

# "I always hated holidays..."



Bernard Walsh is at the airport, on his way to Hawaii to visit his aunt. There, he meets Sheldrake, who works for Travelwise, a travel organization. Sheldrake is actually specializing in the anthropology of tourism.

"I always hated holidays, even as a kid. Such a waste of time, sitting on the beach, making sandpies, when you could be at home doing some interesting hobby. Then, when I got engaged, we were both students at the time, my fiancée insisted on dragging me off to Europe to see the sights: Paris, Venice, Florence, the usual things. Bored the pants off me, till one day, sitting on a lump of rock beside the Parthenon, watching the tourists milling about, clicking their cameras, talking to each other in umpteen different languages, it suddenly struck me: tourism is the new world religion. Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists,

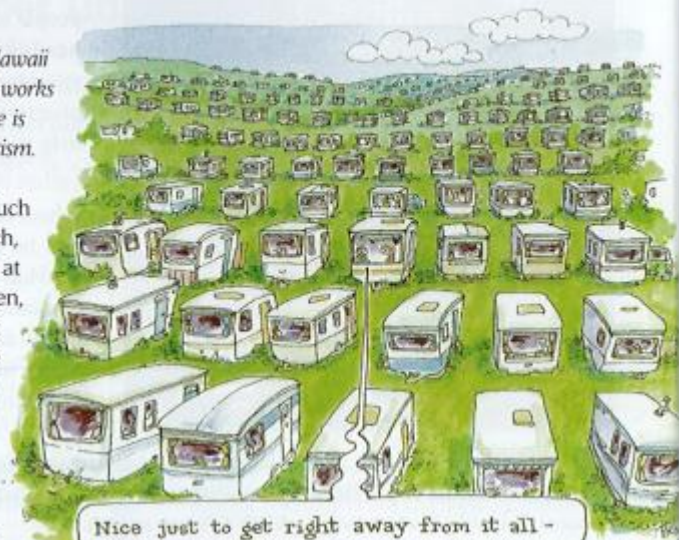
atheists – the one thing they have in common is they all believe in the importance of seeing the Parthenon. Or the Sistine Chapel, or the Eiffel Tower. I decided to make it my Ph.D.<sup>2</sup> subject. Never looked back. No, the Travelwise package is a research grant<sup>3</sup> in kind. The British Association of Travel Agents are paying for it. They think it's good PR<sup>4</sup> to subsidize a bit of academic research now and again. Little do they know." He grinned mirthlessly<sup>5</sup> again.

"What d'you mean?"

"I'm doing to tourism what Marx did to capitalism, what Freud did to family life. Deconstructing it. You see, I don't think people really want to go on holiday, any more than they really want to go to church. They've been brainwashed into thinking it will do them good, or make them happy. In fact surveys show that holidays cause incredible amounts of stress."

"These people look cheerful enough," said Bernard, gesturing at the passengers waiting to board the flight to Honolulu. There were now quite a lot of them, as the time of departure neared: mostly Americans, dressed in garish<sup>6</sup> casual clothes, some in shorts and sandals as if ready to walk straight off the plane on to the beach. [...]

"An artificial cheerfulness," said Sheldrake. "Fuelled by double martinis in many cases, I wouldn't be surprised. They know how people going on vacation are supposed to behave. They have learned how to do it. Look deep into their eyes and you will see anxiety and dread.<sup>7</sup>" [...]



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"What exactly are you hoping to achieve with your research?"

"To save the world." Sheldrake replied solemnly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Tourism is wearing out<sup>8</sup> the planet. [...] In 1939 a million people travelled abroad, last year it was four hundred million. By the year 2000 there could be six hundred and fifty million international travellers, and five times as many people travelling in their own countries. The mere<sup>9</sup> consumption of energy entailed is stupendous<sup>10</sup>."

"My goodness," said Bernard.

"The only way to put a stop to it, short of legislation, is to demonstrate to people that they aren't really enjoying themselves when they go on holiday, but engaging in a superstitious ritual. It's no coincidence that tourism arose just as religion went into decline. It's the new opium of the people, and must be exposed as such."

"Won't you do yourself out of a job, if you're successful?" said Bernard.

"I don't think there's any immediate risk of that," said Sheldrake, surveying the crowded lounge.

David LODGE, *Paradise News* (1991)

1. mill about: *fourmiller* – 2. Ph.D. [ˈpiːtʃdɪ]: *doctorat d'état* – 3. grant: *bourse* – 4. PR [piːˈɑː] = Public Relations – 5. grin mirthlessly: *avoir un sourire forcé* – 6. garish: *aux couleurs criardes* – 7. dread: *terreur* – 8. wear out: *épuiser* – 9. mere [mɜː]: *simple* – 10. stupendous [stjuːˈpendəs]: *colossale*.