



The Naked Tourist: In Search of Adventure and Beauty in the Age of the Airport Mall

Lawrence Osborne

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From the theme resorts of Dubai to the jungles of Papua New Guinea, a disturbing but hilarious tour of the exotic east--and of the tour itself Sick of producing the bromides of the professional travel writer, Lawrence Osborne decided to explore the psychological underpinnings of tourism itself. He took a six-month journey across the so-called Asian Highway--a swathe of Southeast Asia that, since the Victorian era, has seduced generations of tourists with its manufactured dreams of the exotic Orient. And like many a lost soul on this same route, he ended up in the harrowing forests of Papua, searching for a people who have never seen a tourist. What, Osborne asks, are millions of affluent itinerants looking for in these endless resorts, hotels, cosmetic-surgery packages, spas, spiritual retreats, sex clubs, and "back to nature" trips? What does tourism, the world's single largest business, have to sell? A travelogue into that heart of darkness known as the Western

mind, "The Naked Tourist "is the most mordant and ambitious work to date from the author of "The Accidental Connoisseur," praised by "The New York Times Book Review "as "smart, generous, perceptive, funny, sensible."

The Naked Tourist: In Search of Adventure and Beauty in the Age of the Airport Mall **Details**

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John says

Osborne travels to remote Papua (Indonesian side, not New Guinea) to see whether there's really a "last frontier" of un-touristed areas. I knew from the outset that I wouldn't be as interested in the jungle itself, but thoroughly enjoyed the ride getting there. All but the last chapter has to do with the definitely-touristed areas he stops along the way (Dubai, Bangkok, Bali), although there is a stop in the Andaman Islands, where he's forbidden contact with the hostile natives.

Highly recommended as an introduction to Osborne's writing.

Javier Castaño says

Una visión del turismo y del viaje llevada hasta los últimos extremos. Un viajero que de vuelta de todo intenta experimentar el "viaje desnudo" y se adentra en incógnitas zonas de Papúa Nueva Guinea. La calidad literaria es alta. Lawrence Osborne es, sin duda, un narrador, un novelista de primera. Culto, exquisito y mordaz en sus apreciaciones y con una lucidez intacta. Al final, en mi caso, el libro me dejó un sabor de boca amargo. Tanto cinismo y autodestrucción occidental es excesiva para mi gusto. Si buscas un relato sencillo de viajes no lo leas, si has viajado mucho y leído mucho sobre viajes y quieres una visión desencantada, lírica, soez y profunda de en lo que se ha convertido el turismo en Occidente, lee este libro.

César says

3,5

JaumeMuntane says

Con gran sentido humor, Osborne reflexiona sobre el viaje y el turismo y como, cada vez más, los destinos turísticos se transforman en parques temáticos para hacer realidad las fantasías de los turistas, perdiendo aquella esencia y peculiaridad que tenían. De esta forma, viajamos con Osborne a Dubai (y su enloquecedora obsesión en convertirse en un macro parque temático); Calcuta y su vinculo con la pobreza; Tailandia y su conversión en meca del turismo sexual y médico; Bali y su rápida transformación y Papúa, para ofrecernos unas divertidas y apasionantes páginas de su dura experiencia en la selva y del choque cultural al encontrarse con tribus sin contacto con el hombre blanco. Muy recomendable.

Michael says

The author is my hero. I want to be like him when I grow up.

The coffee enema scene has to be the funniest thing I've read this year. His encounter with the isolated tribe in Papua was quite moving. "Come back again, Lorry. Come back."

Anfri Bogart says

Bellissimo libro sul viaggio come elemento peculiare della cultura occidentale.

L'autore racconta di un suo viaggio con destinazione Papua Nuova Guinea (forse l'ultima regione del pianeta dove esistono ancora popolazioni e territori non censiti) e lunghe tappe intermedie a Dubai, Calcutta, Isole Andamane, Bangkok, Bali e ragiona sui vari modi di recarsi altrove, che potremmo riassumere nella parola "turismo". Con molte incursioni nell'antropologia, Osborne si racconta nelle sue reazioni di fronte al mondo completamente artificiale di Dubai, a quello disintegrato di Calcutta, o anche di fronte alla finzione culturale di Bali. Si ragiona molto sull'interazione fra culture diverse, fra il visitatore e il visitato, su come giochino finzione e pregiudizi (da entrambi i lati), ma anche sull'irrefrenabile desiderio di raggiungere luoghi lontani che sembra appartenere alla nostra cultura.

Lo shock arriva a Papua, dove il turista (se possiamo ancora chiamarlo così) è costretto a deporre tutti i pregiudizi e le maschere per addentrarsi nella foresta ed entrare in contatto con un mondo assolutamente altro. Se le pagine che raccontano le mete intermedie sono interessanti e argute, la parte finale su Papua è abbastanza sconvolgente per il capovolgimento di tutti i riferimenti culturali e mentali a cui siamo abituati nel nostro concetto di turismo, ecco il senso del titolo.

Stewart says

Lawrence Osborne's 2006 book "The Naked Tourist: In Search of Adventure and Beauty in the Age of the Airport Mall" is an amazing combination of travel writing and a look at some of the history of anthropology and tourism, leavened with keen psychological insight.

Concluding that the "entire world is a tourist installation," Osborne searched for a place to escape that world and concluded that the jungles of Papua New Guinea would be such a place. He put together a Grand Tour, flying from the United Kingdom to Dubai; Calcutta; Andaman Islands; Bangkok and a spa at Hua Hin, Thailand; and Bali en route to Papua New Guinea. "In this way, I could pass through several phases of Easternness, all of them touristified and packaged for visitors like myself, the harried escapists of a hemisphere so rich it no longer knows what to do with itself but move."

The author provides telling, and often amusing, detail about Dubai which has been made into an international pleasure resort; teeming Calcutta; the desert islands of Andaman in the Indian Ocean; the "hedonopolis" of Bangkok, which he also described as "the tourist surgery capital of the world"; and the resort paradise of Bali, often called the "Hindu Disneyland."

Along the way, Osbourne has many important things to say about tourism.

"Modern travel is like fast food: short, sharp incursions that do not weave a spell. In our age, tourism has made the planet into a uniform spectacle, and it has made us perpetual strangers wandering through an imitation of an imitation of a place we once wanted to go. It is the law of diminishing returns."

"The principal occupation of hundreds of millions of humans is now simply entertaining hundreds of millions of other humans."

"The hotels all look the same, because they are run by the same people; the places all look the same, because they are shaped by the same economic drives. Everywhere resembles everywhere else, and that is the way it has been designed. One day the whole world could easily be a giant interconnected resort called Whatever." But the final chapter, "Anywhere Out of the World," is where Osborne's powers of observation and insight

are at their most keen. After walking for days through palm swamps, jungles, and steep ravines, a fatigued Osborne, his colleagues, and 25 porters finally met the Komai, a tribe of people almost totally cut off from the outside world, many of whom live in tree houses. When he was introduced to them, they seemed reluctant to shake his hand or touch him in any way. Later, he found out that the Komai didn't want to touch the white people because these jungle people thought they would be incredibly cold.

In this culture, a candle was a sensation and cups and forks incomprehensible. Clothing was something not understood: "They looked over at me with a sort of sorrow, the pity that the naked feel for the clothed."

However, Osborne couldn't feel superior. He told a chief that he came on an airplane and tried to explain how an airplane flies. "I was halfway through my explanation of the dynamics of winged flight when I realized that I had no idea how airplanes fly. He looked intently at me, curious to see a man who could not explain how his own artifacts worked. ... About these marvelous inventions of my own culture I was essentially as ignorant as he – that is, he knew much more about his stuff than I knew about mine."

Thinking back on his many miles of visiting many countries, Osborne makes the distinction between a "traveler" and a "tourist." The former wants to seek out "the other" and submerge himself or herself in new cultures. The latter wants to quickly go to new places but enjoy the same lodgings, food, conveniences, and language he or she enjoys at home. Osborne admits that there is less and less travel these days and more and more tourism, the premise of the latter being "that experience can be bought for money."

"This is why I think it must be said the travel itself is an outmoded conceit, that one no longer travels in the sense of voyaging into cultures that are unknown. Travel has been comprehensively replaced by tourism."

For those who would like to think of themselves as travelers and not just tourists, this will be a welcomed book.

Lori says

I picked this up at my library's book sale, purely based on the fact that it was in the travel section and I needed a mid-winter literary escape to warmer climates. It promised an exploration of the "psychological underpinnings of the tourist trade" which sounded interesting. I was pleasantly surprised by the author's wit, humor and his self-admitted bias on sense of place (or lack thereof) wherever he traveled. He also wasn't afraid to ask contemplative, often unanswerable questions, which I appreciated because it engaged my brain in a way I hadn't anticipated. This made a nice companion read to *Euphoria* by Lily King, as well as and *The Lost City of the Monkey God* by Douglas Preston and *The Lost City of Z* by David Grann (both of which I read recently).

Renee says

Imagine what it would be like to spin a globe, point your finger, and travel to where ever your finger lands with a back pack, some cash, and absolutely NO plan of where you will stay, how you will stay, and what you will do. The only thing you do know is that you'd rather live in a forest than stay in a Hyatt or anything that remotely resembles anything having to do with the tourist industry. Basically that's Lawrence Osborne's life. In the *Naked Tourist*, his search took him to one of the remote untouched places in the world; Papua New Guinea. For a time (it's hard to tell exactly how long), he lived in a jungle with people who had no idea what Bali was and that it even existed (Bali is one of the closest islands to Papua; a very short flight away), have never seen a white person, and who huddle behind rocks, when a plane rarely flies over head. Osborne is one of the few (travel) writers that lives as closely as a native as possible. His books usually average three

stars on goodreads, but when I read his books, I know it will probably be as close to Papua as I will ever get, and I'm grateful for his ability to bring me there.

Uwe Hook says

It's quite obvious that Alain de Botton, author of "The Art of Travel", and Lawrence Osborne are kindred spirits in their expert ability to discern the power of "whateverness" in experiencing locations foreign to one's sensibilities. Osborne's initial premise is to move from civilization to the bowels of the planet in order to show how the world has become less individualistic, that it seems one-size-fits-all tourism has diluted the cultural sense of locations and that the true allure of travel can only be found in the world's most remote pockets. I don't think he entirely proves his thesis, but his biting and entertaining travel tome is quite a treat, as he cuts a sharp swath through the Asian corridor from Dubai to Papua-New Guinea.

He is not your typical globe trekker but a traveler who shifts his motivations as the circumstances dictate. Sometimes the author reaches a cathartic point of self-discovery, but more often, he seems to be going back to something instinctual as if his travels satisfy a need simply to roam. His sense of adventure borders on the absurdly humiliating, for example, a high-colonic he has in Bangkok, which brings out the worst nightmares of medical treatment abroad. In Dubai, where he begins his journeys in earnest, he describes in vivid detail "The World", an extravagant project to be designed to recreate the entire globe with three-hundred man-made islands in the Persian Gulf, each up for sale to highest bidders among the world's nations. Bangkok beckons him for the luxury and potential debauchery of its Vegas-like spas, and with the plethora of party-seeking foreign tourists and American-style bars, Bali brings the author a faux-sense of its culture and people seemingly brainwashed to accommodate tourist expectations. He is enamored with the works of legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead and others of her field who have perhaps inadvertently built up the mystique and idyllic state of Bali.

However, the best part of the book focuses on the author's transformative moments in Papua, where the somewhat surreal existence of its native population gives him pause. He comes upon an abandoned missionary house in Wanggemalo where he is gawked at by members of the local tribe, the Kombai. A typical ritual of the Kombai is cutting potential sorcerers into four parts, then cooking their brains and viscera on hot stones and eating them. As Osborne delves deeper into the jungle, he is met with even greater peril where he eats pasty-floured grubs and meets natives who know nothing of an outside world. Osborne's cynicism wears away in this section as he develops an honest rapport with the Papuan jungle natives much to his chagrin. It is indeed a grand journey by a most English gentleman.

Patricia says

No suelo viajar a «tierras muy lejanas» por eso me gusta viajar a través de los libros y este, en mi opinión es un libro que gustará a todo el mundo, viajeros o no. Una crítica al ser humano y su afán por destruirlo todo, y disfrutar de paraísos de mentira.

Matthew says

I gave this book two stars as I both really liked it and really didn't like it. This book raised a lot of issues that

really set me off.

First of all, the premise. Lawrence Osborne is a travel writer who is so totally over travel writing. Travel writers have ruined the world by making people want to travel, thus making the world totally inauthentic. So he's giving it up for good. Except he's not. He has decided to do one more big trip. Nobody has been to some God-forsaken corner of the Papuan jungle, so Osborne figures that this must be the last place on Earth that he can go and ruin. On his way to go ruin it, he decides to stop off along the way to a bunch of other places that have already been ruined and complain about how ruined they are.

If you can get past his absolutely awful idea, he does some interesting writing. He talks a lot about the history of tourism and the Grand Tour that young Brits went on to come of age with the harlots of Venice. The chapter on Dubai is a great illustration of how the orientals themselves have now coopted orientalism and are building thier own shopping malls in the romanticised version of themselves for themselves. The chapter on the classic Grand Hotels of Calcutta made me want to stay in one. I really got a sense of colonial nostalgia from him, though I'm sure if you called him on it he would deny it. The chapter on the Andaman Islands was fascinating, as I didn't know ANYTHING about them till I read this book. The chapter on medical tourism to Bangkok was morbidly captivating and the recounting of his coffee enema was almost worth the price of the book alone (though bought used). The descriptions of what may or may not have been first contacts with tribes in Papua New Guinea were hair-raising. Really some profound encounters took place and he described them well.

That is why his premise really pissed me off so much. He had these amazing experiences there, but you hate him for it because he has spent the first six chapters talking about how there was nothing authentic left and its all the fault of tourists. Osbourne is better than any writer I know of expressing the seemingly incompatible attitudes of haughty arrogance and utter self-loathing in a way that only a Brit could truly master.

Truth be told, I am so completely cynically bored with the whole traveler vs. tourist distinction. As far as I can tell, the main criteria is that the person making the argument naturally falls into the traveler catagory. I think that unless you have a motive other than fun, or "experience", than you are a total tourist. I suppose Osbourn can claim that he was technically working and therefore could possiby catagorize his trip as business travel. But I also don't see why the tourist moniker should be such a shameful designation. I guess a tourist is just the easiest target, like the new kid at school who doesn't have any friends, the prefect dork, who doesn't dress right, talks funny and is easy to trick into handing over his lunch money for some Ayurvedic medicine.

The other accusation that makes the bile rise in my throat is how foreigners ruin a place by visiting it. This to me is the ultimate ethnocentricity; thinking that it would be better for the world if the natives continued to run around half naked in the rice fields for the sake of our own asthetic sensibilities instead of opening hotels and good restaurants and loading up thier bank accounts with Euros and American dollars and sending their kids off to get an education in the States. What is wrong with that?

So, I loved it and I hated it. I want to read his new book about Bangkok where he lived for a long time.

Maybe this perspective will make me feel better about his distainful contempt of other people if he doesn't claim to be exactly what he loathes.

Jill says

He vacillates from totally pretentious to a giggling 15-year-old boy. Don't look at the author photo -- it'll ruin the book for you.

Giuseppe Siragusa says

Affascinante viaggio in Oriente dello scrittore che racconta la propria avventura, con tanto di parentesi storiche (a volte un po' noiose sinceramente), ma decisamente divertente nel complesso.

Mi sono piegato in due dalle risate al momento del "lavaggio del colon". Libro molto molto piacevole...è stato un buon compagno di ombrellone :)

Ffiamma says

un viaggio nell'ultima terra selvaggia, la papua nuova guinea- per gradi, partendo da dubai e passando per calcutta, le isole andamane, bangkok, bali (con margaret mead come nume tutelare). per tre quarti, uno dei libri di viaggio più appassionanti, esilaranti e ironici che abbia mai letto. l'ultima parte, quella ambientata in papua, appunto, mi ha molto intristito sebbene sia rimasta affascinata dalle descrizioni di questa terra misteriosa, inospitale (insetti, fango, malaria, pioggia, afa)e primordiale.
