

4 Ways Traveling Can Expand Consciousness

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4/10/2014

“Genuine travel has no destination. Travelers do not go somewhere, but constantly discover that they are somewhere else... Nature does not change; it has no inside or outside. It is therefore not possible to travel through it. All travel is therefore change within the traveler, and it is for that reason that travelers are always somewhere else. To travel is to grow.” ~ James P. Carse

Experiencing the world can expand our minds because it allows us to see the world from another perspective. We can read all we want, poke people on Facebook from Whereveristan, watch videos of snake charmers in the Medinas of Marrakesh, or talk to people who have visited Tibet, but until we actually immerse ourselves, we will never truly understand the majestic power of these beautiful locations. Here are 4 ways traveling can help expand consciousness.



A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving. ~ Laozi

1) It diminishes preconditioned prejudices

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.” ~ Mark Twain

We don’t choose where we’re born. We don’t choose what culture we’re raised in. We don’t even choose what values we’re indoctrinated into as children and adolescence. Growing up we are conditioned to believe and to think with a particular worldview that is often drastically different than the worldview of someone in another part of the world who was born on the exact same day as us. If we never travel, we may never even become aware of this astounding fact. When we finally do get around to traveling, we discover that the world is an amazingly diverse place.

Immersing ourselves in diverse cultures helps us to become more flexible in our worldview. We become perceptually elastic and even more empathic as we become engrossed in the alien goings on. Travel teaches patience and resiliency and helps us to become more adaptable and open-minded, making us more Zen in our everyday life. Nothing stretches a comfort zone like good travel.

When we open ourselves to the world, the world opens even further to us. We discover that our preconditioned nationalism and patriotism are petty things compared to the glorious interconnectedness that comes with true immersion into diverse parts of the world. Like Einstein warned us, “Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind.”

2) It creates unity

“The only true voyage would be not to travel through a hundred different lands with the same pair of eyes, but to see the same land through a hundred different pairs of eyes.” ~ Marcel Proust

As our preconceived prejudices diminish we discover another boon of good travel: unity. We come to understand that separation is an illusion. When we travel we become better at handling relationships. Our social skills improve dramatically. The more people we meet, the more we tend to grow into refined, sophisticated people. Good travel even improves our ability to trust.

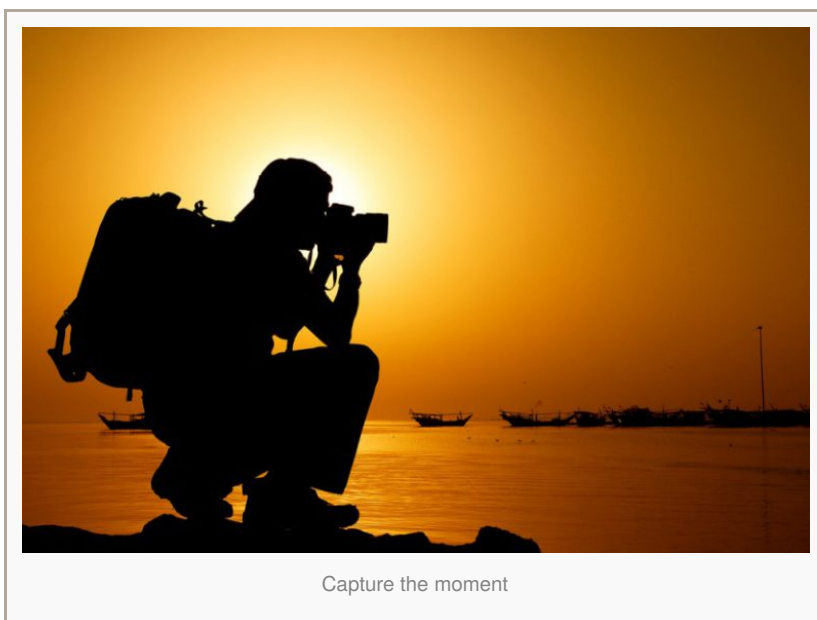
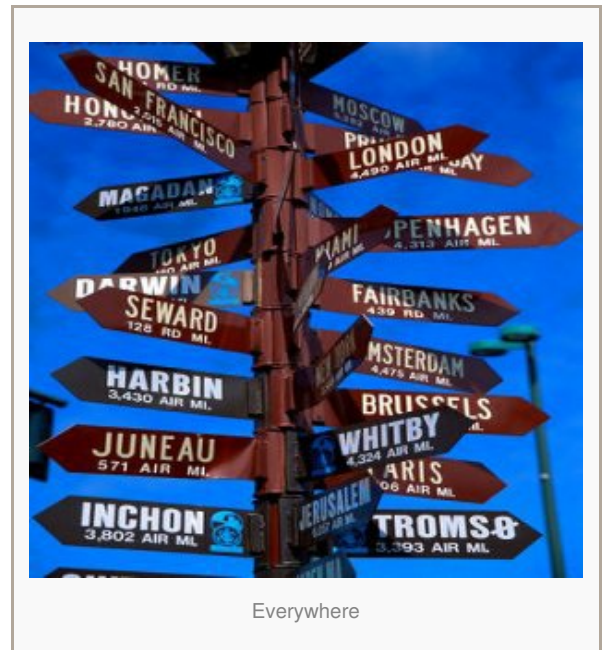
Five studies done at Northwestern University examined the effect of travel on generalized trust. Researcher Jiyin Cao wrote, “In all five studies we found a robust relationship between the breadth of foreign travel experiences and generalized trust.”

The more we travel, the more we learn about the harmonious cycles of various cultures, the more we come to realize that, even though things are different, things are also connected in ways that go beyond sharing a border with a country. We discover that there really are no borders. Borders are illusory lines drawn into the sand, at best; especially those laid down by outdated methods of governance and parochial power plays. A genuine traveler realizes that all boundaries can be transformed into horizons.

3) It enhances creativity

“If you’re really listening, if you’re truly awake to the poignant beauty of the world, your heart breaks regularly. In fact, your heart is made to break; its purpose is to burst open again and again so that it can hold evermore wonders.” ~ Andrew Harvey

There is so much beauty in the world, and no amount of pictures or videos can do justice to experiencing it firsthand. The biodiversity alone is astounding. Nothing beats the ability to contrast the memory of a sunset in the Sahara with the memory of a sunset in Kauai, or the capacity to differentiate between the popcorn-stink of tiger piss in Thailand and the dry dusty-stench of a donkey while hiking down into the Grand Canyon. You can’t get this from sitting around at home vegetating in front of a computer. Having such diverse experiences enhances our imagination which, in turn, enhances our creativity.



Genuine travel reveals the searing beauty of the world, and we cannot help but be bursting with the need to express

it. Whether through photography, poetry, a traveler's journal, or the canvas waiting for us when we get home, traveling compels us to share our experiences through our art.

You can feel it weigh heavy on your heart when you witness monkeys leaping from cliff-face to cliff-face while boating through the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River. You can see it at midnight in the bioluminescent waters off the coast of Pi Pi Don. You can smell it while backpacking through a tulip farm in Amsterdam, or on the back of a camel trekking through the Sahara. You can taste it eating a scorpion kebab in Bangkok. Like Laurence Gonzales wrote, "See the beauty. Seeing what is beautiful in the world binds you to it so that you are motivated to stay alive to enjoy it again."

4) It can reduce stress and depression

"If the individual realizes his self by spontaneous activity and thus relates himself to the world, he ceases to be an isolated atom; he and the world become part of one structuralized whole; he has his rightful place, and thereby his doubt concerning himself and the meaning of life disappears." ~ Erich Fromm

Genuine travel reduces anxiety. But in a [nine-year APA study](#) that tracked the health of 12,000 middle-aged men, researchers found that those who took at least one vacation a year were almost 30 percent less likely to die from a heart-related cause compared to men who did not take time off.



The Road

Besides that, traveling gets us away from the corporate rat-race and domestic grind of life. It connects us back to the world. Our materialistic, hyper-possessive lives fade away as we suddenly become more engaged with the cosmos. We become more aware. We realize that things don't create lasting happiness, but the experience from traveling will stay with us forever.

Like Chris McCandless was recorded as saying in *Into the Wild*, "...so many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a person than a secure future. The very basic core of a living spirit is passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day, to have a new and different sun.

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