

You Don't Have to See the Must-Sees

I think it was in Frommer's Europe on \$50 a day, in the late 80s, where I first came across the idea of "must-sees", the main tourist attractions designated as required viewing in each place. Must-sees are like the checklist of activities for a place. Do those and you have done the place, like the character Chevy Chase plays in the movie "National Lampoon's European Vacation", where he walks around Paris with his check list, looks at a site for a minute, then happily checks it off his list. That must-see is done, on to the next.



When we first traveled in Europe, we dutifully went to these tourist attractions, but after awhile we started call them "must-not-sees". The must-sees are usually where all the tourists are. They are the famous museums, the famous sights. You will want to see some of them, but pick them according to your interests. If you are interested in art, line up to see the Mona Lisa in Paris. But if you aren't, find some other thing to do that interests you. Don't feel obligated to see the must-sees. There is no rule that you have to visit every major tourist site within reach.

Do what you want to do. You travel for yourself, not to follow someone else's plan or to be able to return home and list off all the famous things you saw.

Cutting Through "Must-see" Materialism



In the 1970's, I read a wonderful book called "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism" by Chogyam Trungpa (Shambhala Publications, 1973). It was about being materialistic even in spiritual matters. Many of us do not pick one spiritual path and go with it; instead we collect religions or spiritual paths. "We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are developing spiritually when instead we are strengthening our egocentricity through spiritual techniques."

It may be a stretch, but I think this idea can be applied to travel. Take a non-materialistic approach to

travel. The travel experience is for you to enjoy, not for you to recount later to friends (besides, your friends are never as interested in your travel as you hope they will be, unless they too are travelers).

Be Your Own Guide



Everyone's interests are different, but we find that some of the best travel experiences come from following the same interests we pursue in everyday life. At home, we love to walk and do light hikes on local trails; no wonder we delight in a day of hiking in the Swiss Alps or the walking trails of England. At home, most days include a coffee and some social contact at our local coffee shop; finding a favorite café or tea room near our vacation rental and visiting it often enough to be recognized provides an unexpected amount of pleasure.

Slow Travelers often describe how they combine personal interests and pleasure on vacation. They enroll in language courses, participate in cooking classes, study a region's wines, follow the "Perugino Trail", attend operas, and explore new extremes of partying. Robert from Santa Monica set out to visit every piazza in Rome which has an obelisk! This type of travel still allows you to see the sights, but centers around what means the most to you, personally; when you return home, you can't wait to start organizing the next trip!

Spend One Week in One Place

Remember those Reader's Digest Condensed Books? War and Peace in 150 pages? Enough to know what the book is about, but not the full experience. Well, don't expect more from the Reader's Digest Condensed Version of Europe: five cities in ten days or worse, five countries in ten days.

It is tempting to do a first trip to Europe like that, but I think this type of travel ultimately turns you away from travel. You do one trip to Europe, get a confusing overview, and never go back because you were running the whole time, you came home exhausted and your memory of the experience is a blur.

The Slow Travel solution is to stay in one place for at least one week on each trip. Your itinerary may include any number of places, but be sure to include a stay in the same accommodation, preferably a vacation rental, for at least one week. This forces you to settle into the rhythm and experience of local life during a part of your travels. Staying in a vacation rental, instead of a hotel, is ideal for Slow Travel. You become a temporary resident of your chosen city, village or countryside area. This gives you the chance to shop for groceries, become a "regular" at a local cafe, attend the local market day and spend

some time just relaxing in the comfort of your own house or apartment. You get to discover some lesser known activities and places of interest in "your" area.

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