

# Case's Travel Philosophy

## Geography = Travel

or, the Traveler (with a capital "T")

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In the third century BCE, Aristotle told Alexander, "Go and see..." Several centuries later, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Immanuel Kant--an astute geographer in his own right--said, "I treat [Geography] not with the completeness and philosophical exactitude in each part--which is a matter for physics and natural history--but with the rational curiosity of a traveler who collates a collection of observations and then reflects in its design." What both of these philosophers had in common besides geography, was travel. Everyone here also has these two elements in common--whether they know it or not!

Today, travel--like Geography--is a necessity. The world is so interconnected that it's virtually impossible for any of us to stay removed from it for too long. Eventually we encounter views that differ from and challenge our own. Geography helps us make sense of the world, helps us step outside of ourselves and understand what's important to us and, more significantly, what's important to our fellow beings. Geographers--Travelers with a capital "T"--have an open mind. And having an open mind leads to understanding, which in turn, brings us closer together as a species, breaking down the walls of ignorance and hate. For a Geographer, the travel *TO* a place is just as important as the destination, and a Geographer values a local trip nearby their home just as much as a trip to another country. It is through Geography that we learn when something is different, it is not necessarily bad (or good!). It's just different.

Geography is life at its most interesting and exciting! Geography exposes your mind to new ideas and different ways of doing things (if your mind is open enough to accommodate such things). Many Americans, indeed, many people, however, forget Geography's importance in the World, and

become simply tourists, not Travelers (with a capital "T"). The difference? Tourists see what they *came to see*; a Traveler, on the other hand, *sees* what they see. Think of it this way: a tourist has a list of sites they want to "do"; they take pictures of each "thing" on their list and then dutifully check off that site. Often times they are like sheep, being shepherded from place to place. They eat lunch at their (usually expensive) hotel restaurant or one their "guide" arranged. They shop in "tourist" markets and have little regard for the local way of life, so they are perhaps treated poorly. They return home and tell friends and neighbors of the trip, using their recently made scrapbook. Then, the scrapbook sits on a shelf or coffee table, only taken out to show off the "experience". The tourist might travel repeatedly, but the result is always the same: they see what they came to see.

The Geographer--a Traveler (with a capital "T")--on the other hand, *might* see what the tourist sees, but their purpose is different. A Geographer--a Traveler (with a capital "T")--might eat lunch at a public park or on a bench in a railway or bus station, watching the locals (and tourists!) scamper hither and thither. They have a drink at a neighborhood cafe where no one speaks their native language, forcing themselves to make conversation and become more like a local. They visit a local department store and make friends with the clerks, maybe hanging out with them after the store closes. Their new "friends" might show them a special waterfall with a secret cavern, or take them through the servant's entrance to explore a medieval castle--both experiences a tourist would never have. They return home with pictures, stories, ideas, and maybe a new outlook or different view of life, and then incorporate what they have learned into their own lives, sharing experiences whenever possible, but not in a forcible way.

I am a Geographer--a Traveler (with a capital "T")--but I did not start out that way! Becoming a Geographer is no easy task: it requires an open mind, a dedication to understanding, and a willingness to adapt in an ever-changing world. This concept is very difficult for most people to grasp. I didn't even recognize *my* first experience as a Geographer--being lost in the Chihuahua desert and walking 25 miles through a Mexican Monsoon storm when I was 15 years-old--until many years later. Rather, my first realization of travel as a Geographer began with my first trip to Europe which I started

as a tourist, but finished knowing there had to be something *more* to travel. Only many travels (travails?) later did I become a Geographer--a Traveler (with a capital "T"). For this trip, after paying the exorbitant tour company fees, I was soon on my way to Prague, in what was then Czechoslovakia. There was no preparation, no learning of customs, landscapes, languages, or even reading a guidebook. I had lots of "friends" on the same tour and a "guide" who would show us everything. I even took a suitcase--something I would never be caught doing now! When I arrived in Prague, I was surprised to see the military roaming around the airport, outfitted with AK-47s and hand grenades, but we were almost instantly met by our guide who helped us through customs, to our bus, and then to our hotel. She also arranged our meals and city tours for us. It was, for a little while at least, nice to be catered to and have everything taken care of for you, but on our last day in Prague, our "free" day as the guide called it, that all changed.

That evening, a friend and I went for a walk. We ran into a bunch of "kids" on the outskirts of town who were joking around, just hanging out as teenagers do. Through broken English and hand gestures, we found out they were from Germany, here in Prague for the cheap beer. They invited us to roam the city with them, and we obliged. We soon met up with a couple more of their friends, one who happened to be Czech and spoke good English. As we walked through the night around the city, our "guide" recounted personal stories of USSR iron-fist ruling, and the changes that were about to happen in the country (keep in mind, this was right before Czechoslovakia's split). He told us how the landscape had changed dramatically--even in his short lifetime. How for generations his family had run a small farm on the city periphery, but now it was being annexed by the government to be used for housing projects because of urban sprawl. His stories were the stuff I only read about or saw in movies back home. But I was right in the middle of it now; it was all *real*. For the rest of that "tour" through Europe, I viewed the landscapes and people differently; each took on new meanings, uniquely drawn together (or apart) by their place in space. I began straying from the tour whenever possible, wandering the streets in every city, becoming intimate with my location, my place in the landscape. By the end of the trip, I was a "baby geographer"--a traveler, though not yet with a capital

"T". And it took several more travels before something magical happened: I realized what I was doing all along was Geography!

Nowadays before leaving on any trip, I spend as much time as possible acquainting myself with everything about the place I'll be visiting: from its physical and political landscape to its history and languages. Geography enhances these actions because it brings the people, places, and landscapes alive, increasing my appreciation and hence, understanding of them. Once *in situ*, I wander and roam with no specific agenda other than to see it, to experience it, to be a part of it. Like past Association of American Geographers president John Fraiser Hart, I too have an affinity for getting "lost" wherever I am, wandering through fields and urban corridors to find the ultimate vantage point from which to observe a landscape. My greatest joy in travel--in life!--is wondering and wandering, observing and reflecting: *doing* Geography. I immerse myself in the place, embrace it, and take at least a small part of the place with me when I return "home".

I applaud you all for your willingness to spread Geography and your dedication as Educators and Teachers of the youth. Geography changes lives, and becoming a Geographer--a Traveler (with a capital "T")--is one of the most exciting lifetime achievements.