Book Reviews

Heritage Sites: Strategies for Marketing and Development

David T. Herbert, Richard C. Prentice and Colin J. Thomas, Avebury, Gower Publishing Col, Aldershot, 1989.

309 pages, £35.00 (ISBN 0 566 07099 5)

This is an unusual book, and one which by its very nature and presentation may elude more general notice. Such a fate would indeed be highly regrettable, for it has much of worth to teach those who manage heritage sites as well as those with a more academic interest in them.

It has its origins in research undertaken by geographers at University College, Swansea, for Cadw. It is much to the credit of Cadw that it commissioned the original work. John Carr, Director of Cadw, came to that post in 1985 and immediately recognized that his was much more than a caretaker role. Existing knowledge in Cadw about visitors – and non-visitors – to Welsh monuments was slight and Carr early sought to remedy the situation with this research. He was obviously sufficiently satisfied with the results to contribute his own chapter, on research and the heritage operator, to the book. He recognizes, however, the clear distinction between research and management:

however thorough the research . . . the application of the findings of research rests with the organisation for which it was discovered; and it is the quality of that organisation's management thinking and determination which first identifies the most beneficial markets and then pursues them with vigour. (p. 300)

His own account of how Cadw responded to the messages from the research, and the success it achieved in raising visitor numbers, is one of the most stimulating sections of the book. Cadw is now far more than a mere caretaker, and Carr is certainly in tune with much thinking in the contemporary museum and heritage world when he declares that

If the heritage product is to run and run – as certainly seems likely in this age of greatly enhanced awareness of the need for conservation – then its capacity to support its own costs (at least partly) must be exploited to the full. (p. 304)

The book, however, is concerned primarily with

diagnosis, not remedy. The other eight chapters are all by members of the Swansea department, seven indeed by the editors themselves. This, however, is much more than an account of the Cadw research. These results form the case of discussion, for they are a rich and consistent database, but they are linked to a wide range of other data so that their implications can be much more fully explored away from the specific context of Wales. After a first rate introductory account of the heritage market in the wider context of leisure trends, successive chapters examine the characteristics of visitors, the reasons for visiting sites, the impact of specific marketing programmes, the use of sites as an educational resource, the role of interpretation, the effects of pricing policies and the impact of historic sites on their local environment. Each chapter contains a wealth of comparative material to inform researcher and operator, though the latter might well prefer the messages in a crisper and more readily assimilated form.

The prime criticism of the book must indeed be the form of presentation. In the era of word processing and desk-top publishing, it was disappointing to find this book reproduced in relatively small, single-spaced typescript. It is hard to read, and legibility is not improved by the inclusion of no less than 104 tables in 309 pages. Much of the material in these tables would have had far more impact in graphic form: a few sections of the book do use maps and diagrams to reasonable advantage, but at times the message is lost in the medium. And at £35.00 for a modest book, the medium is indeed expensive!

For a narrow academic market, the book has real value. For the heritage site operator prepared to get at the essential truths, there is much of equal worth, not least in the questions it asks as well as the answers it gives. Whether many will have the time, or the patience, for such a pursuit is the real question. It is a matter of real regret that style and presentation were not more closely geared to the commercial market, so that the messages of excellent research might be far more readily received, and applied.

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