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REDUCING CULTURAL BARRIERS THROUGH TRAVEL--  
LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA AND ASIA

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ABSTRACT

With increased leisure time, improvements in world transportation and heightened global awareness, interest has surged in visiting the far corners of the world. The countries of the developing world have much to offer in terms of Geography, History, Archaeology, Biology, and Culture. The benefits of visiting Asia, Africa, and Latin America are immense to the visitor and to the host. This article brings to light some of these benefits and provides some insight on preserving the heritage of the host people and their sites.

REDUCING CULTURAL BARRIERS THROUGH TRAVEL--  
LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA AND ASIA

The doors of the world are opening faster than ever as more and more people leave to explore distant lands and far away shores. There is a sincere, growing interest in visiting foreign lands for more than a holiday. The desire for new travel experiences grows with each successive journey and those that venture into developing countries can be rewarded by their contact with new lands, new peoples and new ways of life. Although the benefits are great for both guest and host, a delicate approach must be taken to preserve the heritage of the people, the sanctity of the sites, and a peaceful understanding between cultures.

Travel agents are usually well informed on the availability of tours, cruises, customs, accommodations and sites of already established tourist destinations. That task becomes increasingly difficult when the desired location is in more remote areas in Latin America, Africa and Asia. There, the development of tourist facilities has lagged behind that of more industrialized countries. Less has been publicized about the nature of the people and the places that would interest travellers. The more adventurous and further off the beaten path the more difficult it becomes for the agent to match client desire with the right travel option. While some dealers have reduced their practices to bum on seats, last minute discount houses others have flourished to support those that wish more than discounted air fares and well worn tourist destinations.

Tourism to Africa, Asia and Latin America support the latter category.

By travelling to non-established destinations the visitor has a chance to learn by experience the wonders of nature and the diversity of culture. The waters offshore of the Moluccas abound in coral barriers. The richness of species diversity make it one of the best dive sites in the world to explore reef ecology. Temple spires, Royal Palaces and Buddhist Monasteries rest between the majestic Himalayan peaks in Tibet. Along the banks of the mighty Amazon villagers dance their perceptions of life. In ceremony they give thanks to the forces responsible for past prosperity and those who will be responsible for future success.

The earth is rich in geography, history, archaeology, biology and culture. The rise and fall of new world civilizations left behind an array of monuments from Guatemala to Chile. The variety and abundance of mammals in East Africa is unparalleled. Indonesia has its volcanoes and the Middle East its religious diversity. The thousand tribal groups of Papua New Guinea offer a glimpse of peoples living the traditions of their stone age ancestors.

With increased leisure time, increased standards of living, and improvements in plane, boat and bus transport, travellers are able to wander virtually anywhere. With a little time and a little money the far corners of the world unravel before the eyes. Recent developments in travel stretch far into the heart of Asia, Africa and Latin America. These nations have a great deal to offer the world of tourism. There are nomadic civilizations in the Sahara, mountain temples in Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, and rare and exotic birds in the cloud forests of Costa Rica. The megalithic statues in the Lore forests of Central Sulawesi once accessible only on foot now can be visited via a highway linking the North of the Island to the South. There are air strips to most of the tiny villages in the Papua New Guinea highlands. The isolated shores of Patagonia no longer require an expedition to reach.

A look at travel in Asia, Africa and Latin America will illustrate some of the opportunities that developing destinations offer and hopefully provide insight into the benefits to tourism to these areas.

#### A NATURE RESERVE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia's largest park, Gunung Leuser sits in Aceh province of Indonesia's North Sumatra. This large rainforest and river area is relatively untouched by travellers. The area consists primarily of lowland rainforest. Waterfalls cascade down cliffs and swift flowing rivers pass gorges cut through the limestone mountains. The abundance and variation of flora and fauna makes this one of the most spectacular wildlife reserves in the world. Primates found here include orang-hutans, siamangs, macaques, gibbons, and several species of monkeys. Although not easily seen in the dense vegetation, their sounds echo through the jungle. There are many other large mammals including elephants, tigers, rhinos and leopards. Native birds and colourful insects are a more common sighting.

A chance to see orang-hutans is made available at an Orang-Hutan Rehabilitation Centre in the forest region of Gunung Leuser along the parks west border. The station is situated on beside the small village of Bukit Lawang, a five hour bus journey from the Sumatran capital city of Medan. Orangs are taken from captivity and readapted to their natural habitat. The centre teaches the orangs to find food, build shelters, and care for themselves in the wilds. Those that learn the survival skills are released deeper in the jungle. The public is admitted to view the orangs each day between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

It is possible to hire guides to tramp deep into the wilds. White water rafting along the Alas River also provides an excellent opportunity to explore areas that have not seen too many visitors. A journey to these regions is an unforgettable experience.

## EGYPT

The world's longest river threads a green path through the deserts of Egypt continuing 4000 miles into the heart of Africa. Ninety-six percent of Egyptians live along the fertile Nile valley. The great Sphinx and the towering pyramids of Giza lie just eight miles from Cairo, gateway to the world of the ancient Pharaohs. The pyramids here are one of wonders of the world that have impressed man for four-thousand five-hundred years. Many of the artifacts that have survived theft and time are housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Statues to the Gods, precious metals and jewelry, furniture, clay vessels and paintings help present an idea of the history of a vanished culture.

The Nile waters pass villagers farming by the banks and fishing along the shores. It flows past the great monuments that have been preserved by the aridity of the Egyptian desert. It passes Luxor, the ancient capital known then as Thebes. The east bank of Thebes was the home of the living while the west bank was the land of the dead. More than sixty tombs lie in the Valley of Kings built to bury the nobility and house the possessions that would accompany them on their journey to eternal life. The tomb of Tutankhamun was discovered in this valley in 1922 with its full collection of thirty-five hundred year old treasures. Also here are the Valley of the Queens, the elaborate paintings on the walls of the Tombs of the Nobles, the temple complex of Karnak, the Colossi of Menmon, and the grand terraced temple of Deir el Bahri.

Further upstream lies Aswan with its grand dam. The completion of project in the 1960's brought an end to the Nile cycles of droughts and floods. Two hundred and seventy-four kilometers south of Aswan sit the temples Ramses II built in his honour. Outside the first temple stand four massive statues of Ramses carved into the cliffs near the dark blue waters of Lake Nasser. The second temple was built for Queen Nefertari, favourite wife of the vain Pharaoh. Statues of various Gods, carvings, paintings and bas reliefs fill the inner chambers. On the Island of Agilkia near to Aswan is the temple of the Goddess Isis. The area has many other ruins that are less frequently visited. One can travel sections of the Nile by luxury cruise or by feluccas, wooden cargo boats.

## LATIN AMERICA

Peru is a fascinating destination to witness the culmination of the Inca empire. The near perfect masonry of Incan architecture has survived the threat of war and weather to offer a peak at the history of this great civilization. Stone palaces, temples, fortresses and villages lie in the Cuzco area, the archaeology capital of South America. Almost one-half of today's Peruvians are descendants of original Indian inhabitants. They hang on to an ancient culture in a country that has seen centuries of change.

Near to Cuzco, lies the Sacred Valley of the Incas. It is possible to take a trek along this lush stretch of country that served as an ancient highway between the lesser known Inca settlements. It was never found by the Spanish and remains how the Incas laid it out. Starting from Ollantaytambo, seventy kilometers from Cuzco the wonders begin with a great stone village and fortress. The most impressive structure being the temple of the sun (although in ruins it is still magnificent). Between the town and the temple fortress lies the bath of the princess, a waterfall emerges from a natural spring which channels artfully through the rocks.

It is a five hour hike to the start of the Inca trail and then three to five days following to Machu Pichu, lost city of the Incas. The trail follows a gorge cut along the Urubamba River and leads to the incredible citadel atop a nine thousand foot green ridge. There are two hundred and twenty stone buildings and temples which were masked by six centuries of jungle growth until their discovery in 1911 by explorer Hiram Bingham.

All along the trail are archaeological sites in various states of ruin. Good examples lie at Llactapata, Runkuracay, Sayajmarca, Puyapatamarca, and Winay-Wayna. The ascent into the high country is gradual at first. The trail then becomes rugged and steep. The course leads past rivers, waterfalls, mountain meadows, rain and bamboo forests, always in view of the snow capped andean ranges. Guides sold in Cuzco lay out the route.

Not everyone is cut out for the conditions of some developing country destinations and extra caution is needed to describe the reality of the environment. Travelling to remote areas usually requires a little more time than travelling to already built up tourist sites. Transportation schedules tend to be less rigid than in commercial zones. Vehicles may not be modern and breakdowns are not uncommon. The eight o'clock ferry may have left at seven o'clock or maybe won't leave until eleven. Delays are likely to occur where weather conditions are not quite so predictable. Heavy rains may delay a boat journey or wash away a sector of road.

Health risks exist in the tropics that must be safeguarded against. This may require vaccinations, prevention drugs and avoidance practices while in the countries. Tropical cuts easily become tropical ulcers if left unattended. Language differences can also be a problem. Finding out where to catch an on going bus or what is on the menu in a restaurant becomes difficult. Cultural differences can act as barriers and hinder pleasurable experiences. Despite the setbacks of tourism in the

developing world a great deal of satisfaction is possible with the right kind of input.

Satisfaction comes from the combination of what is expected and what is experienced. To maximize satisfaction calls for adequate client preparation. Travel information sources often mislead the clients with their exaggerated descriptions of paradise conditions. The client is often filled with expectations of deserted white sand beaches, first class facilities, friendly locals and spectacular nearby attractions when in fact rip currents restrict the beaches swimming, the luxury hotel is not quite up to par, local peoples resent wealthy foreigners and the only means of visiting the "nearby monastery" is a three day mountain hike. If a travel client is prepared for the imperfections of their destination it eliminates the problem of unreal expectations.

There are no hotels in Gunung Leuser National Park in Sumatra, no Diners Club in Tibet nor is there regular air bus or train service along the Inca trail. A paradise for some does exist but it may be shrouded against a back drop of red tape, troubled environments and lack of basic facilities. Once prepared for the expectations the opportunity exists to enjoy orang hutans in their native jungle, magnificent Buddhist temples and impressive Incan Archaeological wonders. If the disadvantages that might occur are likely to spoil the trip it might be wise to alter plans to a more suitable destination.

Preparation of travellers is hampered by the limited availability of accurate information sources. Advertising through tourist boards, brochures and leaflets require capital for funding. There is little money for that kind of investment in countries where economic instability is marked. Without the money to promote tourism the countries are limited in their ability to boost their own travel industry.

The best information will invariably come from people who have travelled through the area and/or who specialize in travel to that particular region. There has been a significant increase in tourism to Africa, Asia and Latin America. As travel to these areas increases the information that becomes available increases via tour operators, travel agents, newspapers and magazines. Certain agencies do specialize in less touristic regions and they often hold regular seminars and slide shows. Veterans to the areas are usually willing to share their advice and impressions to new venturers.

Many of the countries do have representatives through airlines, tourist offices and embassies. Libraries as well have a wide range of reference materials available to the traveller. There are books on geography, history, religion, flora and fauna. Travel bookstores exist with their collection of guides and novels. With increased tourism, the countries will be able to feed money into the development of travel promotion. Improvements in tourist facilities follow revenues received from tourism.

Travel is capable of evoking lasting and favourable memories. The benefits go beyond the snap shots and souvenirs that return with the journey. There are more inherent values gained by travel interactions. Fresh ideas and alternative ways to perceive develop after being absorbed

in new environments. The mind broadens with each novel encounter.

Travelling to destinations that abound with nature treks, mountain hikes and water sporting possibilities provide a perfect opportunity to test fitness. The thrill of achievement from the challenge of body against nature is ample reward for the courage and endurance needed for this kind of travel.

Travelling to remote lands installs a certain amount of respect and understanding for the customs that are often radically different to those that have been nurtured in the home country. Tolerance and patience arise from dealing with the seemingly backward bureaucratic and transportation systems and the often underdeveloped accommodation and restaurant facilities. Communication and cooperation unfolds with successful interaction with new languages, individuals and groups. The virtues that develop from the demands of new environment travel become apparent when back home. All attributes needed abroad would serve use in day to day living. They remain long after the completion of the trip.

The values to the host country are also significant. The money generated from tourism is a real boost to these countries so in need of economic stability. Indirectly that money feeds its way into education, healthcare and other social services.

The advantages go beyond pure economics. National pride accompanies the ability to attract visitors to the unique attributes of the country. Cultural pride accompanies the chance to share the heritage that is the very essence of the host. The presence of the traveller forces an interaction between the two peoples. If the interaction is favourable it presents the perfect opportunity to lessen the cultural gaps between the meeting cultures.

Travelling should be an exchange between two parties. Those that visit a country, take what is available and leave again without offering a part of themselves are guilty of parasitic tourism. Parasitic tourism leaves scars on the host population and could be detrimental to future visitors. There are ways to avoid negative contact. It is easy to learn a few expressions in the language of the host. The exchange can be a greeting in local tongue. The farther from the beaten path the less likely that a culture will speak English or any other major world languages. Phrase books and dictionaries can be purchased in major cities to break down the barriers. A smile in the market will make purchases a more pleasant experience. During the times that the people show their kindness to visitors a sincere and simple reciprocation would create a bond. Bonding requires so little--a few moments of talk, a photograph, stamps and postcards or a small donation to preserve the nature sanctuary or village temple. The genuine desire to be welcome will produce the acceptance sought.

What is new is a shift to include individual travellers in the role of foreign peace ambassador. Travellers can and do have a significant impact on the countries they visit. Efforts should be made to make that impact absent of detrimental effects on the culture, to the sites or to the environment. Actions should also reflect a healthy impression of the travellers home country. Certain dress restrictions apply to visits to

religious sites. Temple scarves for instance are required by all women entering Balinese shrines. It is improper in muslim countries to eat, point or touch with the left hand. It takes a little bit of time to acquaint oneself with the rules and regulations of a culture but the foresight helps to avoid behaviours viewed as offensive. When respect is observed the physical and natural properties of an environment are preserved through time.

These effects are needed to assure the continued enjoyment of travel to Africa, Asia and Latin America. With the positive elements of world tourism it is possible to lessen cultural as well as economical barriers between the developed and developing nations.