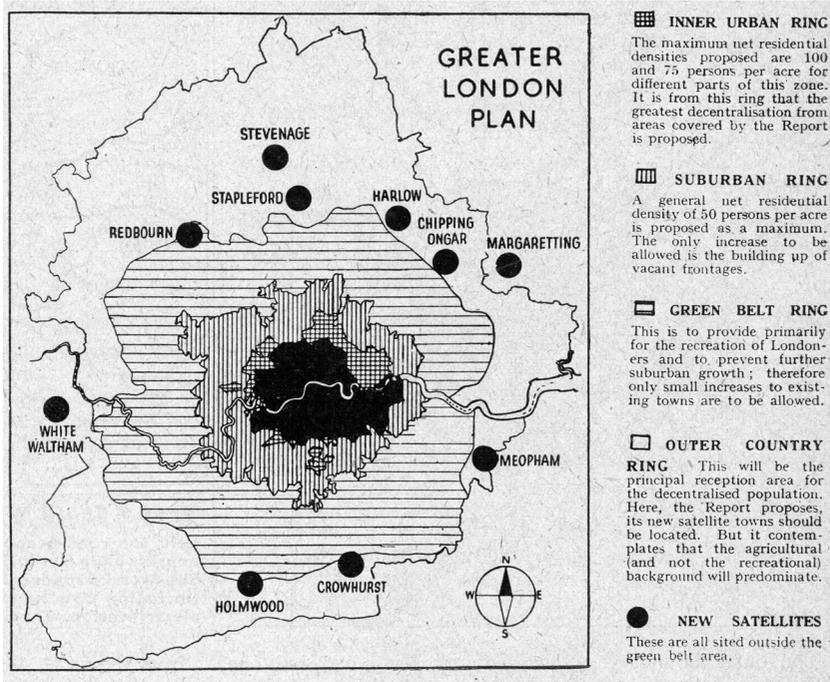
in 1978 lamented that many tourists miss out on experiencing London's 'multiple fascination', because they failed to go beyond the West End and conventional tourist attractions ... 'if only they moved to the right or the left of those well beaten tracks' (Crookston 1978, 8).

Contemporary expansion is being facilitated by extending the capacity of existing services (e.g. by running the Underground 24 hours a day), and by building new infrastructure (e.g. the new Crossrail network and a new runway at Heathrow Airport) and accommodation provision (plans for 23,000 new hotel rooms by 2025). However, growth in the visitor economy is driven more by market and cultural trends than any deliberate planning and policy; and this unfettered growth is likely to outrun formal provision. The rise of social media and the sharing economy, and the desire for new, distinctive and personalised experiences, are pushing tourists into peripheral locations, but also advancing tourism into spheres not normally considered tourism territory. Growth is likely to be enabled and absorbed by unofficial tourism providers, including London's residents who now provide a range of services: most obviously accommodation, but also food, travel and guiding. This book explores these trends and, in doing so, highlights the mechanisms and processes that are driving the expansion of the visitor economy. The discussion enhances the understanding of London, but it also helps us to better appreciate the ways that tourism in cities is expanding into new spaces, times and spheres.

### **Tourism Expansions and Extensions**

How cities grow and develop is an established field of academic enquiry. A large number of texts explain how cities change over time, including detailed consideration of the processes of regeneration and gentrification. London is a city known for its planned growth – its expansion has been carefully orchestrated, and the limits of the city are still bounded by a 'green belt' (See Figure 1.2). But urban growth and development also happens in unplanned and/or unofficial ways: planning policy is breached through various types of informal, illegal and unsanctioned development. In the twenty-first century, attempts to curtail urban sprawl mean expansion is often vertical, rather than merely horizontal, a trend explored in Chapter 6 of this text. Alongside analysing the expansion of cities, it is important to analyse how existing urban areas evolve and Tim Butler's (1997) work on the waves of gentrification in London is very important in this regard. Various forces driving urban change can be understood as cycles of development involving cultural pioneers paving the way for more mainstream, mass market clientele. This model is equally relevant to urban change instigated by increased demand for tourism services. The visitor economy is now acknowledged as a force that shapes cities, but it is rarely analysed in depth as a significant contributor to urban transformations. Dedicated analyses which explain how tourism develops and expands in cities are even rarer. In the era of 'the entrepreneurial city', the visitor economy has become central to the economy and life of many cities and it deserves more consideration.

This book is situated within an emerging body of work that appreciates the way tourism has diversified, making it harder to separate from other activities.



**Figure 1.2:** Greater London Plan's Four Zonal 'Rings' (Abercrombie/RIBA Collections, 1945).

Tourism *in cities* exhibits particularly pronounced indivisibility (and therefore, invisibility) due to the way that tourism activities and other forms of consumption and mobility coincide. In a city like London it is very hard to distinguish tourists from other mobile elites, including students, those travelling for business and people that reside in multiple locations. The traditional distinction between tourists and locals is increasingly blurred, something exacerbated by noted role reversals. In contemporary cities – particularly global tourism cities – it seems as though tourists want to be locals and locals want to be tourists (Lim and Bouchon 2017). For this reason, it is helpful to talk about tourism as a role or set of behaviours that people perform, rather than as merely a category of consumer defined by where someone lives. This allows for consideration of 'as if' tourists – residents who use tourist services/spaces and act like tourists even if they live locally (Novy 2018), alongside tourists who use residential services/spaces and behave like residents (Maitland 2009).

Traditionally, tourism has been regarded as something that takes place in a distinctive part of a city – the 'tourist bubble' or 'entertainment district' – but it increasingly infiltrates a more diverse set of urban spaces and places. This process of 'tourism territorialisation' is analysed in this book. The growing literature on city tourism often equates this with the process of touristification – 'the

coming into being of a touristic place' (Stock 2007, 3) – where the city and the citizenry are appropriated as objects of tourism consumption. There are obvious links to the wider processes of commodification and commercialisation and to the aforementioned ideas of regeneration and gentrification. According to Novy (2018, 7) 'the geographical spread of tourism in Berlin has occurred in parallel with a spatial expansion and intensification of gentrification processes'. This pattern is also noticeable in other European cities, including London. Non-central areas – for example, the South Bank, Camden and Spitalfields – have fundamentally changed because of their appeal to international tourists, day visitors and other consumers.

More research is needed to understand how urban/residential space is converted into tourism territory. This is a complex process; and it is over-simplistic to suggest tourism commodifies, or commercialises space. As Biddulph (2017, 32) argues, tourism does not expand into empty or moribund space: as 'the space that tourism is territorialising from the centre out is already the site of a range of commercial activities'. This radial expansion of tourists and tourism is explored in this book, which examines the spread of tourism beyond established tourism zones into peripheral, suburban and residential areas. The book contributes to the literature by focusing on the ways that tourism territory expands in, and extends through, the contemporary city. Expansion is partly driven by public policy, but mainly by tourist markets and associated capital which are constantly seeking new 'products' to exploit. Understanding this expansion helps us to understand the ways in which urban areas are commodified and consumed.

### The Development of London Tourism

Tourism in London is a very established activity/industry with a long history. There is insufficient space here to provide a detailed historical account, but a brief review of the emergence of tourism in the modern era provides a helpful introduction to the chapters that follow. In this endeavour we are grateful for the work of David Gilbert who has produced a range of articles on the 'under-acknowledged' role of tourism in the development of modern London (Gilbert 1999, 279). The history of tourism in London is significant for various reasons, not least because the dominant images that are shared and circulated of the city today are still heavily reliant on key periods in the past – particularly the Victorian era and the 'Swinging [Nineteen] Sixties'.

Whilst London's appeal is based on historical attractions that date back to Roman times, the city's tourism 'industry' arguably dates back to the nineteenth century. In the period 1820–1840 new facilities were established that still provide the backbone of the city's tourism sector: iconic attractions (London Zoo, Madame Tussauds), leisure settings (public parks, shopping streets) and supporting amenities (hotels and rail stations). Key institutions introduced at

this time included the Royal Polytechnic Institution at 309 Regent Street (est. 1838) – now the University of Westminster – which was one of London’s pioneering visitor attractions. This was a precursor to the city’s Science Museum (est. 1857) – one that allowed new technologies and inventions to be shown to the public.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 is said to mark the birth of the modern tourism ‘industry’ not only in London, but globally. The pioneering entrepreneur Thomas Cook organised tours which brought thousands of people via train into the UK capital. This pivotal event – which like the Polytechnic Institution aimed to reassure people about modernity – highlights one of the factors underpinning London’s enduring appeal: the way the city allows visitors a glimpse into the future. The city’s history and heritage has always been a draw for visitors, but from the early nineteenth-century onwards tourists also visited London ‘to see a new world in the making’ (Gilbert 1999, 281). The appeal of London as a destination was never driven by its beauty or aesthetic qualities – it was (and still is) compared unfavourably to Paris, Berlin or Brussels in this regard (Gilbert 1999). What fascinated tourists was the entrepreneurial dynamism driven by its role as the centre of a trading empire. For example, Burton’s (1996) account of the experiences of Indian visitors highlights that they were entranced by London’s ‘vitality and ceaseless motion’. Similarly, Gilbert’s (1999) analysis of nineteenth century guidebooks suggests these texts were less concerned with architectural merit and more concerned with detailing the sheer pace of commercial life. The appeal of slumming – something discussed in detail by Claudia Dolezal and Jayni Gudka in Chapter 7 of the book – also meant that some voyeuristic tourists ventured into the impoverished easterly districts of Whitechapel and Stoke Newington. Therefore, whilst the appeal of peripheral neighbourhoods and everyday activities has certainly intensified in recent times, these also attracted London’s tourists in the nineteenth century.

In the first half of the twentieth century, tourism in London was severely affected by war and various political and economic crises. The main drivers of tourism at this time included various international exhibitions such as the Franco–British Exhibition (1908), the Olympic Games (1908), the Japan – British Exhibition (1910) and the British Empire Exhibition (1924–25). Despite the damage inflicted by the Second World War, which ruined much of the city and public finances, London also staged the 1948 Olympic Games. Multiple benefits were sought from hosting this event but, according to one Foreign Office official, ‘the government’s main interest is to seize the occasion to develop the tourist trade’ (Polley 2011, 132). The Games were used to generate publicity and demand for the newly created British European Airways, which was based at the recently opened London Airport at Heathrow. Other major events were also used to rejuvenate the city’s morale and the built environment. Staging the 1951 Festival of Britain meant the derelict South Bank was transformed into a new cultural district featuring boldly designed galleries, theatres and concert halls.

The post-war period was a key time of global migration to London. As a liberal metropolis and a port city that functioned as the commercial and administrative fulcrum of a global Empire, London had long been a city of migrants. Economic migrants and persecuted groups from across Europe came to live in London, including Jewish and Huguenot refugees. But in the second half of the twentieth century London also experienced a significant influx of people from the Caribbean, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. These migrants added to the appeal of London as a world city, a place where a range of international foods, traditions and music could be experienced. Certain clusters, most notably Chinatown in central London, but also the Bangladeshi communities of inner east London, became attractive areas for visitors curious about London's cosmopolitanism. A guide book published in 1978 illustrates this dimension of the city's appeal:

it is the immigrants to the capital who have given it such an exciting variety of ambience and taste... making Gerrard Street in Soho tinkle like a Kung Fu movie, Bayswater Cafés murmur with Austro-Hungarian melancholy, Islington delicatessens vibrate with vehement Italian (Crookston 1978, 8).

London's international credentials meant the city was visited not so much as the capital of England and the UK, but as a global capital. This was reinforced by key (colonial) attractions featuring world-wide collections, like the British Museum, Kew Gardens and London Zoo. This globalism provided the foundation for London's contemporary appeal, as evidenced by a recent tourism marketing campaign which featured the strapline 'See the World: Visit London'.

By the 1960s London had become a vibrant metropolis again, not only because of its enduring role as a centre for trade and commerce, but because of its role as the centre for popular culture. London began to adopt the modern urban aesthetics popularised by New York, perhaps best symbolised by the opening of the Hilton on Park Lane in 1963 (Czyzewska and Roper 2017). In this new age of liberation and leisure, London's appeal was based on its cutting edge 'scene' and 'buzz' – attributes inextricably associated with high profile musicians, artists, fashion designers, film directors and photographers. This era witnessed the rise of commodity culture with cultural producers and consumers concentrated in Soho, a creative cluster which positioned London within 'international networks of fashion promotion, popular culture, travel and tourism' (Gilbert 2006, 4). 'Swinging London' was dismissed as merely 'a few hundred exhibitionists with a flair for self-promotion' (Aitken 1967 cited in Gilbert 2006), but this representation was disseminated widely and proved to be remarkably enduring.

Despite the different layers of attraction that had emerged by the end of the 1960s – the frenzied commercial activity, the monumental edifices of state (and empire) and more latterly the cultural 'scene' – London tourism was still

a relatively small-scale phenomenon compared to the multi-billion pound industry we see today. According to Tyler (2009, 418) ‘tourism was never a particularly major part of London’s economy until the 1970s when overseas arrivals doubled within a decade’ – from 3 million to 6 million per annum. Boosted by a global appetite for international travel, and a series of urban renewal programmes focused on the city’s docks and wharves (see Chapter 8), London began a 40-year period of (largely) uninterrupted tourism growth, which has endured to the present day (London and Partners, 2017). From the 1960s we also see the emergence of formalised tourism governance. The London Tourist Board was incorporated as a company in 1963 with an objective to manage tourism and promote London as a year-round tourist destination. In 1969 the company became one of 12 English tourist boards coordinated by the British Tourist Board.

At the end of the 1980s the first Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for London was developed by the Joint London Tourism Forum. However, the start of the next decade was a difficult period: the recessions that occurred at this time meant a decline of 1.5 million visits to London in the first two years of the 1990s (Church and Bull 2001). Subsequently, tourism arrivals grew very fast – buoyed by new forms of short break tourism, and the remarkable rise of Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism which doubled 1991–1995 (Church and Bull 2001). This trend led to the fascinating realisation that, during the 1990s, ‘people may have become the most important attraction, not the heritage and culture, but Londoners’ (Church and Bull 2001, 148). The growth of VFR tourism has not only continued, it has accelerated with the latest figures suggesting VFR tourism makes up over 30 per cent of all overnight visits (London and Partners 2017). It is the growth of this market that has pushed tourists and tourism beyond the West End into more peripheral parts of London.

The twenty-first century has seen some significant changes, not least to the way tourism is managed and governed in London. Under the GLA Act (1999) the newly established elected Mayor of London was given the statutory responsibility for the promotion and development of tourism, which was then devolved to the London Development Agency (LDA). The LDA created a new organisation Visit London which effectively replaced the function of the London Tourist Board. These initiatives were instigated by the Labour Government 1997–2010, but when the Conservative–Liberal Democratic Coalition took over, they abolished the LDA and the other Regional Development Agencies. One result was that Visit London was folded into a new organisation – London and Partners – which also took on responsibility for other types of city marketing (to potential investors, students and film makers). This new organisational structure aimed to produce a more coherent brand for the city, a response to criticisms that London lacked a clear tourism identity (Tyler 2009). Despite responsibility for tourism shifting between different organisations, criticisms of the way tourism is managed have remained consistent. One recurring complaint is that tourism is regarded merely as an economic activity, rather than

one that affects and is affected by wider London's socio-cultural landscape. As responsibility for tourism at the city-wide level is now allocated to a destination marketing agency, it seems unlikely that this problem will be addressed by the current regime.

### Academic Attention

It is surprising that in academic literature, London's tourism sector and the multiple issues associated with it have received relatively little attention. During his time at Birkbeck College, Andrew Church (working with different co-authors) published some useful work on business tourism (Church and Bull 2001) and labour issues (Church and Frost 2004). Later, Robert Maitland's work (featured in this volume) on 'off the beaten track' tourism in London and related research on cultural tourism by Steve Shaw (Shaw and Macleod 2000; Shaw et al. 2004; Shaw 2008; 2011) made a significant contribution to our understanding of tourism beyond the obvious (centrally located) attractions. There has also been some attention to the sustainability of the tourism sector (Knowles et al. 1999) and post-disaster recovery (Ladkin et al. 2008), plus some fascinating work on historical representations of London as a tourist destination by David Gilbert (Gilbert 1999; Gilbert and Hancock 2006; Driver and Gilbert 1998). Nevertheless, tourism in the UK capital is not well covered by the academic literature, especially if one considers the contemporary significance of London as one of the world's most visited destinations. In her recent work on planning and managing tourism in London (2015; 2016; 2017), Cristina Maxim (2017, 1) recognises that 'despite the important role tourism plays in the economy of the city, there is limited research on the development of this activity in the capital'. This book aims to fill this conspicuous gap in the literature regarding this imbalance by providing a book dedicated to the contemporary tourism sector and its expansion.

### The Structure and Content of the Book

*Destination London* examines how tourism has extended into parts of London not normally regarded as visitor destinations. As Biddulph (2007) argues, spatially oriented studies of tourism have always been fascinated by back regions and the ways these are commodified, and many of the chapters here shed further light on this type of expansion. The book begins with Robert Maitland's review of the spread of tourism into non-central areas, including the city's suburbs (Chapter 2). This chapter provides a good introduction to the ideas and trends that underpin the shift towards a 'new urban tourism', where tourists penetrate further into the city in a search for more distinctive and more authentic districts. In contemporary London, various factors are responsible for tourism's spatial expansion, but the rise of peer to peer accommodation and the sharing economy

seem pivotal. These trends and their impacts on the city are discussed by Clare Inkson in Chapter 3. Other spatial expansions of tourism are facilitated by new developments in the urban periphery. Tourism in London was originally driven by the railways and the grand stations that were built in the nineteenth century, but in the contemporary era, it is airports on the edge of London that provide the city's gateways. These sites are the focus of Anne Graham's work in Chapter 4. In London, rapidly expanding aerotropoli can be understood as part of the wider city destination and as urban destinations in their own right. Sports stadiums are another important feature of London's non-central districts, and their role in driving tourism in peripheral districts is discussed by Claire Humphreys in Chapter 5. Many stadiums have been constructed or reconstructed in recent years and one key design principle is to satisfy growing interest from visitors.

Chapters 2 to 5 essentially focus on the spatial expansion of tourism, helping to explain why tourists are visiting areas outside Westminster, The City of London, Camden, and Kensington and Chelsea. Subsequent chapters (6 to 8) focus on more subtle extensions of tourism in more central areas – into the air, onto aquatic territory and through hidden worlds. These chapters explain how London's tourism territory has extended through the provision of new ways of consuming London. Rather than representing new products in new districts, they are essentially ways of consuming central districts from a different perspective. In Chapter 6 Andrew Smith examines the new ways London can be consumed from above – highlighting the recent provision of dynamic experiences rather than merely visual ones. The subsequent Chapter (7) by Claudia Dolezal and Jayni Gudka highlights a different form of expansion: one that involves opening up secret worlds and alternative interpretations – by offering tours led by homeless people. Simon Curtis then highlights the way that the River Thames has been opened up to provide new open space and new vantage points for tourists (Chapter 8).

Chapters 9 and 10 focus more on events. The work by Adam Eldridge and Ilaria Pappalepore on tourism in the winter season – and at night – means the book also addresses how tourism expands temporally. Andrew Smith then examines the ways London's neighbourhood parks are being integrated into the visitor economy through their transformation into event venues. In an era of neoliberal austerity, resources previously regarded as local amenities are revalorised as eventscapes, thus expanding the reach of tourism into new territory. The core themes of the book and their implications are discussed in the concluding Chapter (11), alongside recommendations for future work.

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