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The Mindful Traveler

*Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not,
Given me seats in homes not my own.
Thou hast brought the distant near
And made me a brother of the stranger.*
— Rabindranath Tagore

“I want to see the Vietnamese countryside,” I explain to my companion as I straddle a rented motorbike and begin a daylong excursion from Ho Chi Minh City to points north. Having recently opened its doors to outsiders after nearly two decades of isolation, I anticipate a rare opportunity to witness a land and its peoples in their pre-commercialized innocence. I’m not disappointed. The shimmering green rice paddies, the coconut palms, the pristine, white-sand beaches, the turquoise waters, and the small food stalls and cafes dotting the sides of the two-lane national highway – the scenery is truly spectacular.

Before reaching the fledgling resort city of Nha Trang, I slow the motorbike and turn off the highway onto a narrow dirt lane. For 10-15 minutes the trail leads me past rice fields, house clusters, and the curious gazes of farmers. I catch myself thinking that, just maybe, I’m the first Westerner to be seen by these villagers. Within a few minutes a large thatched hut comes into view with a mob of locals stuffed inside.

I dismount the bike and attempt to shyly approach the hut for a closer look. Being several inches taller than the others I peer inside, curious as to what the excitement is all about. Tables and chairs are filled by young men (only) sipping noodle soup, drinking beer, and smoking cigarettes. But their attention is singularly focused on one thing: an enormous color television propped up on an old table. My immediate reaction is to wonder how a big screen happened to wash up on the Vietnamese countryside. Is nothing sacred? If that wasn’t enough, I notice that it’s tuned to CNN, broadcasting the daily news – in English!

The news continues to run for several minutes before being interrupted by one of the older viewers who signals to the storeowner to switch channels. For the next 15 minutes the hut is filled with MTV, serving up a string of hits by Madonna, Springsteen, and Snoop Dogg. The younger viewers move into orchestrated head and hip movements synchronized to the beat. Their unison lip sinking betrays a common fluency in a universal language—music—with no respect for boundaries. I just stand there, a bit awestruck. Here is a crowd of perhaps 30 monolingual (in Vietnamese) villagers, hardly aware of my presence, fastened on a dream world that got there way before I did.

A WORLD IN MOTION

This scene illustrates the fact that we live in a world that increasingly escapes our grasp. Rural teenagers in Vietnam are now connected to the people, products, images, and values generated by modern urbanites on the other side of the globe. Cable TV and fiber-optic technologies enable cultural flows that defy the borders of space and culture. Chances are that some of those village

Vietnamese will eventually find themselves leading a transnational life that stretches across different cities if not nations. More than likely they will experience a weakening attachment to family and place, and gradually strike out, like their counterparts in the West, to create and control their own lives. In a global age, one's life is more nomadic than sedentary. It's spent not behind a plow on a plot of land, but in cars and trains, on a cell phone or the internet, and within cities that house all the nation's peoples, each one discarding old identities and fashioning new ones.

This kind of cultural convergence has led some to question what educational insights can be derived from travels abroad when the rest of the world appears to be just a reflection of ourselves. In his book *The Naked Tourist*, Lawrence Osborne (2006) laments that there's "nowhere left to go" because "tourism has made the world into a uniform spectacle" with "everyone wandering through an imitation of an imitation." Even prior to the advent of mass tourism, Claude Lévi-Strauss observed that civilization ceased to be "that delicate flower which was preserved and painstakingly cultivated in one or two sheltered areas of a soil rich in wild species." He pessimistically predicted a monocultural world depleted of authentic peoples and pristine places, and, thus, of truly educative experiences.

On the surface, Osborne and Lévi-Strauss appear to be correct. Western music, movies, fashions, and technologies are literally *everywhere*, influencing the tastes and aspirations of virtually *everyone* on earth. In fact, there are precious few places on earth where American culture has not spread, and done so promiscuously. Bangkok and Jakarta now contain new housing developments with names like Orange County and Manhattan Gardens. Budget travelers to places like these are often surprised to find two parallel but mutually dependent social worlds – one for the mass of struggling hosts and the other for transient guests like themselves (along with a minority of resident rich). In fact, the global corporate culture is so ubiquitous that if a group of global-trotters were parachuted into a shopping mall after hours in the air, it would take some investigation to know whether they were in Manila or Manhattan, Bangkok or Berlin. Everything from the architectural design and interior décor to store names and shopper "look" would appear nearly identical.

Fortunately, the drive to "Disneyfy" the planet doesn't tell the whole story. There's abundant evidence supporting the fact that societies don't uniformly submit to foreign goods and ideas. Those who view Westernization as either a dangerous embrace of corrupting values or as an American strategy for world domination will actively *resist* its local reach and influence. Islamicists, for example, ban satellite television in order to restrict global information flows. Others, like the Arab-language *al-Jazeera*, Britain's BBC, and the Pacifica radio network in the US, use new communications technologies to present a view of the world that one doesn't get from Time Warner and Rupert Murdoch. The current resurgence of alternative identities and loyalties—nationalist, ethnic, and religious—also highlights the strategic ways that smaller states and peoples defend themselves against the new economic and cultural juggernaut.

Peoples will resist or reject certain elements of a globalized culture, but more often they will appropriate new forms into their lives. Some Europeans may be wont to view every Big Mac as an ominous sign of American cultural imperialism, but the Chinese have welcomed the invasion, even internalized it. One survey indicates that nearly half of all Chinese children under 12 identify McDonald's as a domestic brand. Even this most homogenizing of institutions will regularly improvise to suit the local context, serving up McFalafels in Egypt, "seaweed burgers" in Japan, and vegiburgers in India. In China, instead of leading to the Americanization of tastes, McDonald's has

set off a boom of local fast food variations. Beijing's Fastfood Company now has over 1000 outlets serving Chinese favourites like roasted duck and dumplings. Instead of displacing established local elements, new global forms combine with and coexist alongside of them.

This is the cultural process depicted in the popular slogan "Modernization without Westernization" encountered across Asia. Modern technologies and opportunities – yes; degrading Western values and morality – no. This is actually good news for student-scholars and others still hoping to learn something from journeys abroad. Globalization appears to be reorganizing 21st century world cultures without abolishing their distinctiveness. They still are different, but in uniform ways – that is, according to categories and standards that allow variations across cultures to be mutually intelligible and compatible. This is what causes the world's peoples and places to appear, in Pico Iyer's words, "half strange and half strangely familiar." Instead of indulging a sentimental longing for an irrecoverable past, we should treat the complexity of our contemporary situation as offering a "teachable moment" that is truly extraordinary. No doubt there are areas of the world where a modern worldview has so penetrated the fabric of society that sojourners will rarely encounter cultural strangeness. We should also expect to navigate a "blowback" of resistance produced by the excesses of American popular culture in many traditional areas of Asia and Africa.

But risks like these shouldn't discourage us from experiencing peoples and places that exhibit new and unexpected combinations of ideas, identities, and lifestyles. The visual dominance of global chains, Internet cafes, and brand names may seem to be creating a global village whose central shrine is a placeless shopping arcade. But we know better. The Thai or Tibetan teenager listening to hip-hop on an iPod also inhabits a lively and persistent local culture that is full of available wonder for intrepid culture learners. "It does not matter that there is little scope left for original discovery," argues Maurice Albert Michael. "The important thing is that we should discover things that are new to us and be able to feel the same thrill and excitement as though they were equally unknown to everyone else." And so it falls to us to comprehend our world afresh, in all its wonder *and* wontedness. Because this is rarely possible "inside the box" of our own cultural experience, we must embrace global learning experiences where the social and psychological distance between ourselves and others can best be bridged.

Doing so, however, entails certain responsibilities that this chapter attempts to unpack. Instead of standing outside the travels we undertake, we turn the gaze back on ourselves. Specifically, we consider the unintentional impacts of educational travel on human and earth others. "Mindful" travelers are conceived as ones who embrace study and service abroad for reasons that reach beyond themselves. They exercise a clear, intentional awareness of their motivations and expectations, and are alert to how they effect the social and natural environments they enter and act upon. They are to be distinguished from both the carefree drifter and the mass tourist in allowing higher purposes to guide their attempt to become more enlightened persons while, at the same time, enriching the lives of others.

THE GREAT DREAM

One quality seems to mark those who live from something and exist for something that reaches beyond themselves: vision. They have been able to connect their personal interests to a future expectation of a more just, humane, and life-affirming world. Vision is an act of seeing, an

imaginative perception of what *should* and *could* be. It begins with dissatisfaction—even indignation—over the status quo and it grows into an earnest quest for an alternative. A global education in which the act of knowing is an act of love faces the world as it is and declares, “This is unacceptable... the nihilism, the dispossession, the exploitation, the contempt for human dignity... there must be another way.” Then it dares to dream. “Nothing much happens without a dream,” declares Robert Greenleaf. “And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams” (2002, 16). So we ask: Is there a great dream or story that is capable of giving ultimate meaning and purpose to our global learning? If there is, how might we internalize that vision in such a way to better grasp it, affirm it, and struggle for its realization?

Questions like these tend to elicit a strange silence from our intellectual traditions. Most have chosen to either ignore or devalue regions of experience penetrable only through faith, consciousness, and spirit. That leaves us to draw upon the world’s spiritual traditions as sources for the story we need. Eastern heritages speak of non-injury and compassion (*ahimsa*) towards all of life, both human and non-human. Ancient Israel spoke of this great dream or vision as *shalom*. Jesus taught it as the *kingdom of God*. Opting for a more culturally neutral term, the *Great Economy*, Catholic essayist Wendell Berry (1987) nevertheless draws upon religious tradition to define it. Each of these terms captures a vision *of* and *for* a world “made right.” A world where all individuals and institutions, families and peoples, the natural world in all its richness, and the divine powers that provide ultimate meaning for existence are knit together and fulfilled in mutual respect and delight. Alienation and exclusion, domination and subjection, oppression and exploitation are finally overcome.

The diagram below portrays for us the primary features of this re-born creation. It considers human persons in intimate and interdependent relationship with the Eternal; with those from their own and especially other cultures, classes, and creeds (the “others”); with the various institutions that “fix” social existences; and with the natural world that surrounds and sustains them. The universe is seen as a dynamic and interacting unity, a seamless whole that cannot be fully explained by its constituent parts. Like a hanging mobile, each part is related to and affected by every other part.

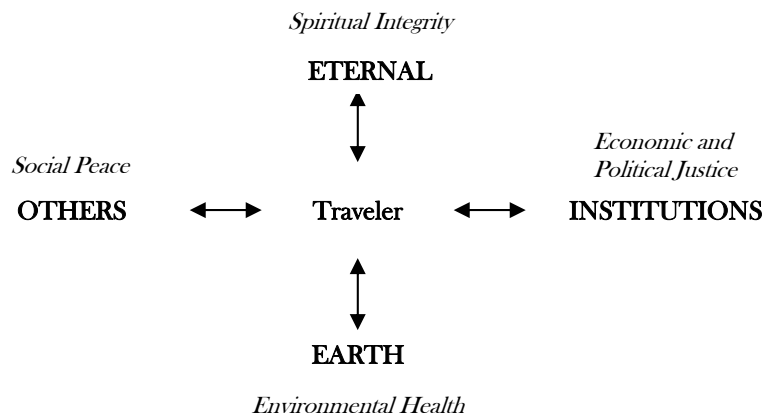


Figure 1: Essential dimensions of shalom

The Lakota people have a beautiful phrase that signifies the inseparability of human life from all other elements of the universe through space and time. When they leave the sweat lodge they say *mitakuye oyasin* (“all our relations”) as a prayer of respect, honor, and love for all of creation. Matthew Fox (1991) explains:

‘All our relations’ implies all beings, all things, the ones we see and the ones we do not; the whirling galaxies and the wild suns, the black holes and the microorganisms, the trees and the stars, the fish and the whales, the wolves and the porpoises, the flowers and the rocks... the children we give birth to and their children, and theirs and theirs...the unemployed single mother and the university student, the campesino and the landowner... the excitement of New York City and the despair of an overcrowded prison. (7-8)

Shalom captures this dream of our innumerable life-relations restored to how they ought to be. Especially in the minds of the Old Testament poetic and prophetic writers, the meaning of shalom encompasses much more than what we call peace, be it peace of mind or an end of hostilities between enemies. It is best understood as that state of affairs in which intimacy and mutuality, unending variety, fairness and freedom, wholeness and delight reign supreme (Plantinga 1995; Wolterstorff 2004). In Judeo-Christian tradition, an impressive array of biblical narratives and metaphors reveals for us the contours of this state of universal flourishing:

- A new heaven and new earth (renewal) where the past is erased, and where all peoples and the entire material universe are energized by the divine presence and restored to their fullness
- A new era of harmony (peace) where instruments of brutality and war are transformed into implements of mutual caring; where nothing threatens the weakest segments of society—particularly the children and elderly—and where the age-old enmities in nature will cease
- A new order of plenty (prosperity) in which people voluntarily share of their wealth and power with each other, and the basic needs required for life are provided for all
- A new order of liberation (freedom) from every form of alienation, servitude, and oppression; where the least will be first and the first last; and where individuals and nations enjoy a sense of worth and self-respect
- A new era of righteousness (justice) in which the lives of the poor and the powerful are changed, and where all individual and institutional evil is put away
- A new world of compassion and restoration (healing) in which the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and everything that is partial is made whole
- A new realm of joy (delight), where all the causes of pain and suffering are done away with; where children live and learn without fear of death or exploitation; where the elderly live out full lives; and where all enjoy the fruits of their labors
- A jubilant wedding feast (community) on the holy mountain where communion with the Eternal, fellowship with each other, and respect for the land is celebrated with the full

diversity of transformed humanity – sisters and brothers from “every nation and tribe and tongue and people”

It’s impossible to overstate the indispensability of a “great dream” to the way in which educational travelers frame their actions. Images of ultimate meaning may lie far beyond our observable experience, but that is precisely what makes imagination so critical to global learning. Only as we entertain the “otherwise” beyond the “what is” do we dare to envision the type of possibilities and take the type of risks that serve the future rather than ourselves. A cold acceptance of the status quo is powerless to stir us towards “mindful” community involvement. The dream drives the action. The decisions we make related to where we study, who we live and serve with, what topics we investigate, and how we use discretionary time are all made from a certain view of ourselves in relation to the world.

TRAVEL WORLDS

Perhaps nothing expresses our relation to the world better than our journeys. Travel of all types has become the planet’s largest single industry, generating more than 12 percent of global GNP. The industry encircles the globe through an astonishing array of integrated sectors—from resort construction and travel tours to guidebook and suntan lotion production—and employs one out of every 15 workers across the planet. In fact, the principal occupation of millions of humans is now transporting, feeding, housing, and indulging the whims of the *billion* people who travel abroad each year. By 2020, that number is expected to top 1.6 billion (World Tourism Organization 2001). Experts estimate that travel now occupies 40% of available free time in the United States, and it consistently tops the list of leisure activities throughout the industrialized world.

A thirst for change and a more satisfying life underlies much of the travel that has occurred throughout history. During the medieval period, pilgrims endured hardship for months and even years on journeys they hoped would end in spiritual enlightenment. Religious scholars crossed national and cultural borders in search of new knowledge or to spread their faith. They were followed by the young elites who undertook “Grand Tours” through Europe starting in the 17th century. Following established trade routes, they would dedicate two or three years to expanding their intellectual and cultural horizons through travel-study. Then there were the real explorers and adventurers—from Marco Polo and David Livingston to contemporaries like Freya Stark and Sir Wilfred Thesiger—who pioneered routes in uncharted lands. All that was left was for an eclectic and far more civilized swarm of colonists, merchants, and missionaries to fill in the details and beat down tracks that would eventually appear in guidebooks to virtually every country on earth.

St. Augustine of Hippo once wrote, “The world is a book, and those who do not travel, read only one page.” Travel is a school for life, one that generates fresh insights and unforgettable memories. Nevertheless, it primarily enrolls a class of wandering elites. The explorer of the Amazon, the collegian studying abroad in Spain, and the religiously-inspired volunteer to Haiti may each bring different personal backgrounds and goals to their travel. But they all share the expectation that travel will confer a certain social status while satisfying an existential need for life meaning. Peak experiences are accumulated and rehearsed in conversation or on a resume for years to come. Each sojourn also offers, in the here and now, a break from the compulsiveness and tedium of bourgeois life.

We might like to think that education abroad is a special case, immune to this self-actualizing orientation. However, it probably has more in common with other “enlightened” forms of travel—like adventure travel, mission travel, and pro-poor travel—than we would like to think. This is evident both in the type of participants and in their travel expectations and consumption practices. Most short-term study abroad involves transporting rich, white collegians into societies where the majority is poor and dark-skinned. In common with others from their ethno-class, they learn to distinguish themselves from others, not just by their education, income and place of residence, but by the objects and experiences (what Pierre Bourdieu called “cultural capital”) they accumulate. This is especially true for the more adventurous student-travelers. These often emerge from their ventures as figures of admiration, earning a certain cachet from having braved two or three weeks amidst resource-poor people in an exotic locale.

This admiration is often well-deserved. The best of the academic sojourner set venture out to distant lands in order to test the limits of their emotional maturity and their understanding of the world. Through community internship programs, they also hope to do some good for others. As an expression of sincere desire or obligation, there’s nothing wrong and everything right with caring for orphans, feeding the hungry, or building shelters for the homeless. “The problem,” contends John Hutnyk in *The Rumour of Calcutta*, “is that the technical apparatus and the conventional possibilities that are currently established for such expression tend easily towards servicing a grossly unequal exploitative system which affects us at every turn” (1996, 219). In other words, the collection of service experiences can be just one more consumer form where the volunteer “takes,” actively. While this comes as no surprise in a world market where virtually everything is for sale, it’s still important to stand back and consider what it actually means. What are the links between the global economic system and “working for the poor”? To what extent do short-term missions reinforce the view that poor people need to be looked after and protected, not the least from themselves? In what ways does consuming charity redeem the giver?

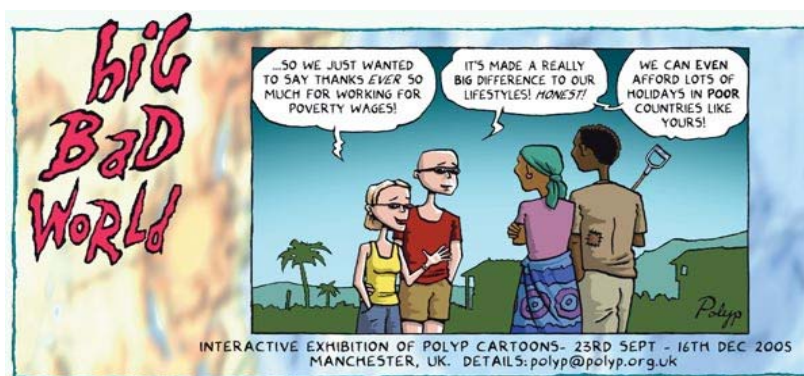
By 2015 the world’s population is expected to swell to 7.2 billion, with 95% of the new growth taking place in the cities of the South. Not surprisingly, educational travel from the so-called “developed” world to the “developing” world is also expanding. Many Western students are unprepared for what they see: a brutal level of poverty and inequality rooted in poor soil, land shortage, primitive technologies, population growth, violent exploitation, and despotic leadership (Diamond 1999). Lacking productive industrial capacity, various forms of tourism increasingly define and confine their economies. Nations like Thailand, Guatemala, and Nepal hope that their stunning landscape, distinctive culture, and low labor costs will attract a new generation of traveler, turning tourism into their “passport for development.”

North to south educational travel tends to highlight these harsh economic imbalances. This is especially evident as collegians from the West use their surplus time and cash to rub shoulders with Third World peoples, most of whom have neither leisure time nor much money. Australian priest Ron O’Grady (1982), who has lived much of his life among Asia’s poor, asks us to ponder their reality:

They are people who will never be tourists. When they speak of travel they mean going on foot, or in a crowded bus, to the next village or town.... Family incomes are barely sufficient for survival and there is no extra money available for luxury travel. Indeed, when they think of luxury, their minds cannot stretch far beyond a bottle of soft drink or a better meal. The

concept of a paid holiday or expenditure on leisure travel or visiting a foreign culture is totally outside their conceptual framework. (1)

Ironically, the gross disparity in the worlds of the poor and the non-poor underlies much of the allure of Third World destinations. The inexpensive and unspoiled places that students increasingly search out and appropriate into their personal worlds reflect, to a great extent, political and economic imbalances that originated under colonial rule. “Imperialism has left its edifices and markers of itself the world over,” notes Caren Kaplan, “and tourism seeks these markers out, whether they consist of actual monuments to field marshals or the altered economies of former colonies. Tourism arises out of the economic disasters of other countries that make them ‘affordable’” (1996, 63). Not only can affluent travelers to the Third World live “on the cheap.” As noted earlier the experience itself is also seen as a form of liberation from the shallow and sometimes smothering “overdevelopment” of modern life. Authentic experience is thought to lie elsewhere, in simple and spontaneous relationship with natural environments and purer cultures. The thought of roughing it for six weeks in a “primitive” village amongst “traditional” peoples reflects this nostalgic search for a freedom and authenticity that the West lost centuries ago. Of course, the very act of traveling to whatever remote and unusual cultures remain ensures that they, too, will eventually lose *their* simplicity.



ALL ABOUT ME?

It's often said that what we're attracted to in other people and places are those qualities we miss in ourselves or our homeland. If this is true, travel allows us to escape the banality of our own lives in order to seek satisfying experiences among those who can't escape the reality of their lives. This is undoubtedly what led me to that remote Vietnamese village. Alighting from my motorcycle, I was stunned to see it despoiled by American media entertainment. But what was I expecting to find? Traditional forms of entertainment handed down from the elders to the young? An oral recounting of local history in story and verse? What a tale I could have told – of a simplified world where farmers experience antiquity, tranquility, communion with the earth, and all the other things missing in the West. Instead I discovered villagers in Levi's and Nikes intoxicated with images of paradise associated with my own domicile, Los Angeles.

Pico Iyer (1989) reminds us that “a kind of imperial arrogance underlies the very assumption that the people of the developing world should be happier without the TVs and motorbikes that we find so indispensable ourselves. If money does not buy happiness, neither does poverty” (14). It

would have been much easier for me to assume that these Vietnamese villagers had freely chosen their way of life than to consider that maybe it was reflective of their place in the international economic order. My obliviousness was awkward enough, but it can take more pitiful forms. It's rather charmless to see Indian men gawking for hours at topless Swedes on the beaches of Goa, or obese American women being hoisted onto the backs of camels in the middle of the Egyptian desert.

Images like these underscore the speed at which traditional economies are converting from meeting their own basic needs to catering to the leisure whims of foreigners. They also illustrate an astute observation first made by Karl Marx: that it is in the nature of commodities to veil the social relations embodied in their production. When we eat a piece of fruit, buy an article of clothing, or participate in a study abroad program, the economic conditions and social relationships of the many people responsible for producing that particular commodity or service are typically hidden from our view. We simply consume the product without giving the larger context a second thought.

Professor Ben Feinberg (2002) of Warren Wilson College was curious to know what “second thoughts” study abroad participants actually had after spending months in another culture.

Doubting that a professor could elicit sincere responses from students, I invited one of my favorite undergraduates to work as my research assistant, interviewing 30 or so of her peers who had recently returned from courses in Central America, Europe, and Africa. The responses from Peter, who had spent 10 weeks studying and working on service projects with a group in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho, were representative. When asked what he had learned from his African experience, Peter used the first-person pronoun seven times, eliminating Africans: “I learned that I'm a risk taker, um, that I don't put up with people's bull, uh, what else? That I can do anything that I put my mind to. I can do anything I want. You know, it's just -- life is what you make of it.”

The term abroad became all about them. Feinberg goes on to suggest that a generation raised on reality shows like *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race* come to see exotic locations as personal playgrounds sealed off from real people in real places producing real goods under real conditions with real effects. In fact, the inequalities and injustices that travellers experience in some parts of the Third World are there to be voyeuristically “consumed” as part of the overall experience. Colourful street scenes of modern skyscrapers towering over teeming shantytowns and scruffy street peddlers are transformed into aesthetic images of “nativeness” to be discovered, sighted and “shot.” Few sojourners stop to consider that heterogeneous conditions like these reveal, above all, the persistent gap between extreme wealth and dreadful poverty. The vast majority will simply observe the cruel hardship of others' lives and come away feeling “so blessed” that divine providence or fate has permitted them to be born in privileged circumstances and not as one of those “made to suffer.”

This message of gratitude may be profound and heartfelt, and contain important personal lessons. But as a form of closure to a tour abroad, it can easily become a self-serving way to assuage guilt or manage poorly understood realities. Interpreting complex situations through a lens of providence or fate evades any serious analysis of the geographic conditions, historical relations, and enduring abuses (social, economic, political, and environmental) that undermine human flourishing within host communities. It can also act to extinguish ignited passions and paralyze assumed “next steps.”

This may help to explain why growth in study abroad participation has not necessarily met with a corresponding increase in longer-term cross-cultural engagement, whether at home or abroad. It's hard to call people to radical responses to a world that has only served as backdrop for ephemeral episodes consumed purely for personal enrichment. Professionals increasingly complain of the embarrassingly high percentage of participants who exchange the rare delight of exploring cultural difference for a nightly ritual of partying with other expatriates. In such cases the line separating recreational from educational travel tends to blur beyond distinction. (We return to this particular concern in the next chapter.)

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS SHALOM

This helps to explain the persistent calls, from both outside and inside the field of education abroad, for greater accountability and "quality control." Some have gone so far as to question the moral propriety of sending culturally innocent First World youth to Third World destinations. They raise a number of probing questions: In what ways do ethnocentrism, racism, nationalism, and exoticism subtly operate within cross-cultural sojourns? How does educational travel tend to feed off of and service gross political and economic inequalities? Is it even possible for non-poor students to "encounter" resource-poor residents in anything other than a paternal and intrusive mode? What can they realistically expect to "export" abroad?

Questions like these are likely to be debated for years to come. Where consensus is growing, however, is around the notion that it's not enough for education abroad programs to seek to expand the cultural horizons of First World participants without also doing everything in their power to protect fragile habitats and cultures and to provide direct financial and social benefits to communities. The demand for programs to embrace an ethic of eco-social well-being or shalom is especially evident among an expanding "new intellectual" class comprised of independent, educationally-oriented travelers. They may be children of privilege but their travel style is decidedly in the direction of being purposeful and "pro-poor."

Some elect to backpack their way through regional circuits, *Lonely Planet* or *Moon* travel guide in hand, as a latter-day equivalent of the Grand Tour. Others pre-arrange volunteer service placements through organizations like Action Without Borders (www.idealists.org) and Volunteer Abroad (www.volunteerabroad.com). Still others enroll in programs that feature locally-sponsored homestays and service projects organized around issues of conservation, human rights, and community education. What they all share in common is an awareness of the downside of conventional tourism and a desire to make responsible choices about where, how, and even whether to travel. If the "old" mass tourist was all about sun, sand, sea and sex, the "new" mindful traveler aims to be sensible, sensitive, sophisticated, and sustainable.

The question remains: Is there a way for educational travel to promote the well-being (shalom) of an impoverished creation while also enhancing the learning of the non-poor? As much as this question strikes to the heart of mindful travel, it eludes easy answers. At one level it's becoming increasingly clear that travel potentially carries both positive and negative effects for host communities. The more obvious of these summarized in the diagram below.

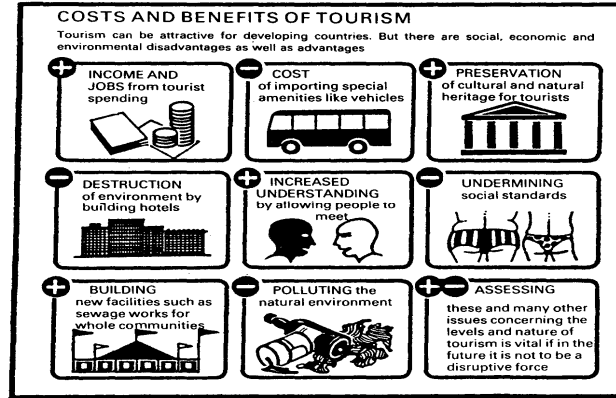


Figure 2: Costs and benefits of tourism
 Source: United Nations Environment Program

On another level, however, a careful accounting of the complex pattern of gains and losses is difficult to arrive at, for both technical and ideological reasons. One person might deem a given activity to be “just” and “beneficial” to a given community if it involves only X amount of disturbance to traditional lands and life ways. Another person may define it as involving Y number of new jobs and infrastructural improvements. A third may define it as involving all of these, as well as the cultivation of certain types of relationships between missionaries and hosts.

Instead of offering technical cost-benefit calculations, our focus is on practical strategies that might enable educational travel to maximize the benefit and minimize the harm to host communities. There are some who argue for an immediate moratorium to be placed on First World travel to the Third World until the most deleterious environmental and social effects are reversed. One can't help being sympathetic with the sense of urgency behind this call. But is it realistic to expect that cross-cultural travel can *ever* be totally freed of any undesirable effects? As Deborah McLaren (2003) reminds us,

For a tourist to have truly minimal impact, she would have to walk to the destination, use no natural resources, and bring her own food that she grew and harvested. She would also have to carry along her own low-impact accommodations (a tent) or stay in a place that is locally-owned and uses alternative technologies and waste treatment. Of course, she would also leave the destination in no worse and perhaps in even better condition than she found it and contribute funds to local environmental protection and community development.
 (93)

The student-traveler—like the trader, missionary, or soldier—is unavoidably an agent of cultural change. And particularly so in those regions where the sociocultural gap is greatest. Because culture is never static, the question is not whether they will introduce change but *in what direction*? How might students journey in ways that strengthen rather than undermine the goals of economic development, cultural preservation, social harmony, environmental protection, and spiritual flourishing?

Economic shalom

Third World tourism has become one of the world's most rapidly expanding economic sectors. One in every five international tourists now travels from a "developed" country to a "developing" one. This has allowed tourism to become the leading service export sector in 24 of the least-developed countries and the first source of foreign exchange earnings in seven.¹ These countries promote tourist activity as a means of generating new jobs and services, earning foreign exchange, and alleviating poverty. Tourist demand creates much-needed jobs in construction, light manufacturing, transportation, telecommunications, and financial services. Locals then use their wages to buy food, farm machinery, pharmaceuticals, and other items needed to improve their lives. New economic enterprises can even be established in isolated locations, stimulating much-needed infrastructural improvements.

But these potential benefits are not automatically fulfilled. Third World economies drawn to tourism as a way of earning foreign exchange soon discover that a relatively small amount of the non-wage revenues generated actually enters their national economy. Much of it ends up being repatriated ("leaked") to First World investment firms that own and operate the airlines, hotels, car rental agencies, and food services that foreign travelers depend upon. In fact, it's possible for a group of 15 college students to book round-trip flights to the Philippines on a United or Lufthansa airliner (with commissions paid to a U.S.-based travel agency), enjoy a variety of on-board meals provided through a U.S. catering company, and then, following touch down, rent a Ford or Toyota van that transports them to a hotel owned by a French transnational before making their way to a local McDonald's or Pizza Hut for dinner. Over their two-week stay, the group will likely shop at foreign-funded mega-malls before boarding the plane and returning home to tell how "awesome" a place the Third World is.

This example may be generalized, but it highlights the money-power held by foreign interests compared with local communities and national governments. In fact, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) estimates that an average of 55 per cent of gross tourism revenues to the developing world actually leak back to developed countries. What does stay in the country is typically captured by relatively affluent groups, with very little actually benefiting the poor. That's not all. To attract foreign exchange, governments market their beaches and wildernesses, as well as the customs and festivals of their people, to the rich world. In the process they seldom hesitate to evict existing communities from prized properties earmarked for tourist development. Real estate prices then soar, requiring local families to spend a larger share of their income to meet their housing needs. Once expropriated from their natal lands, subsistence farmers and fisher folk often have little choice but to re-invent themselves have become as seasonal tour guides or low-paying security guards for vacation homes locked up most of the year. Women are especially vulnerable to having to find alternative ways of generating income, whether as pick pockets, bar maids, or beggars.

¹ The list of "least developed countries" includes: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina-Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia.

Economic shalom compels educational travelers to remain ever mindful of who actually gains and loses financially from their presence. Some may decide to stay in locally-owned and operated guest houses, youth hostels, eco-lodges or—better yet—in the homes of those who typically find themselves left out of tourism development. Transportation is chosen that employs poorer members of the community and maximizes opportunities for interaction. When essential goods and services are needed, mindful travelers opt to patronize locally-owned eateries and other businesses. They also learn to pay a fair price to vendors operating within the “informal” sector. In these and other ways, local residents come to share in the generation and control of tourism revenues – a first step toward creating a more economically just world.

Cultural shalom

Besides bringing into the local community money to purchase goods and services, educational travelers also introduce a new cultural reality. The languages they speak, the clothes they wear, the electronic toys they carry along, the consumption habits they prefer – all of these carry an impact. And that impact can be overwhelming, especially in traditional societies unaccustomed to foreign forms. This is not to say that societies can—or should—exist completely independent of outside influences. The free exchange of ideas and practices can be mutually enriching, and can act to challenge and correct aspects of the local culture that undermine shalom. Many of the world’s most vulnerable populations are protected today as a result of transnational movements that continue to address cultural practices like child slavery and domestic violence that deserve to go.

Third World entrepreneurs have also learned to reach beyond their own societies, effectively marketing aspects of their way of life to a new wave of “culture vultures.” In some cases, this has helped revitalize traditional folk arts and instill a fresh sense of cultural pride. Miriam Adeney (2006) reminds us that, “With government or private grants, traditional houses and community centers may be built. Local music and dance and storytelling may be valued and practiced. People may weave and throw pots and dive and trek and climb who otherwise would have become plantation or urban laborers. ‘Lost’ stories may be recovered and brought back into public discourse” (467). Local traditions and material heritage is important for anyone wanting to gain a deeper appreciation for another culture, and educationally-oriented travel can help keep them both alive.

There is a fine line, however, between the revitalization of culture and its “trinkitization.” Virtually all travelers find themselves inescapably complicit in the process of commercializing Third World “otherness” within a global market economy. Witness the spectacle of indigenous community members-turned-actors in embalmed cultural rituals or artificially-staged festivals. Tourism prioritizes remote, exotic areas of the world, placing on them an almost irresistible pressure to modernize. Helena Norberg-Hodge (1996) documents how this happened in the Himalayan province of Ladakh (Kashmir) as a result of tourist “development.” Within two decades, the traditional culture became a negative reference group, held up to scorn and ridicule by youth who began to see themselves as ugly, poor, and backward compared to the beautiful, rich, and culturally advanced foreigners.

Ventures by First World persons into the Third World inevitably entail unequal cultural encounters. Aware of this fact, mindful travelers do all they can to communicate respect for

distinguishing elements of the regional culture. Leading up to the trip, they take it upon themselves to learn about the area's political history, current events, religions, and customs. They also make sincere efforts to "unpack" and "claim" the cultural "baggage" of myths they inevitably carry to the field.² During their field stay, they forsake the tourist bubble in favor of becoming accepted outsiders within local neighborhoods. Neighbors come to admire, not only their eagerness to adopt native ways without demanding Western amenities, but also their willingness to speak, however haltingly, in the local language. Foreign guests who move towards the local culture in these ways will also tend to refrain from offensive cultural practices, whether it is stealth photography or condescending treatment of service workers. This not only helps to dismantle "ugly American" stereotypes; it also opens up local hearts to receive the best of Western virtues and values.

Social shalom

A primary goal of shalom is to produce greater understanding and respect between strangers. Every education abroad participant is potentially a cultural bridge between peoples, enabling a two-way learning process that is deeply rewarding for host and guest alike. Especially in the context of collaborative service or research projects, foreign students and local residents have the opportunity to form relationships based on a common commitment to community improvement. Initial defensiveness can be reduced, as already noted, by living with a respected local family who explains our presence to other residents in their own terms: "Jenna is a student from Australia trying to understand our way of life, just like we might send our daughter to Australia to study how they live." Most important, however, is our observed character in the community. An honest, humble, and teachable presence naturally reduces the power gap between guests and hosts.

Most harmful social effects derive from the large numbers of westerners introducing a foreign sociocultural reality into a weaker, receiving culture. It happens that, as soon as tourists "discover" an unspoiled destination, governments and multinationals rush in to build roads, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, and golf courses – special enclaves that enable temporarily leisured foreigners to enjoy a privileged separation from the mainstream culture. But these social divisions can also reach far beyond guest and native. The presence of large numbers of outsiders may exacerbate already-existing tensions felt between the young and the old, the traditional and the modern, the beneficiaries of tourism and those marginalized by it. Given the disparity in economic and cultural power, it is the native peoples and social system—not the foreigners—that are expected to adapt.

Aware of the vast social chasm needing to be bridged, mindful travelers will choose to begin their intercultural education in their own backyard. In virtually every U.S. community the "other" is there, living in adjacent neighborhoods, riding on public buses, and playing at local Boys and Girls Clubs. By entering the social worlds of those unlike ourselves, we get in touch with conditions of social exclusion, low-wage labor, and family failure that surround us. We also learn to confront our own tendency to safeguard group privilege and to romanticize, rather than love, the stranger. Intercultural trainers have long wondered why "tourists withdraw from social others in their own suburbs, but pay to engage social others abroad" (Priest, 443). Perhaps international travel allows us to neatly "bracket" our adventures around the world from realities around the block that would

² One of the best resources for a serious level of cultural self-assessment is Richard Hughes' *Myths Americans Live By* (University of Illinois Press, 2004).

unsettle our protected sense of self. Seneca, the ancient Roman philosopher, once queried: “Why do you wonder that globe-trotting does not help you, seeing that you always take yourself with you?” If what we gain from our international sojourns largely depends on the kind of person we’ve become prior to departure, the best route to global competence may actually run through city center at home.

Ecological shalom

Until recently, one of the most neglected areas of ethical reflection has been the relation of humans to the ecosphere. The natural world was generally perceived as trivial, having no intrinsic worth beyond providing exploitable raw materials to supply the needs of people. Consequently, environmental impact presented educational travelers with no particular moral questions or obligations. This general disposition is beginning to change. After nearly three decades of environmental advocacy, and with the recent release of Al Gore’s absorbing documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, more and more of us have begun to consider the ecological consequences of our actions.

In fact, one of those “inconvenient truths” is that global travel is closely linked with climate change. Airplanes travel in the sensitive upper troposphere and lower stratosphere where they release a cocktail of greenhouse gas emissions which currently accounts for about 13 percent of total transportation sector emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂). A single trip from Toronto to Tokyo produces over one ton of CO₂ *per passenger*. This does not include the emissions from energy used in the airport buildings, facilities, baggage systems, airport service vehicles, concession facilities, aircraft fueling, airport construction, and air navigation and safety operations. “Fortunately for the climate,” writes Ian Jack (2006), “a lot of the world’s population is too poor to do much traveling at all.”

As the situation with atmospheric CO₂ worsens, it’s likely that national governments will be forced to impose some form of carbon tax or greenhouse gas “allowance” in order to meet legally-binding carbon emissions reduction targets. Until they do, respect for the aggregate rights of fragile ecosystems calls educational travelers to embody personal lifestyles of restraint and frugality. “Love entails giving up at least some of our own interests and benefits for the sake of the well-being of others in communal relationships,” notes ethicist James Nash (1991). Yielding at least some of our rights to safeguard the well-being of others is not what most of us are accustomed to doing. Especially when it comes to making travel decisions, our primary consideration is whether we have the discretionary time and surplus money to make it happen.

An ethic of ecological shalom calls us to weigh the educational benefits of our travel against the real harm done to the biosphere. Here we ask, without denial or rationalization, *Is this journey really necessary? Do the benefits justify the costs?* If we truly believe that global learning should not just be “about us,” we should at least ponder: Is a greater good achieved by transporting a team of 15 North Americans to Ghana for 3 weeks of service-learning at a local orphanage at a combined cost of \$35,000 and 40 tons of CO₂ when that money could support six full-time nationals for an entire

year without damaging the environment? Mindfulness invites us to reflect upon our own rights to discovery and learning alongside the economic and ecological rights of human and earth others.³

At the point that we do take up residence abroad, mindfulness requires that we retain our eco-sense. Tourism development is notorious for thoughtlessly “paving over paradise” and overusing scarce resources to meet the heavy water and energy demands of its patrons. It’s said that in Phuket (Thailand) the fresh water needed for showers, toilets, baths, swimming pools, and golf courses at the ten largest hotels equals the water used by the entire local population of 250,000. Mindful travelers can help reverse this trend by opting for accommodations—like local families or neighborhood hostels—that don’t disturb natural living patterns. There they consciously adjust their level of water and power consumption toward the local standard by learning to turn off lights, take short or “bucket” showers, and sparingly use air conditioning and heating. They are attentive to the fact that their study destination is someone else’s home, and that they share with their hosts a finite planet with exhaustible resources. They choose to cultivate habits of thrift and restrained consumption as a primary expression of ecological love.

Spiritual shalom

Every international sojourn brings us to a forking of paths: it can be yet one more “been there done that” venture that pampers a spirit of pleasure and conquest; or it can be something of a love story that romances the other through acts of mindful caring. Spiritual shalom follows the latter path, inviting educational travelers and community members, together, to pursue wholeness and insight as a natural response to the spirit of life. A thin stratum of decidedly secular people may exist in the West (principally in Europe and Australia), but most of the world lives in cultures of explosive, pervasive religiosity. Moreover, that religious life is far from static and isolated from others. It continues to be shaped by mass travel, mass migrations, and mass media. We can expect our journeys to deposit us in communities where ethnic and religious heritages intermingle, and where local residents manifest spiritual identities with fuzzy, hybrid edges.

This situation presents us with rare opportunities to search out and discover vital spiritual resources for cultivating a deeper, richer sense of self. Unfortunately, few modern travelers carry this expectation with them. Many share an unenviable reputation around the world as insular and unreceptive to sources of value and virtue outside their own cultures. An ethnocentric orientation ultimately contributes little to host communities, or to the travelers themselves. Not only does it leave them “at arm’s length” from some of the community’s most meaning-filled forms; it also unwittingly reproduces the imperial error of a previous generation. According to David Bosch (1993),

They were predisposed not to appreciate the cultures of the people to whom they went — the unity of living and learning; the interdependence between individual, community,

³ A number of travel companies now offer conscientious travelers “carbon-neutral” or “carbon offset” plane tickets. For example, Expedia partners with TerraPass (www.terrapass.com) to enable companies and individual travelers to sponsor measured reductions in greenhouse gas emissions directly proportional to the emissions created by their airline flights. Travelers buy “passes” (also called “green tags” or “offsets”) for a small fraction of the average cost of their airline ticket. These revenues are then invested in projects—like wind farms and biomass energy—that are certified to either avoid or reduce CO₂ emissions.

culture, and industry; the profundity of folk wisdom; the proprieties of traditional societies — all these were swept aside by a mentality shaped by the Enlightenment which tended to turn people into objects, reshaping the entire world into the image of the West, separating humans from nature and from one another, and “developing” them according to Western standards and suppositions. (294)

In a post-9/11 world, the margin for such error has narrowed significantly. American sojourners in particular often report being perceived as cultural imperialists interested only in extracting personal satisfactions from Third World miseries. This is all the more reason why educational travel must be an affair of love. It must dispose us, first of all, to seek out and to welcome all reflections of truth, goodness, and beauty in the lives of those we meet. Reversing the natural tendency to denounce life ways poorly understood, we choose to see and feel the “holy” in even the most distressed places and most tragic persons.

Imagine entering any of the *favelas* of Brazil, *bustees* of Kolkata, or *umjondolos* of Durban as part of a service-learning project. You would be immediately immersed in a wider world of physical and social realities unaffected by fantasy and illusion. At that point our impulse might be to treat the slum as something of a personal theme park that does little more than feed an appetite for the bizarre. The alternative would be to enter into the resilience, ingenuity, communal bonds, and “eternal” perspective of those struggling to improve their lives and realize a redistributive justice beyond mere charity. “In the slums of Dhaka,” reports Jeremy Seabrook (1995) “there is an attempt to teach literacy to 60,000 adults. In the late evening, by the smoky flare of kerosene lamps, rag-pickers, brick workers, domestic servants, child laborers, and rickshaw-pullers meet to learn and to share their lives. They are delighted when others try to understand what motivates them...” (23).

Mindful travelers carry a desire to become a sympathetic, contributing part of their host communities. They generously serve alongside people of different faiths but like passion in the difficult task of making the world a better place to live. It is precisely this shared commitment that provides the context for true dialogue about real issues and ultimate life meanings. And dialogue of this kind his kind can’t help but unsettle cultural complacencies and moral certainties. Jackie discovered this as she served alongside the residents of Las Brisas, a rural community in El Salvador:

Now I look at things through different eyes. Things I do and even things I buy, things I say, even just talking with people. And on the big level of what I am going to do with my life... I have been saying over and over that the people are not just numbers anymore. The poor are no longer just statistics. They have names and faces. They are friends. (Yonkers-Talz)

Student-travelers like Jackie find that the initial confidence they exercise in commencing a journey abroad may unexpectedly issue in a deeper unknowing. Everything may appear much more complex and less “cut and dried” than before. But this is the genius of educational travel. As it arouses our passion and fascination with the unknown world, it also engages us in a constructive questioning of assumptions regarding our place in it. We find that there are no easy answers, especially as we face-off with economic and political forces beyond our direct control. In the end, our best gift is to remain ever mindful of our affect upon a structurally unequal world, and to persist in the struggle for a brighter future.

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