Tourism—associated with recreation and leisure consumption—seems antithetical to socialist ideology’s critique of free-market consumerism. Popular histories of postwar European communism tend to highlight collectivization and industrialization programs, political uprisings and their suppression by totalitarian regimes, and the generally circumscribed economic and personal freedoms characteristic of the postwar Eastern bloc. A seaside holiday on the Crimean peninsula or the Adriatic doesn’t fit this ideologically-driven narrative.

Once seen as a frivolous or marginal field of inquiry, in more recent years tourism history has received increasing legitimacy, particularly as scholars of tourism have moved beyond a mere narrative of commercial development to convincingly demonstrate the significance of tourism’s role in political, ideological, and cultural constructs that shape modern life. At the same time, while the bulk of scholarship on tourism, historical and otherwise, has focused primarily on Western capitalist societies, more recent work (especially on the Soviet Union) has asserted the significance of travel and leisure within socialist and totalitarian states. Given these trends, Yugoslavia’s unique postwar history—its blend of socialist planning and elements of free-market capitalism, and its relative accessibility to western European travelers—make it an especially valuable case study. This work not only provides a comprehensive account of tourism under the four-and-a-half decades of communist rule in Yugoslavia, but goes further to assert its crucial role in the establishment and complex evolution of the fragile postwar federation.

The editors and contributors to the volume deserve praise for grounding the essays in recent scholarly literature on tourism. Early tourism scholarship among sociologists, anthropologists, and historians, tended to critique tourism as the passive consumption of constructed experiences—“pseudo-events”—via the hegemonic “tourist gaze.” More recently, scholars have embraced a more nuanced understanding of individual agency (among both visitors and “natives”) in constructing varying levels of significance and meaning in tourist experiences, while at the same time assigning increasing importance to the efforts of the state—in a variety of political contexts—in structuring and co-opting leisure for political ends. Both veins of scholarship are influential here. “Through the lens of tourism,” write the editors, “it is possible to elucidate larger processes and, in the case of Yugoslavia, to trace the shift from an orthodox Marxist position to one of consumerism and westernization, as well as the growing irrelevance of socialist ideology to the lives of ordinary people.”(7) The book’s chapters are focused primarily upon the ways in which tourism (especially domestic tourism) shaped political discourse, identity, and narrative in postwar Yugoslavia, and vice versa.

_Yugoslavia’s Sunny Side_ is strongly interdisciplinary, incorporating scholars of anthropology, ethnology, and history. Despite this diverse collection of voices, the book achieves admirable resonance and harmony. In an array of different contexts, the authors consistently demonstrate not only the importance of tourism to the country economically, but more significantly its inherent contradictions that threatened to undermine the “project” of postwar Yugoslavia. Tourism played an important role in fueling the nation’s economy, legitimating the socialist state and shaping a postwar Yugoslav identity. At the same time, leisure-oriented consumerism undermined those goals; the influx of prosperous tourists
from Western Europe provided constant reminders of the shortcomings of Yugoslavs’ standard of living, and often exacerbated distinctions of class and identity that the state aimed to diminish.

The work is divided into three parts, bookended by extensive introductory and concluding chapters. While space does not permit a full survey of every essay, I will make some effort to provide sufficient concrete examples to illustrate the larger themes of each section. Part I, entitled “Holidays on Command” focuses primarily upon the early years of the postwar era, when Yugoslavia’s Communist Party leadership envisioned state-sanctioned leisure time and paid vacations as central demonstrations of the benefits of socialist policy; vacations, once the privilege of the elite, were now available to the masses. State subsidies of domestic holidays offered Yugoslav workers some compensation for the lack of consumer choices and material indulgences enjoyed by citizens of Yugoslav citizens’ free-market neighbors. Igor Duda’s essay here on the odmaralište, or workers’ resorts, reveals that this ideal of well-organized egalitarian leisure obscured the variety of experiences of workers on vacation, and the increasingly commercial and stratified nature of resort villages. Tourism also played an important role in the nation’s central postwar political challenge: the tenuous construction of Yugoslavian “brotherhood and unity” from an amalgam of peoples historically divided along fault lines of ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia sought to subsume these older identities under the new Yugoslav socialist ideology, and tourism was to play an integral role in that shift. “Through travel to other parts of the country,” writes contributor Rory Yeomans, “the nations of Yugoslavia would learn to see each other as brothers and attain a Yugoslav identity.” Yeomans ultimately concludes, however, that “like the idea of Yugoslav identity itself, Yugoslav tourism as a path to national reconciliation and ideological enlightenment ultimately fell apart under the weight of its own inherent contradictions.” (102)

State-structured tourist sites and worker resorts in Tito’s Yugoslavia were less centrally organized, and more open to private innovations or adaptations, than their counterparts in other postwar communist states. In Part II, “Tourism and the ‘Yugoslav Dream’” scholars illuminate the ways in which individual citizens operated within the state-structured framework, often expanding prescribed boundaries for use and meaning. For example, Nevena Skrbić Alempijević and Petra Kelemen analyze the evolution of the village of Kumrovec, Tito’s birthplace, after its opening as a memorial site in 1953. While the site was overtly political and educational, intended to glorify Tito’s rise into the antifascist struggle and the building of the Yugoslav state, the authors adopt an anthropological approach to uncover visitor agency and the limits of the “official” structured narrative. Sources such as visitor’s comment books, media descriptions, and accounts of visitor behavior in front of Tito’s statue, provide insight into travelers’ interpretation and reshaping of the site. They conclude that Kumrovec “was ultimately defined by the travelers to that destination … Tito’s birthplace has become an important site of memory and cohesion of the Yugoslav community, although not completely in the fashion conceived by the place’s socialist constructors.” (166) Here a better understanding of tourism and tourist experiences illuminates the limits of public commemoration as an instrument of the state, challenging a theme that has been perhaps overstated in literature on public historical memory.

Part III “Tourism Economies in Transformation” explores the economic and social dynamics of tourism as it gradually evolved from state-structured recreation into increasingly commercialized leisure consumption. Families in the southern fishing village of