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## The History of Luxury in Tourism and Hospitality

In this chapter I will present a short and necessarily superficial history of tourism, focusing on how the idea of luxury has developed and changed. Before attempting this, it is important to recognise that our knowledge of this history is sketchy at best in relation to the earliest days of travel and tourism. We certainly cannot state any dates and claim them to be the beginning of travel.

While most of this chapter will focus on Europe it is important to recognise that tourism is a global phenomenon with many regions of the world having their own historical story to tell of its development.

The Euro-centric focus is less a function of where I live than of the fact that the most documentary evidence, such as it is, exists for Europe and it is fair to say that modern mass market tourism was born in Europe. Readers looking for more detail on the historical development of tourism in the different regions of the world are advised to turn to the third edition of *Consumer Behaviour in Tourism*, by Horner and Swarbrooke, published in 2016.

### The earliest days of travel

The earliest travellers in the world, several thousand years ago, were likely to have been of at least five distinct types, namely:

- Business travellers whose motivation was the desire to sell their goods and services for gain.
- Pilgrims, travelling as part of the practice of their religion whatever it may have been, visiting shrines and holy places or participating in religious festivals.
- Military travellers who travelled to conquer and occupy new lands.
- Explorers and adventurers, seeking new places and new routes.
- Sightseers, people of leisure, whose motivation was to see new places and no doubt go back and tell their friends all about their experiences.

We certainly know that all five activities have a history of at least two millennia, and much longer for at least the first three. In one way there is a distinction between the first three and the other two in that the former involved 'involuntary journeys' that were required because of one's occupation or religion, whereas the latter were 'voluntary journeys' that a traveller chose to make.

However, in terms of luxury, one suspects that the idea meant nothing to the business traveller crossing a desert on a camel, a pilgrim sleeping in the open, or a soldier marching for mile after mile, or an explorer sailing the seas in a tiny open-decked boat. For these people any improvement in their situation might seem like a 'luxury' whether it be a new cloak to keep out the cold or some fresh fruit picked from a tree on the journey. Already though there would have been a distinction between rich and poor, high and low, for some soldiers marched while others rode and some pilgrims walked while others were carried. To the poor, having a horse or being carried, would have seemed like a luxury.

The 'sightseeing traveller' however is a different case, in that this option would always only have been open to those who had both disposable income and 'free time', a very rare commodity in ancient times. Travel was so slow that any sightseeing trip would probably have been measured in weeks rather than days or hours. The lack of infrastructure would have ensured that even the affluent leisured sightseer would have had precious little by way of luxury on their trip.

However, as we can see from the Roman Empire, for example, people did make sightseeing trips, sometimes over long distances. And there were fine villas to stay in en route and wine to drink if the traveller had wealthy friends, and the towns offered a few of what we might today call attractions, such as theatres. It is likely that the quality of life for the traveller would be at best similar to that enjoyed by them at home, but is unlikely to have been better than their home environment. It could therefore still not be seen as luxury, although it would have bestowed status through the tales the traveller could tell on his or her return. And we do know that both the Romans and the Greeks did travel as tourists, albeit in small numbers, for a century or so ago, in 1916, J. Gilford-Milne published a paper on this very subject!

Over the centuries things changed a little though. The transport infrastructure was still rudimentary, so any journey was a chore at best, a nightmare to be endured at worst. Yet things were improving a little in terms of accommodation, such as the caravanserai on the Silk Routes or the hostels for pilgrims. Some of the caravanserai in countries such as Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey have been renovated and are again performing their original function as accommodation and providers of food and drink for travellers. For business travellers hundreds of years ago these must have seemed truly luxurious compared to the alternative of sleeping in the open.

However, the idea of luxury transportation would have to wait, in reality, until the arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century.

## The Grand Tour

This very European, or rather more accurately British, phenomenon is perhaps one of the first embodiments of the idea of luxury travel in history. It was also a forerunner of what today might be called educational tourism.

The Grand Tour was, in short, an extended vacation designed to be part of the 'coming of age' of young aristocrats, in much the same way as a 'gap year' might be seen today. It was designed to broaden the experience and horizons of the young gentleman – for the vast majority of those taking the Grand Tour were men. These were cultural trips, but no doubt with some hedonistic pleasures also being enjoyed by the traveller. The favoured destination was Italy where Renaissance art and the remains of the Roman Empire were favourite attractions; but France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Greece also featured on many of the trips.

This was travel for those with the luxury of disposable income and disposable time, for they often took up to two or three years and involved lots of travel and the best accommodation, meals and entertainment available in the destination. These 'classic' very Grand Tours were at their peak in the 17th and 18th centuries.

However later in the 18th century something began to happen that has been mirrored countless times since in the world of luxury travel. People with less spare time and disposable income wanted to enjoy the same kinds of experiences as the aristocracy but on a smaller scale. So there started a new type of Grand Tour, where it was older people who travelled for hedonism and sightseeing, rather than education, and travelled for weeks rather than months and years.

It has been estimated that at times there could have been as many as 20,000 young British people taking the Grand Tour in Europe at any one time (Sharpley, 1994).

Those on the Grand Tour really set the parameters for modern tourism, and tourists today in Italy still tend to do a greatly pared down version of what these people did two hundred or so years earlier. However, in the context of a discussion about luxury, it is illuminating to note that whereas the tourist of today may bring home postcards of Renaissance masterpieces, those on the Grand Tour bought home original works of art by Renaissance and later masters, which now cover the walls of the stately homes of the UK! We will see later in the chapter that the link between luxury travel and art did not die with the end of the Grand Tour.