

A Holiday in Three Parts

“The Traveller was working at something, the tourist was a pleasure seeker. The traveller was active, he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive, he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes sightseeing, he expects everything to be done to him and for him”.

Daniel Boorstin. “The Image, A Guide to Pseudo Events”

“Adventure is what happens without design, chance happenstance, serendipity. Tourism is a contrived experience, a pseudo event, a sanitized reality conforming to a created image”

Daniel Boorstin. “From Traveller to Tourist”

Introduction

To be a traveller rather than a tourist a holiday consists of three parts.

First; the anticipation, the planning stage.

Second; the actual holiday, the experience where expectations meet reality.

Third; the recollection, justification of the expense.

Anticipation

Assuming you are not going alone the objectives must be aired and if possible vaguely agreed; is it a pilgrimage, either cultural or religious, antiquarian or devotional, is it for relaxation, the four “S’s” on the beach?, is it retail therapy, or is it physical, walking up mountains in summer or skiing down them in winter? Usually it’s at least three, in strictly timed segments.

But deep down always remember Jonathan Raban’s encouragement of traveling alone.

“The only way to travel is to travel alone. It opens you up to the world. It puts you in the way of luck and chance”.

For the explorer information is essential. Buy the guide books and maps with the idea of reading them before, or at least on, the flight out. Though so often though they are read in retrospect, after the event.

But which one to buy, the serious wordy one with only line drawings, for example the Cadogan and Blue Guides or the fully illustrated photo strewn one for instant identification, the Insight and Eyewitness Travel guides. [Photos of covers].

Simon Jenkins recently claimed that guides were now no more than catalogues, traveller friendly compilations, of hotels, museums shops ,temples and restaurants.

I still prefer proper maps rather than depending on Google on the i-pad.

To add depth buy a travel book by some writer or novelist who has been “abroad”, for example, Jan Morris.

Also take one of those red covered late nineteenth century guide books, a Baedeker or Murray’s, if only for poseur opportunities in cafes and cathedrals [photos of covers]

It is useful to visit the target country’s Tourism Office in London to fill up with the Brochures. They are fun to compare the “reel”, the managed reality, to the “real”, the actual reality. Dean MacCannell refers to this as “staged authenticity”.

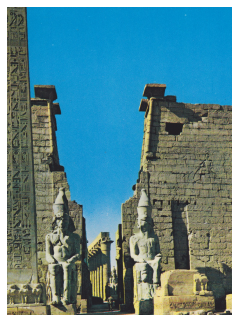


For example above the travel industry’s view of Thailand and the reality.

Also compare and contrast the difference between the magic hour at dawn or dusk as seen through a Hasselblad in the hands of a professional with that from a point and shoot Canon Ixus in the bleaching midday sun. No wonder expectations are often cruelly ruined.

Also a small point, never bring the brochures back, this applies to all the “bumph” collected en route. You will never look at them again. I know, I have a cupboard full of them.

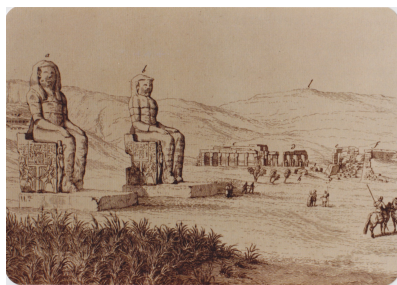
I am fascinated by what I call ‘Then & Nows’, comparing earlier views with today. I use old topographical prints, for example David Roberts, old photographs, for example Francis Frith. The example below is David Robert’s view of the Temple of Karnak in Luxor and a recent postcard.



A further great resource are old postcards from their golden age before the First World



War. Above I have super-imposed an old postcard onto the view today, on the left Table Mountain in Cape Town, on the right a street scene in Penang, Malaysia.



Above are my “then & now” of the Colossi of Memnon in Luxor with a Nordon on the left dated 1765 and a Description d’Egypt, 1796 on the left.

Gustav Flaubert comment on visiting the Colossi of Memnon,

“Think of the number of bourgeois stares they have received, each person has made his little remark and gone his way”.

Finally old maps found in the shops in Cecil Court are great presents and can act as covers for the scrapbook/dissertation. Even the odd stamp, ideally pre-war when stamps were stamps and not commercial propaganda, from Stanley Gibbons and enlarged on a photocopier. [Examples]



“Air flights get you there without the experience of having gone”

Daniel Boorstin

Now you have the information let the agony begin. Booking flights on line, juggling times and prices, filling in endless forms, ticking the hidden boxes, scrolling down through the endless countries, the curse of “U”, checking the security number on the card, losing the connection and starting again. The price of being FITS, [free and independent traveller] as opposed to a packaged tourist.

Now the final hurdle, packing; “I know I will only wear half these cloths, but which half?”, followed by the ritual “weighing of the suitcases and the measuring of the carry ons”. And do not forget the chargers and cables for the mobile phone, cameras, lap tops and plug converters.

Exhausted even before the early morning taxi arrives and then you have to face the crowds and queues at the airport.



Duane Hanson
Tourists II 1988
autobody filler, fibreglass and mixed media, life size

Execution

“Tourist angst, that gnawing suspicion that after all one is still a tourist like all the others”

Alan Brien

“I am a traveller, you are a tourist, he is a tripper”

Keith Waterhouse

Do not believe it until the flight takes off, you are at 35,000 feet and there is a drink in your hand. A quick justification; we have worked hard, we do deserve it, hang the expense anyway, what's money for, we are spending their inheritance and so on.

But always remember that day to day reality with its bills is on the next flight, and texts and e-mails are just a click away.

“I never landed in Calais pier without feeling a load of sorrows were left on the other side of the water, and have always fancied that black care stepped on board the steamer at Gravesend and accompanied one to London.”

William Makepeace Thackeray in "Paris Sketch Book" 1840. His father in law, who lived in Paris, called his dog "Waterloo".

An example of this problem in one of my box arts, On the beach with clouds of worries overhead, your besuited guilt hiding behind a palm {tax man or private detective] and the backdrop is just a curtain concealing your place of work.



The flight also represents an opportunity to collect free ephemeral souvenirs, I collect. In this case sick bags and those small molded plastic plates, the latter so useful to put things on.

The main quandary when being on the cultural pilgrimage is whether to see less of more or more of less?

Whether to rush around ticking every site and photographing madly with the naive idea of studying them later, a primitive form of possession whilst attempting to separate the authentic from the commodified.



Or to concentrate on a few sites; looking, sketching, writing a word picture, basically fixing it in one's mind. The key is not having a camera with one.

Not the greatest water colour, actually my first, but I will remember this house in the Luberon long after other memories fade.

One of the first guide books for the Lake District written by Thomas West in 1778 describes what he calls stations to paint from. Now it is a designated view point with the sign of the camera and associated car park.

The Camera

As Susan Sontag noted;

“Today everything exists to end in a photograph”.

Where ever one goes people are taking snaps, referred to as vernacular photographs by photographers. They see everything through the camera lens or more frequently the screen of the camera or smart phone. This seems to validate the experience and to confirm that they are actually there.

What used to be the domain of who Martin Amis referred to as the “lens faced Japanese” is now universal. Do see the photographer Martin Parr’s book “Small World”

It frequently involves having one’s picture taken in front of the site/sight or increasing these days doing a “selfie”



Finally the more imaginative are playing with perspective, the classic being propping up the Leaning Tower of Pisa, include examples.

Souvenirs

Then there is the problem of souvenirs, talismans, a connection between the individual and the place, magic.

“Souvenirs, mementos of a rite of passage, totemic symbolism”
Dean MacCannell, The Tourist

Most souvenirs are cheaper in Camden Market or at any car boot sale. Each has it’s attached message, “why did we buy it?” During the Grand Tour in the 18 th. century the



tourists returned with
with the modern chinese



elegant well made objects compared
made plastic tat.

Eighteenth century souvenirs from the grand tour.

For general retail the great problem today is that today everything is available everywhere, so price is the only arbiter, the attraction of the Dubai Malls.

The cry is;

“The difference has gone”

I tend to collect bits. I find a shell or piece of drift wood can transport me back to that early morning walk on that deserted beach, a seed pod or cone can take me back to the smell of that forest or jungle walk. Below is a box of a beach in Penang and a Cabinet of Curiosities from Egypt



The Guided Tour

And does one join that guided tour, that doomed search for the authentic, as Irving Goffman described them;

“The guided tour, an extensive ceremonial agenda involving a long string of obligatory rites, a pilgrimage”.

Recollection

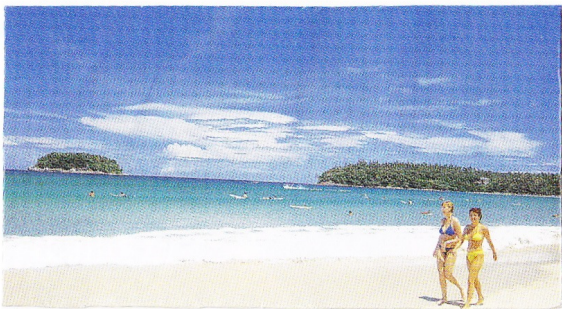
“The pleasure of travel only exists, as a matter of fact, in retrospect and seldom in the present, at the instant when it is experienced”.

J.K. Huysmans, “Jean des Esseintes in A Rebours”. 1884.

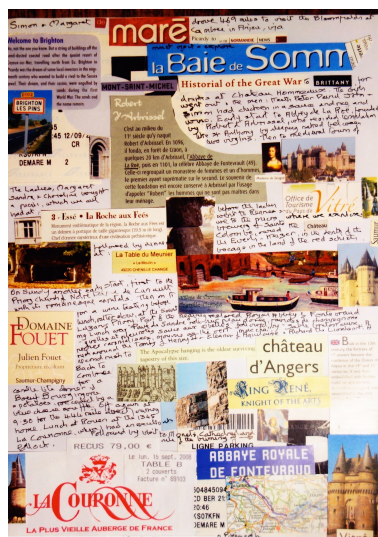
Jean des Esseintes, the reclusive hero of Huysmans's book "A Rebours", decides to visit London. When he reaches the Gare du Nord he overhears some English visitors whom he finds disgusting. Feeling he now knows what London would be like he immediately returns home where he reads all about the city. With the internet and wikipedia one can follow suit, the compromise is to sit in a cafe, absorb the atmosphere, and "visit" the sites on the i-pad.

I look for what I call a second bite of the cherry, reminiscing, having a re-run. These include;

The memory book, a diary of the holiday, now in Pages with downloaded photos, and a blog, a digital Carnet de Voyage.



The juxtapositions mentioned earlier including, "Reel and Real", as below Kuta Beach in Thailand,



Create “Collages of Ephemera” using admission tickets, receipts, menus, bus tickets, plane seat tickets, mistranslations, local ads and packaging in the style of Kurt Schwitters, Peter Blake and Peter Beard

Conclusion

The poet Philip Larkin believed holidays were a penance for being happy and comfortable at home.

[See letter in the Times; The Art of going Nowhere]

