

## The Victorian Traveler—Many Rooms with Many Views

by David Hayes

“Why is the devil riding a mouse like one and the same thing? Because it is synonymous.”

—Victorian joke as recorded in *Victorian London*, Lee Jackson, October 2011)

Travel was and is a combination of experiences, each unique but still all woven together to produce its own special experience. Some travel by checking into a hotel and visiting things nearby, while some take day trips away from the area. Some travel by moving from one place to another led by a professional guide, while others travel completely on their own. There are some situations where your fellow travelers are people like you and some where the appearance and conduct of others in your company bear no resemblance to you at all. We may travel to places where local culture resembles our home, and there are trips where nothing at all is familiar. These attributes apply today and trace a path through development of travel during the Victorian age.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, travel was mostly done by wealthy Englishmen visiting prescribed sites in Europe. This was collectively referred to as the Grand Tour. Travelers were expected to grow in knowledge and bring their observations home to educate the masses. Their route took them across the English Channel to Belgium, then Paris, Geneva, and over the Alps into Italy to Turin. The traveler would visit Turin, Florence, Pisa, Padua, Bologna, and Venice; then on to Rome, Pompei, Sicily, Malta; maybe Greece, though not as automatically; from there back over the Alps, this time into the German area, visiting Innsbruck, Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, and Potsdam, and maybe Munich or Heidelberg. From there, they traveled to Holland, Flanders, and back to England.

Sharing experiences with older men who had taken the tour was an important way of bonding. Sharing them with women of marriageable age became an important way of showing off. To the regret of many of the men, many of the women had listened to the stories told by others and read of their travels so that they knew the places they traveled and what they saw. What they could not share was the experience. That would come soon.

The United Kingdom began to develop railroads around 1830. Trips that once took days would now take less than one day. This brought about what would today be called a resort, a lot of similar people doing similar things at a location that looked like home. But still it was a change in climate and probably in prepared food. Even the same things you did at home felt different. That's a vacation. It did not take long for businesses to advertise reasons to come to their location. In 1841, British missionary Thomas Cook convinced a British railway to run a special train to a temperance meeting; then he proceeded to find passengers for the trip, an event regarded as the beginning of organized tourism. Within a few years Cook was setting up excursions on a regular basis, and by the century's end the Thomas Cook & Son travel agency was orchestrating travel around the world. The agency's tours were famously well organized, but they were also known for herding travelers hurriedly from location to location. A Cook's

tourist might see an impressive array of famous sites but often only in superficial glimpses. Over time English speakers started using *Cook's tour* for any hurried tour and, later, for any rushed activity or cursory review. (Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Cook's%20tour>.)

British society, particularly the mobility of women, was also going through a transformation. It was commonly held that sex should only occur to conceive children, and that should occur as an obligation without pleasure. The only group of people who were more frightened by the prospect of sex for pleasure than women were the men. For men this was not a problem since it was widely accepted that men could have a mistress or momentary liaisons. Within the upper levels of society, women had almost zero social mobility since they couldn't marry above their station. They were either royalty or not.

Rules of travel were being rewritten into a hybrid of the Grand and Cook's tours. Men and women traveled together, strangers at first bound not by an obligation like before but by the desire for new experiences. Most of the places visited in the previous century were dropped from the list of most commonly visited, replaced by areas under British influence or outright control. This was particularly true in what we now call India, Burma, and Kuala Lumpur. To this, they added travel into Slavic eastern Europe.

The Industrial Revolution in the UK created great wealth, especially among what became known as the middle class. These households wanted their children, both male and female, to have an education. With the beginnings of women travelers, women from middle-class households gained access to those in the upper middle class or lower upper class. They became friends and, in many cases, sweethearts. The Cook's Tour made this more affordable and with more variety. Women gained education. They became interesting.

Writing memoirs for personal use or sharing with others became highly valued. Of course, such memoirs helped prove you actually went on your journey, and they were critical because some of the people with whom you shared your experiences had had the same, or similar, experiences.

Taking photographs of the trip was initially a real chore, with that heavy tripod, etc. However, beginning in February 1900, the Kodak Brownie camera made that a lot easier.

When reading the list of things to take on your trip, some of the most important were the things needed to collect "objects of natural history." The book *Hints to Travelers* (Royal Geographical Society, 3rd edition, 1878), lists fifteen separate things you'll need. The list grows larger depending on where you will be travelling. Of particular interest might be "collecting" large animals, which can include stuffing them yourself.

For some people travel had a religious component, a desire to spread the teaching of the church to others. In India female travelers were allowed to visit harems and other places that men, including male visitors, could not. In most cases this aided social studies, but in some the visitors were drawn to the sexual nature of what they saw—not only pleasure but power

through influence. Non-European men were more masculine and overtly sexual than their European counterparts. The strong sexual attraction was blamed on the presence of the devil or some other power. In this context, *Dracula* is pure porn.

The effects, intentional and incidental, of travel on the Victorian mind cannot be overestimated. Central to this is the teaching in the Bible and from folklore that human beings have no greater fear than devolving back into a subhuman state. The British—not alone in this—felt that some groups of people were not human, or not fully human (not fully developed). This created three groups: those who were British (note: you aren't British by birth but by social development); those who are not fully developed as humans, but with help will be (see "The White Man's Burden" by Rudyard Kipling)—this was both a mandate and a source of satisfaction to the superior English; and lastly, those abandoned by God either because they weren't a part of creation or their sin caused them to devolve into a subspecies. This is prevalent in the Bible.

This thinking appears in the literature of the time. Travelers who visited sites of bygone days and/or encountered things that were advanced gave rise to time travel as a theme. One excellent example of this is *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells. Travelers who encountered other religions and cultures were often drawn to them, seduced, and had to be freed of their influences. "Noncivilized" areas were populated with all sorts of monsters, vampires, you name it.

Lest you think everything that threatened the female traveler came from a foreign source, I ran across a warning that "the intemperate use of this most delightful and refreshing beverage is becoming a grave evil amongst Englishwomen." They were talking about drinking tea (from *Hints to Lady Travelers* by Lillias Campbell Davidson, 1889).

I hope you found this summary of information about travel during the Victorian Age interesting. I leave you with another joke from *Victorian London*: "See here, wait, I've found a button in my salad!" "That's all right, sir; it's part of the dressing."