

## Touring vs. Traveling

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I have seen much of this planet's land surfaces. To date I have been a visitor to 80 countries. Everyone has engendered unique memories. Some of the people and places I encountered at each destination confirmed and honed my preconceptions of them but most have provided unanticipated vivid exchanges and vistas that have given me an ever-enlarging trove of lasting impressions. With each trip abroad, my comprehension of the world in its human and natural variety has grown apace.

Yet the means by which those trips are organized with respect to the marshaling of time, the management of uncertainty and inconvenience and the imposed structure of social ability towards and with those on the journey with you can be assigned to two discrete categories-tourism or travel. Each has its virtues and constraints. Hence each should be seen as being governed and assessed by specific rules of engagement encompassing distinct capabilities, restrictions and risks. One should not presume touring to be a special form of travel nor should travel be considered as a unique subgroup of guided excursions. They are fundamentally different in the contexts by which the situations of being away from home can be experienced.

Touring imposes a structured program in which most of the arrangements are typically part of a comprehensive package often paid for in advance. For the most part, daily activities as well as bed and board are also known beforehand. Sightseeing in most tours is similarly predetermined. And even if free time intervals are permitted, they are often of short duration. Hence "independent discovery", on a tour is difficult to achieve. On the other hand, unpleasant issues are mediated and often mitigated by a tour supervisor. Opportunities for enjoyment within the constraints of the mandated events of the day can be expected but little is left to chance at least in regard to the dictates of the itinerary.

For the inexperienced, the timid, and those with physical limitations, a tour allows one to visit alluring locations without dealing with encumbering or even frightening hassles. But like everything else in life, there is a balance. The format of a tour restricts freedom even as it enables access, promotes camaraderie with fellow tourists and ensures safety for all. On a tour one can see the sights one has longed to gaze upon. One can listen to the words of a foreign language and hear as well the non-verbal sounds that help distinguish a particular locality. One can also sample the native cuisine on site and purchase local products at their source. Yet the tour routine gives little chance to "touch" upon, both physically and metaphorically, the characteristics of a place because more intensive interactions are constrained by the exigencies of the schedule. The experience then is incomplete. You can witness the scene but not situate yourself within it.

On the other hand, travel dispenses with the rigors of a fixed schedule and replaces it with the rigors of self-reliance. Travel demands mingling with the local populace in order at the very least find a place to sleep, to secure something to eat and to gain familiarity with the indigenous transportation system in order to get around. If you are a traveler you are often faced with the challenge to communicate with those who do not speak your language or you theirs. Travel is undertaken most often with incomplete and often scant knowledge of the rhythms of life and commerce of a country or city. And it places one

in jeopardy possibly to be cheated or to be inconvenienced by bad food or bad people. So the element of danger lurks in the background to a traveler and the likelihood of surprise is an ever present consideration.

Yet compared with touring, the rewards can be greater. The chance to make new acquaintances and with them shared experiences is a key consequence of traveling. An improvised roster of activities is likely to frame the traveler's day. Choice given free rein is what guides the outlook of a traveler. But it is usually not "smooth sailing" all the time.

A definition of travel, I wish I thought of, but one I like to repeat is that it is discomfort recollected at leisure. You are more likely to be discomfited if you travel than if you tour. Yet the angst or pain of the moment will recede over time while the "charm" of the event will increase in pleasure with each retelling of a thrilling or harrowing encounter. And of course the content of the event will, let us say, evolve through its repeated verbalizing as the recurring narrative matures to highlight some details and excludes others. A traveler's adventures are more apt to be retained in sharp focus in one's anecdote bin than would be a remembrance of the components of an impression made while on tour. In that setting, recollection is more often diffuse, instilling a sense of the ambience of a place rather than depicting a particular event in which the visitor is an engaged participant.

Both forms of journeying have their virtues and their drawbacks. Sometimes a tour is a tonic for those needing a pleasant, stress-relieving experience whereas travel would be too much of a risk or a bother. At other times, the exuberance of depending on your wits and your whims, which is the essence of travel, can satisfy the quest for adventure. Nonetheless we should be reassured to know that both options are available in many formats and at various costs. Even today much of the world is accessible to tourists and travelers alike, probably more than ever before, despite the proliferation of danger zones around the world [1-7].

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