

TOURISM BECOMES AN INDUSTRY

For aficionados of travel magazines filled with breathtaking photographs of boutique hotels on sugar-white beaches or yachts cruising turquoise-colored seas, the United Nations World Tourism Organization is a let-down. This agency dedicated to one of life's great pleasures is housed in a nondescript ten-story building on Madrid's Calle Capitan Haya, hidden in a leafy neighborhood with far more impressive government ministries and foreign embassies. It looks like what it is: one of the more obscure organizations in the enormous United Nations, a backwater near the bottom of the international pecking order. Moreover, it is dedicated to the business of travel and tourism, not its romance.

Most of the writers of those glamorous travel articles have never heard of the UNWTO, and of those that have, few have visited the office. "I get their emails, but I rarely read them," said Stuart Emmrich, then editor of the influential Travel section of the *New York Times*.

This disconnect is a testament to travel and tourism's reputation as a worry-free break from the real world, not a serious business. The UNWTO is one of the few institutions that recognizes travel as one of the largest industries in the world and studies its extraordinary dimensions to understand how it is changing the world.



and revolution marked the last century, the competition for prosperity and the marketing of ways to enjoy that new wealth is molding the early years of the twenty-first century. The travel and tourism industry, with its romantic promises and serious perils, is central to that constant commerce. This book is about that journey as well as its findings.

Tourism has a history of confounding countries and societies. The first time the world powers tried to regularize tourism was in 1925, between the world wars, when it was considered a traffic issue. Several European countries created the International Congress of Official Tourist Traffic Associations to minimize border formalities for tourists. That small office was the origins of the World Tourism Organization.

Nine years later, tourism was recalibrated as a propaganda, or public relations, issue focused on spreading the word about where and how to travel. In that incarnation the office was named the International Union of Tourist Propaganda Organizations. Finally, after World War II, it was decided that tourism had risen to the level of government relations requiring the coordination of tourism agencies of various countries like the French Office National du Tourisme and the Italian Ente Nazionale per le Industrie Turistiche. Practical questions were rising along with the increased tourist traffic: Should tourists pay duties on their cameras and automobiles when traveling into a foreign country? Aren't they imports, and what if they tried to sell them?

By the 1960s the jet age of mass tourism was taking off. In 1958 a Pan American 707 flew from New York to Brussels, the first commercial jet flight across the Atlantic without stopping for refueling. A decade later a TWA 707 flew around the world beginning in Los Angeles and flying west after the plane was blessed by three Buddhist monks. Lower fares and bargain flights followed. European countries relaxed passport restrictions and began to see tourism as an important economic engine. "Tourism — Passport to Peace" became the organization's motto in 1967, capturing its higher purpose to open borders in the promotion of better relations as well as the practical motive of making money.

As the U.N. shifted its notion about tourism, the U.N.'s tourism office was moved from The Hague to Geneva, where it was dwarfed among the

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The very idea of describing travel and tourism as a serious industry or business is an oxymoron to many people. The oil industry is serious. Finance is serious. Trade is serious. Manufacturing is serious. Foreign policy and economic policy are serious. Tourism is a frivolous pursuit: fun, sometimes educational in the lightest sense, often romantic, even exotic.

Tourism's low reputation is a big reason why the agency is in Spain. When it came into being after World War II, the United Nations ostracized Spain because it was led by Francisco Franco, Europe's last fascist ruler. Spain remained something of a pariah on the world scene in the 1950s. (Adolf Hitler had been a supporter of General Franco; Nazi armed forces helped Franco come to power.) The U.N. slowly accepted Spain back into the normal world of diplomacy as Franco loosened up and Spain became more democratic. Finally, when Franco was on his deathbed, the U.N. agreed to set up a small tourism policy office in Madrid in 1974. The sufficiently inconsequential tourism body wouldn't raise too many questions, and Spain could be selected over two rivals that were not considered top-caliber at the time.

"There were three finalists—Zagreb, Mexico City, and Madrid," Patricia Tedjini, the UNWTO's historian, told me in his office at the Madrid headquarters. "We wanted to show that democracy was moving in Spain."

Back then, the tourism office was a lowly subsidiary of another U.N. body. It would take another thirty years for the World Tourism Organization to win status as a full-fledged independent United Nations agency, a reward for the work it had done to define the industry and fitfully raise its profile.

The drab UNWTO office in Madrid was my logical first stop in a five-year-long study of the tourism industry. The UNWTO is the repository of rare data on how tourism works, how it drives economies and how governments direct it, so its headquarters was the logical place to begin my research into how all of the industry's disparate pieces fit together and determine what it means to be a tourist. Snorkeling in the pure waters off Costa Rica, studying documents in Paris, tracking down the "anonymous" benefactor of a Zambian wildlife preserve, interviewing Chinese tour guides who promote the Communist Party while reciting the virtues of socialism. I inevitably saw the world through an entirely new prism. If war

cluster of U.N. offices and the International Red Cross. The move to Madrid was a step up the bureaucratic ladder even though it meant exile from Geneva, one of the power centers of the U.N.

In Madrid the tourism organization confronted the dilemma that faced the industry: how to prove that tourism was an industry. There was no question that travel and tourism were growing. In 1950, shortly after World War II, there had been only 25 million trips recorded by foreign tourists. By 1975 that figure had exploded to 222 million trips. But there was no agreement about what that meant for any national economy. Tourism wasn't considered a single, unified economic activity. It was viewed as a constellation of industries—airlines, hotel chains, railway systems and tour agencies to name just a few. Separately those industries were taken seriously but not grouped together as the single economic activity of tourism.

Most conspicuously, tourism was not listed as a separate industry on national indexes. For example, when the United States created its gross domestic product index in 1937, tourism was not included as a distinct industry. It was impossible for most countries to measure what tourism added to their economies.

Then there was the question of motivation. Are business trips and tourist trips part of the same industry; can you easily distinguish between the two and should you? The answer was to define the industry as travel and tourism since the infrastructure was the same. Another issue was trade. On national balance-of-trade ledgers, tourism showed up as a service that is "exported" to the foreigners who come to visit the country. Finally, there were few educational institutions that studied tourism and could help measure the industry; another example of tourism's irrelevance. (Switzerland was the rare nation that fostered top-flight "hospitality" schools; to this day, their graduates fill management spots in hotels, restaurants and resorts around the world.)

What countries could count were the numbers of visiting foreign tourists, a figure that was crude at best. Without a place on national budget sheets, tourism could be ignored by the economists. Yet every day there was growing evidence that tourism was becoming a staple of modern life; an essential part of the family calendar. The middle classes were luxuriating in newly affordable travel and most of the newest tourists were American.

Their newspaper travel sections were plump with advertisements. By the 1970s, industries in the travel and tourism complex were the single largest source of advertising for American newspapers. Americans were mostly traveling in one direction—across the Atlantic and discovering Europe. And they were spending a lot of money.

Many were carrying a thin red book called *Europe on \$5 a Day*. The author was Arthur Frommer, an American G.I. turned lawyer turned publisher. His success exemplified the potential of tourism that the fledgling U.N. organization was trying to capture.

Frommer's book offered Americans the possibility of traveling through Europe in a few weeks rather than the months required in another era and at the same time of enjoying three-course French meals without breaking their budgets. Frommer told me he figured out "how to travel cheaply" when he was stationed in Berlin after World War II. "Before, only the elite could afford to go to Europe, make the grand tour. No one cared about the poor slob who had never traveled before," said Mr. Frommer in his sun-filled Manhattan apartment, where books and curios cover every surface.

Now a legend—the Walter Cronkite of tourist guidebooks—Frommer consciously began writing as the champion of people who thought they couldn't afford to travel. He was drafted into the U.S. Army straight out of Yale Law School and trained as an infantryman to fight in the Korean War, but his orders were amended and he was sent to Europe to work in intelligence. Stationed in war-scarred Berlin, Frommer used his fluent Russian and French at work, and then on the weekends as he mastered the skill of watching free rides on military planes to travel the continent. "I was a poor boy from the United States and here I was flying all over Europe," he said. He still remembers his first freshly baked croissant and Spanish paella. After watching Frommer hitchhiking rides to London, Stockholm, Barcelona, Venice and Paris, all on the pay of a lowly G.I., a few of his friends in the barracks asked Frommer to explain how he got to travel so much while they were stuck in Germany. His answer was *The G.I.'s Guide to Travelling in Europe*, written in stilted military jargon. The initial run of 10,000 copies of *The G.I.'s Guide* sold out in one afternoon.

Frommer had discovered what was critical to modern travel writing and decided to write a guidebook for civilians, as he put it, once he was out

of the service. Above all, most people wanted help mastering the logistics of travel—airplanes, ships, hotels, restaurants, visas, traveler's checks. What they saw once they arrived in the country was almost secondary. In a sense, Frommer reversed the order of the travel books that had come before him. Or as he told me, "People weren't looking for a big travel book with a thorough explanation of a country's history and culture that would stay on their book shelves for years. They wanted a guide."

His ambitions were focused: he wanted to show the masses how to travel without breaking the bank. "I wanted everyone to be able to experience different cultures, to confront opposite views, to celebrate the world's diversities," he said, remembering the purity of his intentions. Frommer's timing was impeccable. The American middle classes had begun to enjoy two-week paid vacations, an idea first instituted by the French in 1936. And private airline companies were offering passage across the Atlantic at prices the middle class could afford, sort of. "But there weren't enough travel books back then to fill half a shelf in a standard bookstore," said Mr. Frommer.

To write his first book Frommer scouted Europe for bargain hotels, cafés, restaurants and boat trips and wrote it all up in clear, simple itineraries punctuated by lush descriptions of the glorious sights of medieval and Renaissance cities that sparked his uncritical love affair with travel. In one of his favorite passages, he describes Venice at night: "As you chug along, little clusters of candy-striped mooring poles emerge from the dark, a gondola approaches with a lighted lantern hung from its prow. The reflection of a slate-gray church, bathed in blue spotlight, shimmers in the water as you pass by. This is the sheerest beauty and a sight that no one should miss."

Europe on \$5 a Day was published in 1960, and its modest first run of 5,000 copies also sold out in a single day. Frommer quit his day job at a prestigious Manhattan law firm to start his own publishing company and launch a movement. His style of providing the mundane details of where to stay and what to eat with an overlay of rhapsodic descriptions of the delights of travel became the hallmark of travel writing in the modern age. "I stumbled into this intense desire to travel," he said as explanation for his

phenomenal success. His series grew to fifty-eight titles and *Europe on \$5 a Day* became ubiquitous. Ten years after its debut Nora Ephron wrote a tongue-in-cheek essay called "Eating and Sleeping with Arthur Frommer." By then, one out of every five Americans traveling to Europe that summer was following his red travel guide like a bible, booking inexpensive hotels and eating at out-of-the-way cafés, literally eating and sleeping with him and sending fawning thank you notes like one from a woman in Massachusetts saying that "not a day passed that she did not bless the name Arthur Frommer."

What Frommer had discovered was that tourism was becoming an industry and needed to be reduced to its parts for consumers—book a plane, find a hotel, eat some meals, go on a sightseeing tour—and he was more than happy to act as that go-between with his guidebooks, making a small fortune in the process. The question for the U.N. World Tourism Organization was how to bottle that elixir, measure it and claim it officially as an industry. The answer came in two parts—first from geopolitics, then from the industry itself.

It took nothing less than the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Empire to open up minds and horizons. The Berlin Wall was the most famous of the barbed-wire barriers erected by eastern and central European puppet governments to cut off their people from their continental neighbors during the Cold War that had pitted the Communist countries against those in the democratic market system of capitalism. Since the end of World War II, the two sides had fought hot wars through proxies in Asia and South America and aimed nuclear weapons at each other in the ultimate standoff for supremacy.

The Soviet side lost and the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, marking the beginning of the end of the Cold War. In 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated. By then Communist China had begun to open its doors to the West, positioning itself against the Soviet Union. The stark divisions of the Cold War were obscured and then eliminated. Those physical and allegorical "walls" melted away from the northern Baltic Sea, from countries like Estonia and Latvia, through Eastern Europe—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia—down to the Adriatic Sea and Albania. On the

other side of the globe the Mekong Delta nations of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were no longer off-limits. For the first time in modern history the world opened to tourism.

The end of the Cold War had a profound effect throughout the world, reshaping countries and lives. The impact on tourism was obvious, since the industry is premised on the ability to cross borders and visit foreign countries. Before 1990, Western Europe was the overwhelming center of the tourist world, grabbing more than 60 percent of international tourists, visiting countries like France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain. Afterward the tourist map was redrawn, now including vast swaths of Africa and Asia and reinvigorating the western hemisphere, which until then accounted for less than one-fourth of tourism. The world was on the verge of a tourist explosion, for better and for worse, and largely unnoticed.

The geopolitical milestone ending the Cold War was matched by a technological revolution. Everything required for traveling had become modernized. Long-haul airplanes could transport travelers halfway across the globe within a day or two. Travel was becoming relatively inexpensive. Medical advances had made travel safe with vaccines and access to doctors and medicines. European and American comforts were to be found in far-off countries not known for modern luxury.

Tourism had hit a unique historic sweet spot. Now all it needed was recognition. Two separate groups stepped in to fill this vacuum: the United Nations and the World Travel & Tourism Council, an industry group that grew out of a decision by the U.S. government that travel and tourism were nonessential during the energy crisis of the late 1970s and therefore not at the top of the government's list for precious energy supplies. James Robinson III, then the CEO of the travel giant American Express, was furious. First he convinced Congress to reverse the finding; then he started examining the tourism industry.

Robinson did his homework. He ordered a review of American Express receipts to see who ranked as its biggest customers. Robinson wanted to know what the solid base of the company's business was. Even though American Express had been a travel company long before it became a giant credit-card firm, Robinson was surprised by the results of his inquiry. The answer was unequivocal: the top companies as measured by the

amount of money billed through American Express credit cards made up the core of the tourism industry, from Disneyland to Hertz Rental cars to United Airlines. Armed with these results, Robinson hosted a 1988 gathering in Paris, inviting his fellow industry executives—the CEOs of Hertz and Avis, Regent and Accor, American, United and Singapore airlines, East Japan Railway, Disney and others, to gauge their interest in joining a new high-powered tourist council representing all the industries that make up the travel and tourism industry.

"By the time we left Paris, we agreed there was significant work to do and that we needed to enlist the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania to help us build a solid body of data about the industry," said Robinson.

With the opening up of borders in 1990, there was no question that travel was on a big upswing, with extraordinary opportunities to make money in the nascent global travel boom. Robinson wanted to erase long-held prejudices and band together all the strands of the tourism business from the airline companies that considered themselves too important to associate with car rental companies to the high-end hotel chains that wouldn't mix with low-end resorts. That was the only way to present a united front as the world's biggest industry and create new business strategies to multiply profits and create new markets. Remaining separate would mean losing a vision that might place tourism at the top of the global business hierarchy.

Robinson took the first step toward a modern definition of the tourism industry with other executives by inaugurating the World Travel & Tourism Council in 1991 in Washington, D.C. The new industry group was dedicated to using the full economic and social power of their companies to advance the business of tourism. Robinson was elected chair of the new board and set as its top priority the discovery of a formula for calculating the full economic power of tourism. That was the data that was missing. If the new council could measure how much money tourists spent, the industry would know how much it contributed to national economies as well as the global marketplace. From there they could begin flexing their muscles. The WTTC teamed with the Wharton School to produce a statistical model that a region or country could use to measure income from

tourism. The statisticians defined the industry by categories: accommodation services; food and beverage services; passenger transport; travel agencies, tour operators and tourist guide services; cultural services; recreation and other entertainment services and a final miscellaneous category that included financial and insurance services. It was an expansive definition meant to capture every American dollar, German mark, French franc, British pound or Japanese yen spent on a trip. And it required years of research and consultations before it proved accurate.

At the same time, the United Nations tourism organization had embarked on a similar project to calculate tourism's full economic impact in order to influence public policy. In 1993 the U.N.'s statistical commission recommended a new reporting concept called Satellite accounts for tourism that would measure the "economic and employment impact of consumer expenditures, capital investment, government revenues and expenditure, foreign trade and business expenditure from tourism."

Working in parallel and eventually together, the WTO, the new WTTC and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development came up with the Tourism Satellite Account system. Canada was the first country to try it out. The United Nations refined and adopted it in 2000, and it is used around the world today. "A movement has been started," said Francesco Frangialli, then secretary-general of the UNWTO, after its approval.

The new satellite formula defined the industry as the production, supply and consumption of tourism commodities: transport (airplanes, cars, railroads, boats); accommodation (hotels, resorts, home rentals, time shares, cruise ships); food; entertainment (anything from sports activities to gambling to theme parks, to dancing to movies to live theater); tour operators; tour agencies. This followed the U.N. tourism organization's definition of tourism itself as "the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes."

Seven years later, when an updated draft was issued, the methodological framework for the Tourism Satellite Account system was 135 pages long. Its calculations were nothing short of a revelation: the tourism industry contributed \$7 trillion to the world economy in 2007 and was the big-

gest employer, with nearly 250 million associated jobs. (And those figures don't include people who vacation in their own countries.)

Even with this recognition, travel and tourism remains the stealth industry of the twenty-first century. Few politicians, government leaders, foreign affairs pundits or economic experts consider the industry an important subject. During the Great Recession of 2008, travel and tourism leaders were left out of the inner circle of decision-makers who outlined the road to recovery, even though tourism by most standards was among the largest world industries.

The dimensions of the industry are astonishing.

For the first time in history, the U.N. tourism organization celebrated reaching 1 billion international trips in a single year in 2012. The graph here for this travel phenomenon goes straight up: 25 million tourist trips to foreign countries in 1960; 250 million in 1970; 536 million in 1995; 922 million in 2008; 1 billion in 2012. Overall, that represents an annual increase of over 6 percent.

In gross economic power it is in the same company as oil, energy, finance and agriculture. At least one out of every ten people around the world is employed by the industry, according to Wolfgang Weinz of the International Labour Organization, who told me that the figure is probably greater, perhaps one in eight or nine, but it is hard to collect accurate numbers in many countries.

Tourism creates \$3 billion in business every day.

If frequent-flyer miles were a currency, it would be one of the most valuable in the world. In 2005, frequent-flyer miles were worth more than all of the American dollars in circulation. (When that figure was released, several U.S. legislators wondered if frequent-flyer miles should be taxed as income.)

The tourism industry has expanded its scope to embrace everything one can do on a trip, beginning with religious pilgrimages, which is the oldest reason for traveling. The modern Hajj, the Islamic religious pilgrimage, is now a multibillion-dollar enterprise and the single biggest tourist event of the year. No longer a humble religious trek, many of the older, modest hotels and boardinghouses for devotees have been replaced with

glitzy five-star hotels for the well heeled, to the consternation of preservationists and some religious groups. Families from poorer Muslim countries like Bangladesh pay a lifetime's savings to buy the required airplane and hotel package for an aging parent to fulfill a religious goal and make the Hajj. Itinerant pilgrims are no longer common at the Hajj.

At every point of every trip, the industry is figuring out how to make a profit on every experience, be it a made-for-tourist local dance ensemble, the purchase of a length of silk or taking a motorboat cruise up a jungle river. Serendipity and happenstance, once the main point of travel, are disappearing. What were once journeys of discovery, escapes from the daily dullness of life, or a plan for retirement are now packaged trips with nearly every aspect planned in advance. Senior travel by retirees is known as silver gold and has become a mainstay of the industry. Everything can be packaged into a tour, including cooking classes and bamboo-weaving demonstrations, and then finely tuned to avoid mishaps. Entire Austrian, Swiss and German villages rent themselves out for as little as \$70,000 a week.

Family reunions, simple vacations to the beach (known as fly-and-flop in the industry), a tour of the old Silk Road in the steppes of Asia or a tour of old and new art galleries in Istanbul—all marketed by the industry. One of the biggest earners are conventions or meetings. Known as MICE, the industry acronym for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions, this category covers a huge gamut of legitimate meetings, film festivals, academic gatherings and boondoggles that have multiplied in the last decade, filling airline seats and hotel rooms. Las Vegas, with its casinos, sports, conference centers, hotels and nightlife, is the undisputed capital of MICE; underlining its motto "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

As in other businesses, the industry expands its profits by expanding the reasons for travel. One of the biggest new fields is medical tourism, which pairs foreign doctors and hospitals with the travel industry to make a package deal of an operation and a vacation for recuperation on a beach or by a swimming pool. The field has grown quickly in the United States as costs of health care and health insurance skyrocketed. Now when faced with surgery costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in the United States, a patient can opt for an attractive tour package with medical care in Argen-

tina, India, South Africa or closer to home in Mexico or Costa Rica often at one-tenth the price of the same treatment in the United States, vacation included. That is thanks to cooperation in most of these foreign countries between the ministries of tourism and the ministries of health.

Travel has also become a default fund-raising technique. Every day letters or brochures are sent out by colleges and universities, bookstores, museums, magazines, public radio stations, arts and music institutions inviting people to go on a tour or a cruise to have fun and raise money for a good cause.

Tourism was born and nurtured in Europe, which still depends mightily on foreign visitors, increasingly from China. In 2011, when it was still in the grips of the Great Recession, Ireland turned to tourism to dig out of debt, earning 9.1 billion euros that year.

Today poor nations see tourism as their best bet out of poverty, second only to oil and energy as the major engine of development. Thailand is the world's biggest exporter of rice, yet tourism is its number-one money earner. With that comes political clout. When Thai protesters wanted to change their government in December 2008, they took over the airport to keep out tourists, which brought the economy to a halt and victory to the protesters. Costa Rica has turned its wilderness into a venue for highly profitable ecotourism. As soon as Sri Lanka, and now Burma, began seeing an end to conflict, they opened the door to a rush of tourists. After the Arab Spring uprising, Egypt sent out a plea to cruise companies and tour operators to return and kick-start the economy, where one in eight jobs depend on visitors. Winning status for a temple or old city neighborhood as a World Heritage Site from UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is a guaranteed tourist draw.

The U.N. tourism organization now places poverty reduction as one of its top objectives, along with the high-minded ideals of improving international understanding, peace and prosperity. Since the end of the Cold War and the opening of the world for travel, tourism has become an important source of foreign exchange for the world's poorest nations, often the only one. While tourism requires some infrastructure, from airfields to modern highways, it is less expensive than building factories. In theory, poor countries should be able to use the new revenue from the tourism industry to

pay for the infrastructure while raising standards of living and improving the environment. One hundred of the world's poorest nations do earn up to 5 percent of their gross national product from foreign tourists who marvel at their exotic customs, buy suitcases of souvenirs and take innumerable photographs of stunning landscapes.

But just as tourism is capable of lifting a nation out of poverty, it is just as likely to pollute the environment, reduce standards of living for the poor because the profits go to international hotel chains and corrupt local elites (what is called leakage), and cater to the worst of tourism, including condemning children to the exploitation of sex tourism. Like any major industry, tourism has a serious downside, especially since tourism and travel is underestimated as a global powerhouse; its study and regulation is spotty at best. Tourism is one of those double-edged swords that may look like an easy way to earn desperately needed money but can ravage wilderness areas and undermine native cultures to fit into package tours: a fifteen-minute snippet of a ballet performed in Southern India; native handicrafts refashioned to fit oversize tourists. What is known is that tourism and travel is responsible for 5.3 percent of the world's carbon emissions and the degradation of nearly every tropical beach in the world. Without global enforcement of basic rules, cruise ships are a major polluter of the seas and pose serious risks. The dramatic capsizing of the *Costa Concordia* cruise ship off the Italian coast in 2012 killed at least 32 people and raised questions about the safety of these mammoth ships.

To make way for more resorts with spectacular views, developers destroy native habitats and ignore local concerns. Preservationists decry the growing propensity to bulldoze old hotels and buildings in favor of constructing new resorts, water holes and entertainment spots that look identical whether in Singapore, Dubai or Johannesburg; a world where diversity is replaced with homogeneity. Another catastrophe for countries betting on tourism has come from wealthy vacationers who fall in love with a country and buy so many second houses that locals can no longer afford to live in their own towns and villages.

Among the more thoughtful questions is how mass tourism has changed cultures. African children told anthropologists that they want to

grow up to be tourists so they could spend the day doing nothing but eating. The tourists who do not speak the local language and rely on guides to tell them what they are seeing and what to think marvel at countries like China with its new wealth and appearance of democracy. Environmentalists wonder how long the globe can continue to support 1 billion people teeming around the world for a long weekend on a beach or a ten-day tour of an African game park.

In reaction, concerned industry leaders—large and small—and environmentalists have created the idea of ecotourism, a form of travel to promote the protection of natural habitats and eventually the preservation of local landscapes, cultures and people. The idea has become so popular it has entered the lexicon of political correctness. Philanthropists are underwriting ecologies in Central America and wild game parks in sub-Saharan Africa. Tourists opt for vacations on organic European farms, while some add volunteer days at the end of their vacations in Asia to build homes for the poor. Few nations have shown more caution about the tourism industry and its downside than Bhutan. The Himalayan nation that measures progress through its happiness index has purposefully kept the number of tourists low to insure that the country's culture, environment, faith and economy aren't perverted by huge influxes of foreign tourists. The government says it limits tourists by regulating how many hotel rooms are available and limiting other tourist "infrastructure" as well as imposing a high tourist tariff. Bhutan calls this "low volume and high value" tourism.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are countries like Cambodia and cities like Venice. Cambodia encourages so many tourists to visit its great eleventh-century temple complex at Angkor that the rare temples are sinking because the surrounding water table is being drained by hundreds of new tourist hotels. In Venice, with a native population of less than 60,000, over 20 million tourists descend on the city every year, an onslaught that is pushing the locals out of their homes and emptying the city of essentials like neighborhood greengrocers and bakeries.

In the globalized economy—with cheap transportation, the Internet and open borders—travel has become the ultimate twenty-first-century industry, which means these problems are not going away.

It is difficult to find issues of travel and tourism debated in public. Historians, political scientists and economists routinely omit tourism from studies about how the world works. Foreign policy journals and experts rarely touch the subject.

Normally the media would ask routine questions about whether the right to travel also included the responsibility to respect a country, its environment, people and culture. But my profession often gives travel and tourism a pass. Unlike the oil industry, which is scrutinized at all levels, travel writing has become an extension of the industry. With few exceptions, travel writing and travel sections share the singular goal of helping consumers spend their money pursuing the dream of a perfect trip. They seldom write critical reviews; only articles about what to do and what to buy and how to experience a destination. This "feel-good" approach is rare even in lifestyle journalism, which is where to find the travel sections. Other lifestyle or back-of-the-book journalists thrive on critical reviews, explaining how and why they judge movies as great or miserable; whether the food at a restaurant is mediocre or exquisite; and describing music concerts as electric or boring. Imagine if movie reviewers only discussed their favorite films, if restaurant critics only wrote about their preferred haunts and music critics never wrote a scathing review of a badly performed opera. That is what travel writing has become.

As unsettling, many travel writers accept free transportation, lodging, food and entertainment from the very destinations they write about. That is forbidden in nearly every other form of journalism. This adds up to a largely pliant media that has become an extension of the industry it is supposedly covering, blocking the public from seeing both the larger picture and the problems inherent in any industry, and preventing travel and tourism from being taken seriously.

It wasn't always this way. Modern travel writing took root in the late nineteenth century—the age of ocean liners and trains—when writers took it for granted that travel meant adventure, not comfort, and that anyone making a month-long trip overseas wanted to dive into foreign lands and cultures. In those days writers rarely specialized in travel alone. They saw themselves as the gatekeepers to the world, noting all that was miserable as

well as glorious about foreign cultures. Their touchstone was Marco Polo, the grandfather of all travel writing. When his *Description of the World* was published around 1300 the Italian public thought Polo's description of China under Kublai Khan was utter fantasy. The tales of the Khan's lavish court, his palaces of marble, gold and silver, his benevolence toward his subjects, his bizarre invention of paper money and the precise details of the enormous bridges and roads he built across his empire were ridiculed as impossible.

Two hundred years later, Christopher Columbus carried his well-worn copy of Polo's masterpiece on his voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in search of China. That spirit of adventure jumps off the pages of the earliest guides. Admittedly, travel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was for the elite or the professional diplomats and colonial bureaucrats who could spend weeks admiring the ancient wonders like the pyramids. Travel was considered such a privilege that people spent months in preparation, relying on their guidebooks to find hidden paths and a bed for the night. The German-based Baedeker travel guides published a handbook in 1876 for *Jerusalem and Its Surroundings* that captures the day-by-day account of how to travel by horseback to the Holy City. "At a fig-tree our path is joined by another from the left, and reaches the village of Biddu, surrounded by heaps of stones and destitute of trees. This scene is a foretaste of the stony wilderness of the ancient Judah."

Once in Jerusalem, the writer warns with an honesty missing from today's travel writing that it is "only by patiently penetrating beneath the modern crust of rubbish and rotteness which shrouds the sacred places from view that the traveler will at length realize to himself a picture of the Jerusalem of antiquity."

For the next eighty pages, the Baedeker describes the holy city's history and sights in vivid commentary, detailing the scholarly basis for its descriptions of the buildings and monuments. Practical information on hotels, restaurants, banks, consulates, pharmacies and tailors takes up less than two pages. For the handbook for Egypt and the Sudan published two years later, Baedeker hired nearly a dozen scholars—historians, archeologists, linguists—to write about Egypt's art, history, religion and hieroglyphics. He included a nineteen-page dictionary of "essential" Arabic words and

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expected the traveler to spend at least four weeks in the country to fully appreciate what they were seeing. Nothing should be missed: "The Sphinx, the guardian of the sacred enclosure of the Second Pyramid is a colossal recumbent lion with the head of a king wearing the royal head-dress. . . . The head is now deplorably mutilated; the neck has become too thin, the nose and beard have been broken off and the reddish tint has almost disappeared. But in spite of all injuries it preserves even now an impressive expression of strength and majesty."

By today's standards, the writing in these books is more stuffy than lyrical, but the guides were complete. In those days, if you made only one trip to Peking or Rome, you wanted to inhale as much history and culture as possible and be prepared for every possible mishap.

In the United States, the *National Geographic* magazine offered something different: armchair travel. Arriving on the scene about the same time as the Baedekers, the *National Geographic* was a magazine with scientific intentions to explore unmapped wilderness and publish articles about the geography of the planet. The first editions featured stories about the river systems of Pennsylvania and the digging of the Panama Canal, which describes the author's overland trek surveying the jungle, including nightly suppers of wild pig, monkey or iguana. Explorations were as common as articles about "The Hermit Nation of Korea" or "Peking: the City of the Unexpected."

By the time of World War I, travelogues were taking on the air of anthropology. Traveling by camel caravan across the Sahara to Tunisia's prize date gardens, Thomas H. Kearney began his article with an Arab proverb that the palm tree thrives with "its feet in the water and its head in the fire" in the Sahara oases. By the 1920s, the *National Geographic* had declared itself "pre-eminently a magazine of travel," reducing its emphasis on scientific explorations. Showing a new inclination to savor travel, the *Geographic* published articles like a winter's "ramble" through Concord, Massachusetts, to honor Henry David Thoreau by retracing the poet's steps to photograph "ice that looks like a loose web of small white feathers."

The world still needed explorers—Admiral Richard E. Byrd received the *Geographic's* Special Gold Medal of Honor in 1930 for his Arctic voyage—but more of the globe was now pleasant enough for tourists. Au-

thors like Rudyard Kipling and Evelyn Waugh wrote sophisticated essays for the *Geographic* that resembled articles by foreign correspondents, weaving current events into portraits of foreign cultures and countries.

A master of the genre was Rebecca West. In her *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, *A Journey Through Yugoslavia*, Ms. West produced a travelogue that any tourist could follow, bringing the country and culture to life and plotting out the routes she took across the region, painting unforgettable portraits: "Under red and white umbrellas in the market place of Zagreb the peasants stood sturdy and square on their feet. The women wore two broad aprons, one covering the front part of the body and one the back, overlapping at the sides, and underneath showed very brave red woolen stockings. They gave the sense of the very opposite of what we mean by the word 'peasant' when we use it in a derogatory sense, thinking of women made doltish by repeated pregnancies and a lifetime spent in the service of oak in villages that swim in mud to the thresholds every winter. This costume was evolved by women who could stride along if they were eight months gone with child, and who would dance in the mud if they felt like it, no matter what any oaf said."

She also explored why this region was the source of such trouble for Europe. Written as World War II was about to break out, she presumed the traveler wanted to understand the complicated history that had turned this corner of Europe into a tinderbox. Her goal, she said, was to write about "the past side by side with the present it created. . . . Bosnia and Herzegovina had driven out the Turks and had been cheated out of the freedom they had fairly won by the Treaty of Berlin, which had given the Austro-Hungarian Empire the right to occupy and administer them. This had enraged the Slavs and given Serbia a grievance."

Fifty years later, when the Bosnian War broke out and Yugoslavia was torn apart forever, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* was the favorite book used by journalists trying to understand the spirit of the country as well as its history. The rich and long tradition of literary travel exemplified by Rebecca West remains alive and well. Some date it back to Homer and his epic poem of the travels of Odysseus. The nineteenth-century writers and explorers Richard Burton and Freya Stark are part of the pantheon that added many more literary travel writers in the twentieth century. Bruce

Chatwin, Paul Theroux, Jani Morris, Bill Bryson, Pico Iyer and others who have kept up the standards and expanded the genre.

The earliest publishers of travel brochures were wary of advertisements for hotels or luggage that might expect special recommendations in their books and newspapers. Karl Baedeker handled that problem by promising his readers in Victorian language that "the Editor begs to intimate that a character for fair dealing towards travelers is the sole passport to his commendation, and that no advertisements of any kind are admitted to his handbooks."

Most publications couldn't afford such high-minded scruples. After World War II the travel industry became the single largest source of advertising for newspapers; at its high point in the 1960s the industry accounted for one-fourth of all the ad revenue.

Normally there is a firewall between advertisers and journalists; advertisers do not receive special treatment from reporters. But the travel industry wanted more than the privilege of buying ad space. They hired public relations firms to work hand-in-glove with journalists, giving them free trips, meals, hotels and nights on the town and then expecting them to write rave reviews.

Stuart Newman was in on the ground floor of this eventually corrupt relationship. Newman is very much in the mold of Arthur Frommer. A veteran of World War II, he, too, jumped into the world of travel after he was discharged from the army, but he landed on the public relations side. He opened his own firm in Miami, and saw manipulating travel writers to the benefit of his clients as the purpose of his business. It seemed straightforward to Newman: convince newspaper reporters to write about a new travel destination, give away free trips to the destination and, when necessary, help write the articles.

Newman told me that in those days the relationship between public relations and the press "were considerably more relaxed." By "relaxed" Newman said he meant that when he wanted a story that promoted one of his clients' restaurants or hotels or nightclubs "I would frequently go to the city rooms of the *Miami Herald* and *Miami News*, sit at a manual typewriter, use their copy paper and knock out stories."

Soon the standard form of influencing travel writers was with the free

trip, known in the trade as a "fam" trip or a trip to "familiarize" the writer with the destination being promoted. Newman said he gave away more airplane tickets, hotel vouchers, drinks at nightclubs and meal vouchers than he can remember. "The biggest challenge in generating major coverage for our travel industry clients remains the policies of media which prohibit press trips and complimentary resort and cruise accommodations. This was not the case in earlier years," he said. "In the 1950s and early 1960s the *Miami Herald's* travel editor had no problem with complimentary travel," he said. The exceptions were the *New York Times* and *Time Life* magazines, which refused to take anything for free.

The practice was so prevalent that some journalists took the free trips but never wrote about them in their newspapers or magazines. It got so bad that companies like the now-defunct Pan American Airways would only give away free tickets to journalists who signed a letter of intent to write up the trip.

The media made this habit even more questionable by hiding the fact that its reporters had accepted freebies. To this day, American travel writers are not required to admit in their stories that their travel was paid for by the hotel, restaurant and airline that are the subjects of their articles. It is the equivalent of allowing the Republican and Democratic parties to pay the expenses of the journalists covering their political conventions and then never publishing the fact. That would be declared corrupt and the antithesis of ethical journalism. Yet it is the engrained way of writing about travel in the United States, much of Europe and Asia. From the beginning, publications didn't question the idea of getting free trips. The editors told themselves it was the only way they could afford to cover the travel world. And the public relations professionals were thrilled, knowing that a hand-zone write-up or recommendation in a magazine was far more credible than an advertisement or brochure.

The *New York Times* Travel section stands out for its refusal to take any free travel and for its breadth of coverage. (I was a *New York Times* correspondent but never wrote for the Travel pages.) The 1980s were a golden age for the paper's Travel section, which grew to an enormous size, filling 16 to 46 pages each Sunday. Reporters routinely wrote 3,000-word articles that read like literary essays.

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Michael Leahy was the *Times* travel editor from 1982 to 1986, and he credits Arthur Gelb, the newspaper's managing editor, with the decision to make travel writing "livelier and more ambitious." Comfortable travel was no longer confined to Europe but extended to parts of Africa, South America, Asia and the Middle East, and Australia. If the Soviet Union and other Communist bastions were closed off, it mattered little to tourists. With his new mandate, Mr. Leahy published articles by the newspaper's foreign staff, including R. W. Apple, Jr., the London bureau chief whose well-researched and witty articles on Europe became the standard for travel writing; Drew Middleton, the military correspondent who wrote vivid set pieces like one walking through Churchill's command post; and Joseph Lelyveld, whose travel articles from South Africa never erased the cruel reality of apartheid from the dazzling landscape of the continent. These were not travel writers discussing thread counts of bed linen at fancy hotels but foreign correspondents who knew these countries intimately.

Mr. Leahy went far afield when commissioning stories from luminaries in other fields. Muriel Spark, the novelist, wrote about Tuscany; V. S. Pritchett, critic and essayist, wrote on Seville; Patricia Wells, the food critic, on Paris restaurants; Sari Nuseibeh, a Palestinian academic, wrote on Jerusalem as an Islamic city; and Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and author, wrote about Jerusalem as the Jewish City of David. It didn't hurt that these were the years that advertising from the tourism industry often accounted for one-fourth of newspaper advertising revenue. "The sections were very, very fat but you had this Chinese wall between the advertising side and the editorial side. All I knew is that I had great big sections and the luxury of space," said Mr. Leahy.

It meant that he could publish essays like Apple's article comparing British to continental European cuisine. "Eating in Britain, like most things there, has a good deal to do with class," he wrote. "French families of modest means save for months to eat a superb meal on a birthday or a holiday. . . . They were accustomed, they told me, to eating in restaurants about once a week, and they went to the best bistros they could afford except for their twice or thrice-yearly splurge. When they ate at home, I am sure, they also ate well, if simply. There are just not very many people like that in Britain, and without people like that, there is no way that good

restaurants will ever be the norm, as they are in France and Italy and Belgium."

These are strong conclusions in a nuanced and reasonable piece about Britain and its place in European cuisine in the 1980s. It was not an exercise in self-indulgence that was more about Apple than England. However, all of that was about to change.

Nancy Newhouse was in charge of the Travel section when the Cold War ended. "We covered a great deal more of geography," said Newhouse, who went to Eastern Europe to see for herself the attraction of these newly open nations. Prague, she told me, "was definitely a sleeping beauty. It was like opening a door and seeing this magical city." Dresden in the former East Germany was "sad, deeply sad and yet they saved all the art, an astonishing collection."

An elegant woman who had been the editor of the newspaper's international Style section, Newhouse was a veteran of the "lifestyle" genre of reporting. With so many more nations to cover and technological changes in the travel industry, she refined her writers' mission to concentrate on describing the experience of traveling to a certain destination and to write consumer stories to help tourists make the most of those trips. "It was an evolution from travel writing to up-to-the-minute consumer travel reporting," she said in a long interview at her brownstone in Manhattan. "We still had literary pieces but on the other end of the spectrum we ran consumer pieces."

These new consumer pieces were shorter and reported on lower fares and bargain flights, and they were decidedly subjective, emphasizing the personal point of view. "If you lose the vision of an individual, how they interpret a country, you've lost the heart of travel," Newhouse said. Travel writing was becoming reporting an "experience" where the reporter didn't need to know that much about Burma as show a talent for telling a good story about the experience of visiting Burma and well-researched recommendations for where to spend the night.

This produced the major emphasis on "good news only" consumer travel writing. Travel sections told the reader where to go and what to do, but not what to avoid. Newhouse believes this is appropriate journalism and says that her reporters will check out ten hotels in a city in order to

recommend the four best. They won't mention the six that didn't make the cut. "We didn't give out the bad report cards."

"We never did the ten worst, only the ten best," she said for emphasis. There were hints of problems—overcrowding at historic sites like the Taj Mahal, pollution by cruise ships—but the larger picture of the enormous changes in the travel and tourism industry, and the dark side of those changes, went unmentioned. "At our staff meetings we constantly brought up changes in travel and we used changes in the industry as a jumping-off point to discuss changes in the way we travel," said Newhouse. "It was the whole newspaper's failing not to cover the tourism industry—the sex trade in tourism, environmental and cultural degradation; that's legitimate news but not for us, for the travel pages," she said.

That is the standard for travel journalism at its best, according to more than one dozen travel editors I interviewed. The critical judgment, they all said, came in their recommendations for best value or exotic new destination. And they rejected any suggestion that this kind of writing looked more like an extension of the industry—telling readers how to spend money traveling.

The rise of the Internet confirmed this direction. With its websites rating hotels, airlines, restaurants, and tours, travel writing became singularly focused on practical consumer information. Catharine Hamm, the travel editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, told me she has made news and consumer information her chief mission to lure back readers. Her reporters write about the fluctuating dollar, the change in passport requirements, effects of the price of gasoline, the best luggage and travel clothes or, more recently, which hotels have serious environment standards.

"Our competition is everybody and everything. Travel news and information is so big out there—guidebooks, websites, magazines, that we compete with anything that takes time or eyeballs away from us," she said, explaining she needs those eyeballs to hold on to advertisers. Despite their mission statements and the hard work it takes to put out their sections, travel editors know their pages are meant to attract advertisements.

Travel sections are not and never have been an essential part of the core journalist mission of a newspaper, said Stuart Emmrich, the successor of Newhouse at the *New York Times*. Instead, he said, "travel is designed to

bring readers to the newspaper." To that end, Emmrich has enlivened the section with off-beat angles on travel and a "frugal traveler" feature that has raised the paper's image as one for wealthy readers only.

Few newspapers or websites have the budgets of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* and magazines like *Condé Nast Traveler* and the *National Geographic* that pay all the expenses of their reporters and forbid accepting gifts. The transformation of travel writing into an extension of the tourism industry was cemented by the financial difficulties in the media business. In every other form of journalism free travel is a gift and considered a serious conflict of interest. "If you take ethics seriously, the same policies that cover news gathering have to apply to travel coverage," said Kelly McBride, an ethics specialist at the Poynter Institute. "Free travel is not acceptable."

Without free travel, most self-described travel writers would be out of business. And those free trips don't come easy. Writers have to compete for them. Laura Daily, a freelance travel reporter, was the 2008 president of the Society of American Travel Writers, a professional networking organization with over 1,000 members that helps arrange the junkets. Daily defends the free trips and routinely accepts them from the destinations she covers. "There is no way in this day and age that you can go to Antarctica and sell the story to newspapers without some sort of subsidy," she told me. "If you're lucky, a newspaper will pay you \$350 for a lead story."

She said she never questioned why a cruise ship pays for her trip rather than buys an advertisement. But she said that the subsidies did not affect her judgment. "No quid pro quo is allowed. That is a no-no. No coming on a media trip in exchange for a positive story," she said.

She did say that her articles are generally positive—she could not give a single example of writing a negative review.

Her description of how those free trips are doled out suggests considerable influence by the industry. At conferences of the Society of American Travel Writers, journalists meet with travel industry publicists like Stuart Newman. There the journalists pitch stories to the publicists to convince them to pay for their trips. Daily described the event as "sort of like speed dating," where journalists hop from table to table to discuss new tourism venues, new trends and get approval for new trips paid for by the industry.

Virginia Sheridan is the president of M. Silvers Associates, a public relations firm that specializes in the travel industry. She is a member of the travel society and attends those conferences because, she told me, her relationship with journalists largely consists of pitching stories for her clients in the same way that political operatives pitch stories that help their candidates. And with today's tighter deadlines and fierce competition among freelance reporters, she said, "our relationship with the lifestyle and travel and tourism journalists has gotten closer."

There are exceptions to this close relationship. The *New Yorker* magazine publishes an annual travel issue that often includes in-depth articles on the industry. Writers Rick Steves, Anthony Bourdain and Rudy Maxa are not only travel gurus for consumers but can be critical of the industry. Among daily newspapers, the *Miami Herald* has a beat in the Business section dedicated to the industry; thanks in part to Tom Fiedler, one of the few newspaper editors who routinely covered tourism as a major industry, not simply as a pastime or lifestyle. First as a reporter and then as executive editor of the *Herald*, Fiedler watched the tourism industry transform Florida, and not always for the better. When he became the newspaper's executive editor, Fiedler created the tourism beat and assigned Douglas Hanks III to cover Florida's \$50 billion industry.

As the *Miami Herald* tourism reporter, Hanks routinely wrote about the extraordinary power of the Florida tourism industry, including its successful lobbying to prevent Florida schools from lengthening the school year by shortening summer vacation—a change that would have prevented high school students from working the entire summer tourist season. Hanks wrote about the tourism board's iron-clad influence over development, taxes and other issues that the industry fears might cut into tourism to the "Sunshine State." He interviewed British travel writers eating lobster bisque at an upscale South Beach restaurant on a free vacation organized by the Greater Miami tourism board, which gives away three hundred trips a year that include free meals at Miami restaurants and free hotel rooms. The publicist for one of these restaurants told Hanks that giving travel writers free meals was the only marketing she did. It was much more effective and much cheaper than old-fashioned advertising.

However, Jane Wooldridge, the former *Miami Herald* travel editor

and now the newspaper's business editor, said she often ignored the newspaper's strict prohibition against accepting freelance journalist articles if those pieces were based on travels subsidized by the industry. She said she had to fill her section and didn't want to depend solely on wealthy writers who paid their own way. "It's a pile of crap that we're all pure," she said.

Fiedler, now the dean of the College of Communications at Boston University, said the line between a tourist pamphlet and a travel piece is far too fuzzy. He blamed the extraordinary amount of advertising revenue newspapers earn from the tourism industry. "I don't know if it's a cultural inhibitor that takes hold so you only write good news stories," he told me. "If you were looking at it cynically, it is a conspiracy of silence."

Travel writing and its refusal to treat the industry seriously can take some of the blame for tourism's frivolous reputation.

The final anomaly is the central role of government. Tourism is that rare industry whose "product" is a country. Travelers first decide what countries to visit, and then what city, region, beach resort or historic site. And all travelers to foreign lands must pass through borders that are controlled by a government that issues visas, stamps passports or turns people away.

That is only the beginning. Governments are like the head of the shop, controlling in obvious and subtle ways just about everything that affects travel and tourism. Governments can preserve cultural sites or allow them to be destroyed; they can set aside wilderness areas or issue permits to build resorts along a deserted beach; they can require sewage and water installations for any new construction or they can build super airports that flood rural areas with tens of thousands of tourists. Some preservationists see proper tourism as a salvation for remote areas; others see tourism as their death. Governments—local, regional and national levels—decide whether an international company can build a new hotel, whether to give a new route to an airline, whether to build a conference center, whether to bid for an international event like the Olympics. The list is endless and is bound to the industry.

Finally, governments are the main sales force for tourism. Offices and agencies of tourism spend millions of dollars promoting their country to tourists, with brands and slogans like "New Zealand—100% Pure";

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"Incredible India"; "Austria. You've arrived!"; "South Africa: Inspiring new ways" or "Smile, you're in Spain." National tourism websites are the starting point for many travelers; some websites are translated into up to ten languages. Embassies in foreign countries provide tourism information as well as visas. The best wildlife resort in Zambia depends on the government promoting Zambia to lure tourists to the game parks.

The United States is the exception. The Republican members of Congress sponsored and passed legislation to remove government from the tourism business in 1996. The Clinton administration dismantled most of the government tourism agency and the United States resigned from the U.N. World Tourism Organization. Patrice Tedjini, the historian of the UNWTO, said the U.S. resignation created a crisis for the organization. The tourism industry is built around countries. Cooperation, innovation, improved policies, require government participation. When the United States pulled out of UNWTO, it was the most popular tourist destination in the world. Since then, the U.S. growth has flattened and countries like China are becoming big forces in the industry.

"Now we are in a new period," said Tedjini. "We believe we are in a great period."

I interviewed Tedjini and six other UNWTO experts during several days at the Madrid headquarters near the Cuzco subway stop. The city sparkled; now it is anything but a punishment to be posted in Madrid, with its noble museums and restaurants that stay open late, serving tapas long after midnight. Marcelo Risi, spokesman at the UNWTO, organized my visit and guided me through the cramped office complex. In several decades covering international organizations, I have probably seen only one underfunded U.N. agency—this one. As the smallest full-fledged U.N. agency as well as the newest—winning that status in 2003—the tourism organization is strapped for cash and operates with a staff of 100 people. The members include 150 countries, and hundreds of member affiliates, including universities, industry groups and nongovernmental organizations. Yet at times it can barely afford to translate its works. A 2008 study of the cruise industry, with its growing popularity as well as its spotty record of polluting the seas, was only available in Spanish during my visit; no English was available due to budget cuts.

Its mission is to keep statistics on the tourism phenomenon and help governments and organizations figure out how tourism can be more of a help than a hindrance to the planet. A representative of the UNWTO attends climate control talks, environmental conclaves and endless tourism conventions, providing expert reports and advice.

Little of that is interesting to travel writers; you rarely see journalists from upscale glossy magazines at the UNWTO office. Most visitors to the headquarters when I visited in June were foreign tourism officials or academics who happily bought specialty volumes on subjects like how tourism can protect local handicrafts or the interplay of tourism, religions and culture. The visitor ledger that first day listed three professors from the University of Surrey and one from the University of Hawaii. Risi and other experts took pains to describe how the industry is slowly moving toward accepting rules and guidelines that would put "sustainability" or intelligent growth at the center of their policies. "The issue of numbers of tourists, what they do, that is the key to sustainability," said Luigi Cabrini, the UNWTO's expert on the subject. "We have to get away from the idea that sustainability is just ecotourism with five people alone walking in a forest. We need models of good practices."

The reputation of tourism is often poor, and rightly so," said Cabrini. It is an extremely sensitive sector. We need ethics codes, guidelines, statistics and data that help the industry, and to work with business, education, governments. That means also looking at pollution; environmental degradation; corporate cultural monotony of tourist establishments; international tourism that undermines local economies and dealing with the sheer number of tourists. In the end, tourism plays an important role alleviating poverty, widening appreciation of different cultures, as informal diplomacy and exchanging wealth from the rich to the poor nations."

The hot June sun lit the medieval square where I was waiting near the Grand Canal Bridge of Venice. I was early for an appointment with Claudio Puggiarin, who is active in a community group trying to control tourism in their city. Puggiarin and I had traded emails, and he had agreed to meet me with two of his friends for a Saturday morning coffee. I had forgotten to ask how I would recognize them. There was no shade at the central

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fountain, our meeting spot. My husband Bill and I were both sweating. Would the Italians show up? Then on cue, the men arrived from different directions, laughing at each other's tardiness and introducing themselves to me. I had forgotten the basic rule that locals know their town, know who normally mingles in that square and would pick out foreigners like me in a heartbeat.

That scene was repeated countless times during my travels for this book. Strangers opened up their lives and guided me through their role in the industry. This book is a narrative of those journeys; of the people who graciously explained how they fit into the industry, demonstrating why it is known as the hospitality industry; of the countries with their special history and culture that determined how tourism worked whether in Europe or the Middle East; of the tourists and their experiences on trips that cost them a nice chunk of their income. All with the goal of trying to grasp the extraordinary dimensions of the industry. There seemed no better way to describe the "product" and the industry than actually taking those trips and telling the story from every possible perspective.

In Sri Lanka, a senior diplomat who had been transferred to the Tourism Ministry explained to me how, just months after Sri Lanka's long civil war finally ended, the country was betting its future on tourism. Bill and I tested that assertion, touring the tropical southern coast to meet hoteliers and investors, and traveling up the hills around Kandy on bumpy roads with monkeys swinging in the trees and the proverbial paradise waiting to be exploited.

On a typical Caribbean cruise from Miami to Belize and back, fellow tourists told me in the cavernous, elegant dining room that they rarely got off the ship to visit a foreign port and then attended ship lectures on how to buy diamonds mined in Africa and sold in shops at the Caribbean ports expressly designed for cruise passengers. A few months later I flew back to Miami, where the head of the cruise line explained why his company refuses to register as an American company and be subject to many American laws.

In Brazil I went from a lavish banquet with international tourist executives at an Atlantic coast resort to the vast, seemingly empty Amazon forest where some of those same travel leaders were trying to save a corner of

the wilderness. History was everywhere, especially in nature. During an African safari in Zambia, the normal road to our base camp was flooded, forcing our Land Cruiser to take a circuitous route through the hills and allowing me a rare glimpse, at twilight, of one of Africa's majestic sable antelopes. They could disappear, I was told repeatedly, since those wildlife parks are still viewed suspiciously as a legacy of white colonial rule rather than as an essential part of Africa's culture.

The most familiar countries offered surprises. During my first research trip to Cambodia I asked the minister of tourism a basic question: what is the most popular tourist spot in Phnom Penh, the capital? His answer was "Tuol Sleng." I nearly dropped my pen. Tuol Sleng is the former torture and execution center of the Khmer Rouge. Like other researchers, I have spent countless hours studying its files, doubling over with horror at the story they tell of sadism and pain: the antithesis of "tourism." Yet Tuol Sleng's cells and instruments of torture preserved as a cautionary museum are now part of a new phenomenon known as "dark tourism."

One morning I took the five-minute ferry across Bangkok's Chao Phraya River to the Oriental Thai Cooking School of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. My fellow students included a professional chef from Australia working on a yacht, a Portuguese financier visiting from Hong Kong and a newly-wed bride from Brazil. They were expert with knives and Asian spices, and able to take advantage of an expensive course: roughly \$100 for a three-hour, hands-on lesson that became our three-course lunch. Chef Martin Kiattiyotcharoen's menu that day included pad thai, the spaghetti of Southeast Asian cuisine. For me it was an introduction into the world of "gastronomic or culinary tourism," which brings in as much as 5 billion euros to Italy alone. Ultimately, I decided to spotlight wine tourism in a trip through Bordeaux. Likewise, my interviews with young Spanish hotel owners trying to cobble together a gay-friendly tour circuit had to be put aside. The gay and lesbian tourism market is considered potentially among the most lucrative, as is the retired-seniors market, but this book is not meant to be encyclopedic.

I crossed the two continent-size countries central to the travel industry; in China, traveling roughly north to south from Beijing to Shanghai and then Xian and Chengdu, and in the United States going east to west from

twenty tourists to the bowels of the old palace and an exhibit of Egyptian art, through the Greeks, then the Romans, then Renaissance Italians and then the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, the star of the museum.

"Be careful," he said, "follow me and we'll see how close we can get."

She is now housed in the enormous, gilded Salle des États, redesigned in 2005 to reduce the traffic jams of the painting's admirers and to better showcase the most famous painting on the planet. With our headsets pressed to our ears, we could barely hear Julian above the loud babble of the crowd. The *Mona Lisa* with her mysterious smile is now sheltered behind a massive clear glass shield and hangs by itself on one wall. The painting is lit so subtly that visitors can admire it from great distances in the room. The renovations cost \$6.2 million and were paid for by Nippon Television of Japan, a testament to the painting's popularity.

"It is not only famous, it is important in art history," said Julian, excitedly opening a path for us.

When the *Mona Lisa* was relocated in this gallery, the Louvre counted 8.6 million visitors a year, more than three-fourths of whom said they had come to see that one painting. Seven years later the number of visitors has jumped to 8.8 million. The Louvre has kept up with the demand and reinforced the most visited museum in the world because it invested \$16 million to build the pyramid and the Japanese refurbished the *Mona Lisa* gallery. What expensive adjustments will be required when the number of visitors double?

France, as the number-one tourist destination in the world, is a country with a government that thinks deeply about such questions.

the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the beach on Waikiki in Hawaii, readjusting my interview schedules as I examined the connections between the two behemoths. Gambling in Macau undercut gambling in Las Vegas. Generations of dreams of Disneyland translated into theme parks in Shanghai.

Everywhere, I ran across wilderness areas modeled after America's national park system: a favorite was an island off Costa Rica that was a former penal colony left to return to nature along with its surrounding seas, where we swam in crystal-clear water.

In the sands around Dubai and Abu Dhabi, I watched the stream of airplanes taking off and landing that have turned this once-deserted corner of the globe into a massive tourist hub, rivaling Singapore and Britain. Europeans have become so concerned about the pollution caused by the constantly growing air traffic that they have included airplanes in their carbon emissions trading system and as of 2013 are imposing a small carbon allowance on every airplane ticket for travel to, within and from the continent—roughly \$3 per ticket.

Pollution and environmental degradation are the serious downside of those crowds of tourists and travelers who are making 1 billion discrete foreign trips every year and possibly three times that many trips within their own countries. With over 7 billion people now on Earth, there is little doubt that the number of trips will rise, raising urgent questions about responsibilities. Travel is an extraordinary pleasure and was once a privilege. Now it is considered a basic right without limits or a sense of responsibility for how all this travel is affecting the places we love.

A tour of the Louvre in Paris is a case in point, a rare example of smart crowd control that has worked, so far. President François Mitterrand commissioned I. M. Pei to create a new entryway to help guide the growing number of visitors, which became the glass pyramid built in 1989 in the central courtyard. The redesign transformed the museum.

On a recent summer morning I joined an English-speaking group guided by Julian, a tall French graduate student with long hair, a beard, scarf and not-quite-scruffy jeans. He said he was completing his doctorate in art history. Besides English, he gives tours in his native French as well as in Spanish. Wearing his headset with microphone, he led our group of