

The Evolution of Tourism

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have read reports about the sharp dive suffered by the tourism industry. Perhaps some readers themselves have been affected due to lockdowns and closed borders. One sure lesson learned from this pandemic, though, is that new forms of tourism are necessary; some are already up and running, such as virtual tourism. Additionally, many tourists are now focused on domestic travel guides like LokaLocal, an online social travel platform. While the current situation forces everything towards a new normal, sometimes I like to stop and reflect on tourism as it was like in the past. As a traveller, have you ever wondered what tourism might have been in like decades or even centuries ago?

Let start with the very term *tourism*. Going back to medieval times, up to about the 15th century, the term *tourism* was not applied. In fact, the word *travail* was used to carry the meaning of torture. This term reflected on the complexity of human movement back then, as people suffered from the difficulty of walking or riding on the rough roads, being exposed to extreme weather, having no (or very poor) transportation options. Later, the term *travail* evolved to *travel*, which brought a totally new meaning – to go from one place to another. Subsequently, the word *tour* is derived from the French root word for *tower*, which references circulation. In 1811, the term *tourism* was 'officially' applied, which described a circular itinerary of a tourist moving away from his normal routine and then returning to his point of origin – home.

The changes in terminologies were also reflected on the evolution of tourism itself. One of the earliest human movements was recorded in 776 BCE, when the first Olympic Games took place in Greece. It is documented that people travelled to Mount Olympus from all over Europe and the Middle East. (Ironically, the

2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo had to be postponed specifically to curtail human movement amid a pandemic.) However, the era that encouraged people to travel most vigorously was during the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in the early fourth century, when many people travelled for pilgrimage purposes. Unfortunately, due to an outbreak of disease, then as now, travelling activity ceased. It was later revived during the Renaissance in the mid-15th century. This reformation encouraged groups of the social elite, as well as educators, to travel throughout Europe, which became well-known as 'The Grand Tour', whereby the wealthy travelled along with scholars or tutors to gain new knowledge, particularly on arts and culture. (We still have *study tours* in the modern world, too!) Due to the difficult journey, most grand tours were well-funded, and servants usually came along to carry luggage. (When they called it The Grand Tour, they weren't kidding!)

In following centuries, namely from 1550 to 1820, travelling activities in Europe extended to health treatments, what today we would call *spa tourism*. In England, the town of Bath was a prominent vacation destination for upper-class tourists, not only for spa treatments but also to flaunt their opulent wealth and engage in social activities. Obviously, tourism was definitely a luxury pursuit in those days, and it wasn't really until the Industrial Revolution in 1750, with its many changes yielding spare time and money among the middle class. With the great timing on the innovation of railways, a package tour offered by a brilliant opportunist named Mr. Thomas Cook catalysed and popularised travel, positioning it as a leisurely lifestyle. The transformation resulted in a new tourism era called the *Railway Age*. Unfortunately, the Thomas Cook Group closed down in 2019, after a remarkable 178 years in business. (There is now talk of its revival in the near future, but for now, it remains another Covid casualty.)

Meanwhile, in Asia, the *Silk Route* included some of earliest records tracing regular human movement, beginning in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 25 CE) and further branching out to seven routes during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), which connected China to Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Europe, Africa, and other Asian countries. Due to the immense geographical coverage, challenges such as extreme climates, language barriers, and cultural contrasts made journeys difficult and dangerous. Despite this, the Silk Routes served as an important travelling channel, where foods, technology, arts, culture, and literature were shared between China and other neighbouring countries.

In more modern times, up to today human movement and ease of travel are more prolific than ever before (apart from the current pandemic). Transportation improvements, socio-political and diplomatic progress, and innovation of travel-centred entrepreneurs have all contributed to the tourism industry. Since the end of WWII, the industry has grown and expanded until today, the so-called *modern tourism* era. Whatever comes next in the post-pandemic era, it's clear the tourism industry was not built overnight, but was in fact a long process over several centuries. ■



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