



Travel Guides

For centuries travelers around the world have set out on journeys for a number of reasons—the love of adventure, spiritual pilgrimage, or to seek fame and fortune. Travelers recorded accounts of what they saw, heard, and experienced for both current and future wayfarers to consult. Thus, travel guides are valuable sources for studying global history.

The travel and tourism industries, analyzed globally, generate billions of dollars annually. The national economies of some countries rely heavily on tourists who visit for either work or recreation. Travel also affects other industries. The financial stability of the transportation system, comprised largely of airplanes, ships, and rail and road networks, is dependent upon travelers' willingness to journey beyond the confines of their home. The hospitality and restaurant industries profit from travelers' business. Modern travel guides, such as *Fodor's*, *Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guide*, and *Routard*, are lucrative for their publishers. New editions of travel books appear annually, focusing on tourist destinations around the globe. These new editions are read by novice and veteran travelers alike, eager to see the newest recommendations of restaurants, lodgings, and sights.

Yet, travel guides have a much longer history. For centuries travelers across the globe have embarked on journeys for a variety of motives. Such motives could include economic gain, spiritual solace, or merely the love of adventure. Travelers have recorded their sights and thoughts for both current and future wayfarers to consult. Thus, travel guides function as extremely valuable sources for studying global history.

Greek and Roman Travelers

Because the Roman Empire was physically extensive—about 4,800 kilometers from east to west—a system of well-designed and engineered roads and bridges was necessary for its successful administration. The Latin adage *omnes viae Romam ducunt* (all roads lead to Rome) attested to the safe, well-maintained network of roads that could permit a traveler to journey from the farthest regions of the empire to its heart.

Additionally, Rome was a cosmopolitan empire, with more than 50 million inhabitants, all of whom spoke various languages, worshipped many local and imperial deities, and engaged in a plurality of customs. The eastern provinces of the empire, where commerce and civilization flourished long before the Romans appeared, had a historic cultural and cosmopolitan legacy, ensuring its popularity as a travel destination during antiquity.

Greek epic poetry, such as Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, circa 800 BCE, conveyed the sense of excitement, but also danger, of travel. One of the earliest travel narratives is that of the Greek historian Herodotus. In his *Histories*, written around 440 BCE, Herodotus recorded his personal observations of his extensive travels in the Mediterranean basin, visiting places such as Egypt, the Black Sea, Scythia, Mesopotamia, Babylon, Cyrene, North Africa, and Anatolia (in modern Turkey). Ancient Greek writers who probably traveled to India included Ctesias (c. 398 BCE) and Megasthenes (c. 303 BCE).

Natural History (c. 77 CE) by the Roman writer Pliny was another travel account that influenced later

As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own. • Margaret Mead (1901–1978)

Europeans' perspectives concerning the world outside of Europe. Like Herodotus, Pliny recorded his firsthand observations of his travels in the world around him. But some parts of his work, such as his discussion on the “monstrous” races of the world outside of Europe, clearly had a basis in myth, bias, and a fear of the unknown.

East / West Connections

Although Pliny's account is not generally favorable toward non-Romans, his depiction of monstrous races nonetheless sparked Europeans' imaginations. Moreover, the sight of luxury goods—including Chinese silk, southeast Asian spices, Indian cotton textiles and pearls, and central Asian horses and jade, which traversed the central Asian Silk Roads—whetted Europeans' appetite for “exotic” items. The Romans, in turn, offered Asian markets various products, including glassware, jewelry, art, bronze, olive oil, wine, and gold and silver bullion.

Merchants and diplomats who traversed the branches of the Silk Roads recorded their observations. For instance, the detailed travel accounts of the diplomatic mission of Zhang Qian (d. 113 BCE), recorded in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian, c. 100 BCE), provide extensive information about the peoples and lands of central Asia, Persia (modern Iran), and northern India. This connection between East and West was not permanent, however. The collapse of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), compounded with near-contemporary third-century crises of the Roman Empire, disrupted trade along the Silk Roads.

An Early Medieval Pilgrimage Travel Guide—The Codex

Religion also motivated travelers. The pilgrimage was a form of travel in which a person, as a form of devotion or penance, walked from his or her home to a shrine. Located at the shrine were relics—bits of clothes and/or body parts of saints, to whom the travelers could pray for intercession.

One of the most popular pilgrimage routes for medieval Christians led to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela, located in Galicia, the northwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Surpassed in importance only by Jerusalem and Rome, the cathedral at the end of the 800-kilometer route housed the relics of Saint James, one of the twelve apostles. Pilgrims from all parts of Europe followed the route through the mountainous northern coast of Spain to Galicia. Because of the popularity of the route, the cleric Aimeric Picaud, between 1130 and 1140 CE, edited the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* (The Book of Saint James), also called the “*Codex Calixtinus*.” The fifth book of the *Codex* was essentially a pilgrim's guide and described to pilgrims the terrain and conditions of the land, pointed out major sights along the route, and warned them of hazards that could waylay the unfortunate pilgrim.

Medieval Travelers—Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta

Possibly the most famous travel narrative and guide of the Middle Ages was by the Venetian merchant and diplomat Marco Polo (1254–1324 CE). *The Travels of Marco Polo*, also known as the *Description of the World*, was a wildly popular account of his travels and travails. It was massive in its geographic focus, detailing the lands from Japan to Zanzibar. As a youth, Marco Polo had traveled from Venice with his father and uncle, who had made a prior journey to China, to the East to establish a new outlet for European exports. He spent about twenty years living and traveling in the East in the service of the founder of the Mongol dynasty, Khubilai Khan (d. 1294 CE), and traveled to China, Burma (modern Myanmar), India, central Asia, and Byzantium (modern Istanbul, Turkey). He undertook a three-year maritime return journey, returning to Venice in 1295 CE. Captured at the Battle of Curzola on 6 September 1298, Marco Polo was imprisoned in Genoa and there met Rustichello da Pisa, an author of romances, who eventually published Marco Polo's account. But Rustichello certainly fabricated parts of the text to create a gripping narrative; the presence of bandits, pirates, and wild animals points to the



hazards of travel. The luxury and common goods that pepper Polo's story point to the commercial nature, and rewards, of an enterprising journey.

A medieval narrative that can compare with Marco Polo's is the fourteenth-century *rihla* (travel narrative) of the Moroccan Abu 'Abdullah ibn Battuta (d. 1369 CE), *A Gift of the Observers Concerning the Curiosities of the Cities and Marvels Encountered in Travels*. From 1325 to 1349, Ibn Battuta traveled extensively and related his observations and experiences during his hajj (religious pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia) and his subsequent travels within the dar al-Islam (Islamic world), from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to Delhi, Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), Bengal, China, and Mali.

Early Modern Travelers

Travel writings did not cease with the "closing of the ecumene"—the arrival of Europeans in the Americas with the first trans-Atlantic voyages of the Genoese sailor Christopher Columbus (1492–1493). Columbus owned a highly glossed account of Marco Polo's travels, attesting to the influence that travel guides had upon exploration. From the fifteenth through the seventeenth century Europeans traversed the globe in increasing numbers, and with the development of the printing press, the volume of travel narratives exploded. The Englishman Richard Haklyut (d. 1616), in addition to writing travel narratives, published accounts of travel and exploration to spur his countrymen to undertake additional journeys. In 1686 the French Huguenot Jean Chardin (1643–1713) published the first part of his narrative about his travel through the Safavid Persian Empire, *The Travels of Sir John into Persia and the East Indies*. In it he gave information about contemporary Persian customs, education, and mannerisms to an increasingly literate society.

The Eighteenth-Century "Grand Tour"

During the eighteenth century, to be young, wealthy, and of noble descent meant that one could embark

upon the "Grand Tour," an excursion that could last from months to years and during which one could learn about European politics, art, and culture. The tour became central in contributing to the education of young British aristocratic men. They especially favored Italian destinations, including Turin, Venice, Florence, and above all Rome because of its grandeur. The letters of William Beckford (1760–1844), published in 1783, comprise one of the most famous travelogues of the Grand Tour, romantically entitled *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents, in a Series of Letters, from Various Parts of Europe*. The latter half of the eighteenth century brought an increase in political stability for Europe as well as rapid technological advancement spurred by the Industrial Revolution, which made cheaper, safer travel easier. Nineteenth-century English travel literature, written by explorers, missionaries, and diplomats, was extremely popular among the literate classes, served British imperialist interests, and depicted the often-tragic encounters between indigenous and European peoples.

Perspective

The continuing historical analysis of the immense body of rich and unique primary sources that make up travel literature will provide answers to questions concerning history, anthropology, and ethnography (study of culture). Further studies of travelers' guides, many of which still await scholarly analysis, undoubtedly will offer increasingly nuanced understandings of the economic, political, social, and cultural interactions engendered by travel.

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See also Ibn Battuta; Pilgrimage; Polo, Marco; Tourism

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