Staff Work

7-27-2017

Tourism with Worldview

Derek Buteyn
Dordt College, derek.buteyn@dordt.edu

Recommended Citation

Tourism with Worldview

Abstract
"When I travel, I am certain to face significant moments of discomfort, because the place I'm traveling to is not my home; everything is unfamiliar."

Posting about cultural differences from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

http://inallthings.org/tourism-with-worldview/

Keywords
In All Things, travel, Europe, communication and culture

Disciplines
Tourism

Comments
In All Things is a publication of the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College.

Tourism with Worldview

Derek Buteyn

Two weeks into our trip through the Netherlands, France and Italy, my wife and I sat down for a meal at a restaurant on a side street in Rome, a few blocks from the Pantheon. While discussing the adventures of the day and our plans for the next, another couple was seated next to us. Their American-English drawl identified them as tourists, like ourselves. As they perused their menus, it was impossible not to notice them become increasingly frustrated. Huffing and puffing and gesticulating, the frustration culminated in the man frantically gesturing to the waiter for assistance. Throwing up his hands, the exasperated man cried: "I don't know what to get! I don't understand this; it's all in Italian!".

I resisted the urge to lean over and remind him that he was, in fact, *in Italy.*

For our first trip to Europe, we planned to visit as many major highlights as we were able. We attempted to strike a balance among visiting the main historical sites, the geography and landscape, and back door culture. Traveling from Amsterdam to Paris to Annecy to Venice to Rome, we noticed that we were initially overwhelmed by each new place – each colored by its own transportation system, city layout, food, vibe – but over the course of a few days, we'd develop a comfortability and sense of ease with each place.

The scene in the restaurant in Rome played out in a few different scenarios over the course of our trip. It seems that every place we stopped had numerous instances of this type of situation. Whether it was a couple spending 10 minutes explaining to a waiter how to adjust a dish to their particular tastes, or a family on board a cramped bus in Rome, yelling to each other about where the next stop was, discomfort with a new and unfamiliar situation seemed to be the calling card of the American tourist.

At times, I was uncomfortable as well, and I had many moments of frustration. If I've learned anything from these new experiences, it's that the key to successful "tourism" is to live into the feelings of discomfort; to learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. I get the sense that in our independent, self-assured American culture, we tend to project even more confidence when we lack control, dominating as if to conform the situation ourselves, rather than letting ourselves be okay with the feeling of uncertainty.

What do we desire to experience in travel? Is it a version of our destination that particularly molded to our likes and dislikes? Or do we step out of our normal to be challenged and shaped, to experience what we don't know, how another culture operates, and to adjust our worldviews?

We visited the Anne Frank house, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, Versailles, Mont Blanc, the Colosseum, and many other amazing sights. Certainly, these all contributed to an unforgettable trip, and I would recommend to anyone to visit them. Yet, walking through the back streets of Amsterdam, talking about family with our Roman taxi driver, and spending the day with a French family that spoke very little English, sharing beer while watching the Tour de France were the moments that colored our experience beyond just visiting the typical sights. It would have been easy to travel to Europe and stay within our comfort zone – never really getting out and experiencing. But, we went with an openness to unplanned moments, and those moments are what we hold on to as our favorite memories.

My observations of a few tourists do not define every single American traveler. I am able to compare my experience most closely to those from my culture, and therefore the Americans are placed on the chopping block. For those that have the opportunity to travel, by all means, do so! I'm positive that regardless of one's motivation for travel or ability to deal with discomfort, it will undoubtedly be a life changing and worldview-altering experience. There are those who are content with the Disneyland version of Europe, yet, I would suggest and encourage that we check our

expectations at the customs gate, and be open to step out of the tourist shuffle, to really experience an unforgettable trip.

When I travel, I am certain to face significant moments of discomfort, because the place I'm traveling to is not my home; everything is unfamiliar. The food will be different, I won't understand the language, and I'll likely take a wrong bus or two. We shouldn't expect a foreign land to be "like home". We need to learn how to manage our discomfort, spending less time trying to make ourselves comfortable, and then lean into the discomfort, peeling back the layers of society and opening the back doors to reveal the experiences that challenge and shape us.