

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Grab a seat, you're not going anywhere. This book is about exciting travel to exotic lands. It's about experiencing the full spectrum of the world's cultures, breaking free from the prison of political borders, and drinking deep from the bountiful spring of the human condition. And it's about why none of that garbage is worth your time or money.

This book is what the overstuffed travel shelves of bookstores everywhere actually have room for: not another cloying travel guide, but the very first anti-travel guide. To counter at long last the never-ending supply of smug accounts that claim how wonderful it is to emancipate one's self from the materialistic confines of the United States, here is an argument for staying home and renting the movie instead. Replete with off-putting anecdotes from the world's tourist Meccas and up-yours caricatures of ubiquitous trust-fund travelers, this book brings good old-fashioned American isolationism into the twenty-first century.

Most travel authors are seasoned wanderers, motivated by a fair whiff of their own ostracism, who spout their constant mantra that to be a dutiful and fascinating citizen, one must "see the world." But that exhortation has generated quite enough feelings of guilt and inadequacy amongst America's great stagnant populace. Well we've seen the world, and we'd like to assure the intransigent majority that they're not missing a thing.

Amidst the ocean of travel books claiming that somewhere else is far better than wherever you are, there is no guide that peers behind the idyllic images of self-styled exotic locales to debunk the myth of globe-trotting and to reassure domestic Americans in their choice to stay at home. A travel guide that systematically and humorously points out the flaws of most of the world's famous destinations would be a welcome salve to those who do not travel, a consolation to the poor victims who did go somewhere and regretted it because they were never warned that

Notre Dame consists not of Fighting Irish but squabbling French, and an enjoyable way to compare notes for those who did enjoy their trip but still appreciate the fun in sharing exaggerated and overblown points of interest in every country.

Those Americans who never go abroad are constantly bombarded with media images glamorizing foreign destinations. They have no source to defend their isolationist lifestyle by reminding them of the unsavory reality of the hassles and disappointments of travel. Similarly, many Americans who do muster the energy to journey afar are inevitably disappointed with the exaggerated claims made by the airline industry and its co-conspirators. They have a need for a book that confirms and consoles their international misery, and that will help them avoid more pitfalls in future if they choose to venture forth again. Furthermore, even travelers who have enjoyed filling their passports with colorful watermarks will delight in sharing funny anecdotes over farfetched local claims. Together, these three markets comprise a large swath of American readers with an interest in either travel or humor. We'd like to give them all some light reading. Here is a reference book and a fun read that wipes the gloss of the travel cabal's brochures and tells the real story instead.

We propose a book entitled *Let's Stay – Debunking the Cult of Global Travel*. Every year, 45 million Americans go overseas. That means 220 million stay here. This is the book for them.

THE MARKET

The book cuts into two broad markets: those who do not leave the country and those who do. The primary focus is clearly upon the first – and biggest – group since the book stresses the problems with going abroad and gives reasons for staying at home. Much of the book,

nevertheless, will appeal also to the latter group, which can be further divided into those who traveled unhappily and want commiseration, and those who traveled happily but enjoy sharing the lighter side of their experience. Both sections of this market analysis will describe first the reasons why this book will interest the particular market niche and second what the contours of that market niche are.

I. Those Who Do Not Travel

A. Why This Book Will Appeal To Them

For those who have better things to do than leave the country, this is the book that puts them at ease about their limited horizons. All throughout adolescence and young adulthood, we are force-fed the benefits of understanding different cultures. Still, at the end of the day, anything that's worth paying attention to emanates from the good old Nifty Fifty.

Network executives know that the best way to cover an Olympics is to talk about American athletes, American parents of those athletes, and those who defected to America to compete. Whether it be foreign tourism or foreign policy, Americans have always flexed their desire to ignore the outside world. This book taps into those wide swaths of limited thinkers and tells them they're right. Isolationism sells. That's because it works.

This book speaks the language of the loafer and lets Archie Bunker and Al Bundy know what they're not missing by squatting their lives away in front of the TV. It assures Roseanne that a trip to Six Flags with the kids is a far better deal than shelling out for five tickets to Rome. In other words, this book is a 250-page comeback for anyone who has ever been told their life is boring because they've never quit their job and paid loads of money to volunteer in Kazakhstan.

B. Contours Of This Market

Last year, 220 million people voted with their feet and chose not to leave the United States.¹ Publishers and authors, however, seem to have ignored this dramatic plebiscite. While certainly not every one of those citizens is going to buy *Let's Stay*, the potential market for a book about not going anywhere is extremely large.

Just because most Americans don't leave the country doesn't mean they're not interested in the idea of moving around. The Travel Industry Association of America reports that

Americans spent \$416.6 billion on travel last year (a ten-year high and an 8.9% increase over 1996), and the vast majority of that was spent domestically.² This summer the TIAA estimates that Americans will take 251 million vacation “person-trips,” up 3% from the record number set in 1997.³ This book assures domestic adventurers that they should remain interested in the kind of travel they’re doing, and fear the kind they’re not.

II. Those Who Do Travel

A. Why This Book Will Appeal To Them

1. Unhappy Travelers

On one of the omnipresent websites spouting the nomadic party line, Swiss self-proclaimed world adventurer, Marcel Stöessel, informs us that “most Americans I met on the road think they are still in California.” Well, Marcel, many of them probably wish they were. And with good reason. This book presents hefty evidence of traveling’s evil Siamese twin – hassle – and so it doubles just as effectively as a vindicating read for people who do venture abroad and find they would have been better off staying home. This is the book’s second major niche: people who took expensive sojourns only to return with a hollow feeling that it was supposed to change their lives and didn’t.

With the strong economy of the mid-1990s, more Americans have started traveling overseas and the trend is growing. As foreign travel becomes affordable to new segments of the population, those with little or no experience outside the country will begin venturing out. These are the individuals who will be hitting sonic culture boom at warp speed. This book will convince them that the next time their mutual funds perform well, they don’t have to use the profits to drag the kids through the Louvre. With the total number of travelers increasing, the

raw number of those who had a rotten time will also rise, thus expanding this second market niche.

If that trumped up week of “eco-tourism” was spent unhappily in a hotel room, or you just wish it was, here’s 250 pages of sympathy. More importantly though, we also offer good lying strategies to pretend that it dramatically changed your life even when it didn’t come close. At the very least, it has changed one thing about you: your assumption that foreign travel is a good thing. This book is also a word of warning to take the pressure off and to lower the expectations before you board that international flight to hell. Traveling is hard, and a lot of the time it isn’t fun. For many of the world’s major tourist destinations, this book makes that clear.

2. Happy Travelers

Finally, there are millions of people who genuinely enjoy their time outside the country and of course this book is also for them. Often, half the fun of traveling is not just seeing things, it’s making fun of fellow tourists and the lame sights to see that suck away time and money. Here’s a travel guide they can laugh along with. So the marketing beauty of *Let’s Stay* is that it’s a travel book that appeals to people whether they leave the United States or not. Whether you never go anywhere, spend the money to leave and wish you hadn’t, or travel happily but appreciate a few anecdotes, this book justifies what you think.

B. Contours Of This Market

“Tourism is America’s number one export”⁴ and the demographics of those tourists are easily discernible. First, 45 million Americans went abroad last year and from the trend of recent years, that number is growing. Second, members of that group are wealthier than average Americans, and they spent more than 52 billion dollars on tickets and travel accessories for foreign vacations – a jump of 8.7% over 1996.⁵ Consider, for instance, the type of people who

read travel magazines. Last year, 612,561 people subscribed to *Conde Nast Traveler* alone, and they ranged in age from eighteen to over fifty, and their average incomes were from \$43,553 to \$102,339.⁶ These people are typically more educated and they're interested in buying items for their trip that are both practical and recreational. This book is both, and it is perfect for this group.

Perhaps those to whom it will appeal the most, however, are students and young people. This age group tends to have the same sense of humor as *Let's Stay*, and they also leave the country in large numbers. In fact, 84,403 of them studied abroad last year⁷ and, by the time they graduate from college, roughly one-third of all undergraduates have traveled abroad.⁸

COMPETITION

There is minimal competition to *Let's Stay*, and nearly all of it is indirect. The current landscape of travel literature consists of two major genres: the reference work designed to inform, and the narrative account designed to entertain. Ours isn't either – or maybe it's both. The first category is dominated by the usual suspects – *Let's Go*, *Fodor's*, *Lonely Planet* – and those are the straightforward guides listing places of interest, fares in U.S. dollars, and perhaps a sprinkling of editorial comments in the margin. The second category consists of first-person memoirs and fictional road stories, which are either humorous – P.J. O'Rourke's *Holidays in Hell* – or semi-intellectual – Alex Garland's *The Beach*. But these works are almost always more about the person who wrote them than the places they ventured.

To say that this book is a combination of those two types may be true at a superficial level, but falls well short of the mark substantively. This book is a new kind of travel account that doesn't simply suggest a dark lining to the lands beyond the gormless immigration officers of

the world. It guarantees it. This book takes that dark lining and shoves it in the face of deluded want-to-be globetrotters, but with loads of funny anecdotes to ease the disappointment.

Most, if not all, other travel guides are written by the wrong people, who have no connection to their audiences. Those authors are career wanderers; by definition, vacationers are not. Why take advice from people who have either been ostracized from normal society or chosen to reject it? Animals instinctively avoid members of their community that act strangely to avoid an influx of defective genetic material. We recommend travel readers do the same to avoid an influx of defective travel advice.

The *Lonely Planet* creator, Tony Wheeler, once ventured from London to Australia without getting on an airplane. *Let's Go* writers are Harvard students who float through foreign lands with plump stipends, worried only about jotting a few editorialized details down on paper. Do these sound like vacations you've ever taken? Hardly. Where are the screaming children, cancelled flights, and real jobs to return to in five days? Come on, most people just don't travel this way. And for their light reading before, during, and after their trip, there really isn't any tongue-in-cheek guide that speaks directly to them. This book does. For the millions who go abroad and return with nothing but a nifty photo album to fill the frustrated void where their enlightenment was supposed to be, this account proves they're not alone.

The only book that conceptually compares to *Let's Stay* is Chris Harris's *Don't Go Europe!* (NTC/Contemporary Publishing, \$7.95, 1994), which we discovered during our marketing research for this proposal. The work is a tight parody of the *Let's Go!* series, imitating its layout right down to the subject headings. Harris recounts his pitfalls through a handful of European nations, but his specific pieces of travel advice require that readers have been there – and have traveled using *Let's Go!* – to understand the humor. Despite it's

imperative title, *Don't Go Europe!* is still an advice guide for once you are on the ground. *Let's Stay* is an anecdote-packed social commentary that is just as funny to those who travel as to those who don't. It also spans four continents, six more countries, and if published will be far more current than its only direct competitor.

The tone of *Let's Stay* is light and the criticism of other lands is good-natured. Precisely because it isn't entirely serious, *Let's Stay* will draw those who aren't die-hard wanderers to it. For those who choose to blow their week-long vacations redecorating the living room or catching up on ESPN's daytime lineup, this book will reassure them that their decision to stay home wasn't so uninspired after all. The next time they're forced to stomach a neighbor's eight-hour slide show of an endless trek in Nepal, they'll know they're getting only half the story. Here's the other half.

THE AUTHORS

Bill Hawthorn

Bill Hawthorn is a third-year student at Yale Law School, where he serves as the Managing Editor of the *Yale Law Journal*. Hawthorn graduated *Summa cum Laude* and *Phi Beta Kappa* from the University of Michigan in 1995, where he majored in English and Psychology. Since that time, he has written and produced an independent feature film, which is currently in submission to various film festivals.

Hawthorn was born in London, England in 1973 and is a British citizen. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Marsa el Brega, Libya, where he lived for eight years until his family was evacuated in 1982 due to rising unrest in the Middle East. After living in Ireland and England for several months, Hawthorn then moved to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where he spent nine years. After graduating from high school in Malaysia, he moved to America to matriculate at the University of Michigan. Between college and law school, he worked for one year at Williams & Connolly, the law firm representing President Clinton in the Monica Lewinsky matter.

Hawthorn has lived abroad his entire life and has traveled to over twenty countries.

Ben Von Italie

Ben Von Italie has worked in network television news for ABC, CBS, and PBS, and currently works for CNN in Atlanta. He graduated *Magna cum Laude* and *Phi Beta Kappa* from the University of Michigan in 1997, where he majored in Political Science and History, and also worked as an editor at Michigan's daily newspaper. Like most of his college friends, he spent part of his junior year studying and traveling abroad. Following a semester at the London School of Economics, he spent time touring Ireland and Central Europe. Shortly after graduation, two classmates talked him into a three-month South Asian journey on the grounds that it was the

region de jour for American travelers. The next thing he knew, he was in a travel agency in Bangkok buying a plane ticket to Vietnam. He grew up in Summit, New Jersey.

With their very different backgrounds in international travel, Hawthorn and Von Italie complement each other's foreign experiences and together provide a variety of compelling reasons to avoid spending time outside of a first-world superpower.

THE BOOK

Let's Stay is organized into three major sections. The first covers the entire gamut of issues that arise before one ever touches down in a foreign land, the second consists of detailed sections on different parts of the globe, and the third addresses everything that arises upon one's return to the United States. The satirical tone is set early in the introduction, and horrifyingly accurate anecdotes stretch on throughout the colorful chapters covering individual countries and into the conclusion.

The book opens with a gloves-off critique of the glamour of foreign travel and reasons why much of it is painfully hyped. Next comes a taxonomy of the stereotypical travelers in every age group. There's the 18-year-old trustafarian who got an open plane ticket on his high school graduation day; the dreadlocked Hemingway who takes off to Austria to write the great American novel between joints; and, of course, the disgruntled 33-year-old middle manager who sets off for Southeast Asia to push the reset button on life.

Next, the book establishes a theoretical framework underlying the global stranglehold of American culture, explaining why you'll be eating Pizza Hut on your first night on Bangkok's Koh San Road. A brief sketch of America's isolationist forefathers and famous xenophobes adds a "great-man" spin to this socio-historical commentary. The final segment of the introduction is

an objective examination of the dos and don'ts of pre-travel planning: navigating the necromancy of passport photography, the labyrinth of visa application, and the jungle of live-virus vaccinations.

The meaty entrails of the book are its sections on specific countries. In each chapter, the book sets forth the attractive reputations of each nation, then points out why they are simply mythology via excoriating anecdotes and exposés of copious disappointments in each land. Finally, *Let's Stay* provides a stateside analog that replicates domestically the experience of every country.

So in each new chapter we start with the glossy images of a foreign land force-fed to the American populace, then we give reasons why natives of such a wonderful place enter U.S. visa lotteries by the millions. One by one we set countries up and then knock them down. We begin with Europe – America's rough draft and a continent where the only kind of cleansing going on is of the ethnic variety. Starting with the beautiful and tortured Emerald Isle, we tear apart the continent's absurdities, all the way to the "sorry I have a boyfriend in the States" cafés of Southern Italy.

Next, we unlock the silky mysteries of Asia. From detailing why the Indian subcontinent is a perfect "how-to" guide for nuclear diplomacy to the asthmatic fits you'll experience amidst the permanent ground fires of Indonesia, we shed some reality on the trendy travel region of the nineties. We include a fond retrospective of how thirty years ago our parents battled tear gas and burned cities to avoid being sent to Southeast Asia – and why they had a point.

Finally, we swing below the equator for a tour of Africa and the countries that are nauseatingly patronized by well-meaning Americans. Cry freedom is what you'll be doing when you look for truth and reconciliation in a lawless South Africa. For our last destination, we trace

Captain Cook's route to rediscover Oceania with a little thought experiment. What would happen if we sent San Quentin's finest to Greenland, encouraged them to kill off the Eskimos, and then watched their offspring run a continent? We'd have one more Australia to avoid.

We conclude the book by providing crucial advice on how to handle the travel endgame: returning to your regularly scheduled life and salvaging the trip. Our debriefing includes ways to convince yourself that you actually had a decent time, methods for doctoring photographs to provide proof of your fun, answers to the inevitable office interrogations, and techniques on padding the travel résumé no matter how feeble the vacation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

I. Before You Get There

Let's Stay begins by hacking away at the very idea of leaving the United States. The glamour of travel is one of the easiest things to cloak yourself in, and even a quick mention of your upcoming adventure at the office water cooler bumps your social stock up a few points. You could have a perfectly dull life and all of a sudden that \$1,000 plane ticket you just purchased gives you that seasoned personal glow. Why is that? Just because you got so frustrated sitting in traffic on the way to work that you up and left the country, how will watching French people sit in traffic calm your nerves and expand your horizons? If you've chosen to sit on your butt every free minute of your adult life, why will it help to go to Bangladesh to watch poor people sit on their butts? In a time when trading stocks on any market in the world or reading the *Phnom Penh Post* online can make you richer and more knowledgeable about the Khmer Rouge than any Cambodian, the case that one needs to get up from their desk to find out about the world gets harder to make.

Global travel started because people needed things. Not things like two-inch bronze Eiffel Towers or pointy straw hats worn by Vietnamese women, but real things like food and water. Travel is more legitimate when it's needed for something other than tempering a mid-life crisis. When the world is brought to your seat through FedEx and fiber optic cable, leaving your air-conditioned workspace becomes less necessary. So don't waste the money and pretend it isn't.

Here's step one: ease up, Kerouac. Whatever mind-bending cross-cultural fertilization you think you're beginning by setting off into the world, keep in mind that it's already been done before. If you insist on going, concentrate on *pretending* that you had an original experience and stop worrying about actually trying to live it. Bragging about it before and after you go is what's going to get you mileage, not the airborne parasite you inhaled while trundling four miles-an-hour on a non-air-conditioned bus to Pondicherry, India. That's why, if you must go, *Let's Stay* recommends chopping down that eight-month journey you've booked to three weeks. Either way the photo album is filled, the suntan is there, and the travel stories – whether you lived them, stole them, or just made them up – can fly off your tongue when you return.

Chapter 1. Marketing Your Trip Before it Happens

Most people make the mistake of waiting until they return to the States to brag about their experience. What they don't realize is half the faux mystique about your world traveler status can be concocted before you even have a passport. Here is where we provide a few pointers on marketing your experience before it even happens.

First, let it be known to everyone at home and work. Weave it into every conversation you possibly can, no matter how tangential the association. Others will quickly spread the news for you and pretty soon people you thought you didn't even know will be throwing you lines

like “I heard about your upcoming adventure. That sounds fascinating.” And that’s all before you’ve done a single thing to get ready for your trip.

Second, talk incessantly about how you got the best deals on everything: airplane tickets, apparel, accommodations – anything you can think of. It will make you look thrifty and savvy, and will build that international mystique that should be your overriding goal.

Third, pretend that you’re going to play things by ear and will be shunning the hackneyed guide books and tourist sites. You know in your heart that you wouldn’t have a clue how to get from point A to point B in Seoul’s Itewan without that *Lonely Planet*, but who cares? Act as though you’re a freewheeling adventurous spirit and God will be your copilot.

Fourth, drum up some sort of theme about your vacation. Pretend you’re interested in real-time environmental monitoring in the Third World or taking a look at European organic farms. This blows the Eiffel Tower and London Bridge folks out of the water.

Chapter 2. Traveler Taxonomy

The idea of traveling to “find yourself” is one that you hear a little too often, so *Let’s Stay* wants to save lost souls the cost of the plane ticket. Instead of trying to find out who you are, we’ll just tell you right now. In travel agencies and youth hostels around the world, Americans can be lumped into fairly accurate stereotypes just by reading the date-of-birth lines on their passports.

Under 15: Why are you even traveling? You’re not even through puberty yet and the parents are dragging you through foreign-language art museums thinking you’ll get something out of it. Bringing your kids along makes little sense, and *Let’s Stay* points out some of the finer temper tantrums we’ve witnessed on the road by people who give new meaning to the words “youth travel.”

16 – 18: Here we have the young and the grotesquely rich. Still in high school and the parents have already splurged for the summer world tour. This group has never done their own laundry or seen the inside of public transportation, but their parents feel that sending them to Europe will finally introduce them to the “real world.”

19 – 23: So, the professor doesn't “get” your writing. Required calculus? I know, C+ means above average. You, a doctor? Your psychiatrist parents may think so but we don't and neither does your \$75-an-hour Organic Chemistry tutor. Take some time off from studying – study abroad. Learn about the nirvana of Bohemian poverty while your parents shell out a few G's for you not to shave for a semester. Nothing sexier than returning to the Tri-Delt mixer with a “Free Tibet” tee that you sweated into for ten weeks straight; that's probably not as much sweat as the three-dollar-a-month Filipino grandmother who made it, but who cares?

24 – 29: Ah, those confusing years. Here, we have the adolescence of adulthood. Bet you're glad you spent years in school learning how to deconstruct the illusion of retrospective determinism. But now it's time to spend ten hours a day typing bi-weekly sales numbers into Excel. Quit the job and buy the plane ticket. Same idea as studying abroad except you're paying for it, you're not getting any credit, and you've nothing to go back to.

Over 30: So, the mid-life crisis came a little early. Bailed on the engagement at the last minute? Wussed out of twenty-something travel because you thought it a waste of time? Now you've got more to lose so it's all that much sexier. Forty is just around the corner and if you're caught sleeping in a hostel then, you might as well stamp “child molester” on your passport. You've struggled with a career, failed at relationships, lost friendships, and become estranged from your family, but you're still guilty of not really seeing The World. That doesn't happen until you witness people doing those exact same things in another country.

The traveler taxonomy goes on to describe middle-aged travelers who broaden their horizons by taking “really neat hikes” and, of course, the doddering octogenarians who take up the good seats all over the world. It also categorizes the most prevalent motifs in every age group.

The Loner: Doesn't matter if you're a girl or a guy on this one. Know about the other because they're your only hook-up option on the road.

Unappetizing Lovers: Be a disgusting couple in ten different countries. Look, just because you bought a plane ticket together doesn't mean you can suck face at the breakfast table.

Americans Becoming Interesting: Remember when Donna and Brenda left the 90210 zip code and went to France? That can be you. “It's like I was exposed to all these different cultures.”

Chapter 3. Isolationist Ideology

When you're sitting in JFK Airport awaiting your departure, it's probably not a good idea to eat at Burger King. Because that's what you'll be eating your first morning on the Champs Elysées. American culture isn't just American anymore. It's now become the entire world's way of dressing and eating and watching movies. In Thailand, tapes of “Jerry Maguire” mysteriously have no FBI warning before the opening credits. Instead they have fuzzy, on-screen silhouettes walking in front of the actors from time to time.

This chapter also examines why Indian men often sport Mighty Ducks tee-shirts with the name Jordan and the number “99” emblazoned on the back, and why you'll be taking refuge in a McDonald's after you puke up that moldy French cheese. As you sink your teeth into that non-USDA Big Mac, stop and appreciate how great American culture is. Then try to understand why you spent thousands of dollars to go experience it an ocean away.

One of the side aims of *Let's Stay* is to update the state of American xenophobia. So to re-cap the trails that our forefathers blazed, we look back at a few historical figures who profited off their extreme nationalism. From our earliest days as a nation we were given instructions to leave other countries alone. After scribbling out the Constitution on a tasty slab of hemp, Washington and friends told us not to enter into entangling alliances with other powers. Today that means not entangling yourself in the customs line at Berlin-Tiegel International Airport and pouring dollars into a European trading block that will soon put more American workers on European-style welfare rolls. In our section on famous xenophobes we trace the upside of rabid nationalism from William Randolph Hearst's Spanish-American War to the Persian Gulf, and from the Hawley-Smoot Tariff to Ross Perot's vision for NAFTA.

Chapter 4. Planning – Less Than Half The Fun

Finally, we give an eye to pre-travel planning and how the work involved usually outweighs any amount of fun that could be had on the road. For instance, if you don't have an up-to-date passport you'd better be up-to-date with the IRS. The tax Gestapo often catches up on delinquents by using new-applicant information from Passport Services. Once you get it though, you'll need to tape it to the inside of your thigh because the State Department reports about 25,000 lost or stolen passports a year.⁹ Think the Rwandans will find it for you? They can't even find half their population.

Then you have to hit your local public health clinic for the shots required in many parts of the world. The only vaccination required by the World Health Organization for entry into some countries is that for yellow fever, but that's a far cry from what's "recommended." A trip to Asia or Africa will involve shots for everything from Tetanus to the latest maverick strain of the Bubonic Plague. You will also have to sit through the lecture by the senior citizen volunteer

at the public health clinic, and stare nervously at the floor while she spouts nineteenth century euphemisms about unprotected sex abroad. But if you forget some of that handy advice, you'll probably become one of the 500,000 American tourists who require a doctor or hospitalization abroad every year.¹⁰

II. Europe

Chapter 5. England – “This Pasty Breed of Men”

For Americans who are nervous about traveling, England always seems a safe bet. Technically it's a different country, but you're not going to feel lost once you get there. It has different food and different customs but only a slightly different language. It most certainly has a different feel than the States, but you know, not that “Mexico kind of different.” It has all the majesty and tradition you need to keep the kids enthralled for a few hours, and you can still read the street signs. Buckingham Palace, Madame Tussaud's, and the Tower of London are all safe options for an “absolutely fab” afternoon.

Basically England is trying to be just like America and doing a lukewarm job of it. It's called the New Britain, and what it means is that the stiff upper lip is out and whimpering in the fetal position over the decline of social capital is in. Tony Blair is Bill Clinton with better soundbites and zero scandals. Studying abroad in 1995, I thought I would be cheated out of watching the O.J. verdict live. Months of sitting in front of Court TV and listening to DNA explanations watered down for a jury of my peers, only to leave the country and be deprived of the money shot. Nope. In fact, they seemed just as interested over there as any idiot slacking away in Encino. “Storm Over O.J. Verdict” ran the headline on the Evening Standard. That was hours before the verdict was known to anyone on the planet. But don't think England is five hours ahead of the United States, it's nineteen hours and a few decades behind.

What does remain of Jolly Old England might as well be thrown out anyway. The nation's main legislative body, the House of Commons, is essentially policy by wisecracks. After Labour's victory in April of 1997, more women became MP's than ever before. As many of them took their first small steps into the public arena, their speeches during Question Time were met with old public school boys on the Conservative side cupping their imaginary breasts and chanting dirty slogans. Smashing. The House of Lords, which really shouldn't be in the same paragraph with the word "policy," is essentially governance by Rapid Eye Movement. Britain's vestigial upper house is keenly steered by a few doddering Bishops and England's star halfbacks from the 1966 World Cup squad. Hear, hear.

Want a truly British experience without leaving the United States? Drive to Toronto. *Let's Stay* continues its commentary on the most civilized country in the world with scathing reviews of their World Cup etiquette, their cutting-edge dental technology, and their relentless pursuit of the empty conversation.

Chapter 6. France – “Europe’s Little Haiti”

Long considered the center of fashion and food, France is adored by almost all American tourists. Many of them seem to forget, however, that no matter when they arrive, the country is going to be on its lunch hour. The only passion the French have surpassing sex with other people's spouses and amphibious food is for going on strike. What other nation would have the audacious ineptitude to host the world's largest sporting event, the World Cup, and then appoint a striking company to be the tournament's official airline? Just because Pierre doesn't make \$19-an-hour doesn't mean they should switch off the entire nation. France has long struggled with its need to appeal to the outside world while shunning it at the same time. Sporting Levi's and smoking Marlboro's, French youths can be found diligently parked at some café bitching about

either why America should stay the hell out of European affairs or why it shouldn't stand idly by while Bosnian-Serbs play ultimate frisbee with landmines.

The French culture war is one of the more amusing sights to see while in Paris. You'll hear the official party line that Francophones are purging their language of English references while you experience the seven-hundred-pumpkin 'Ah-lo-eeen blowout under the Eiffel Tower. The tension in this isometric battle is tremendous, as the language police try to figure out whether "Le Videocassetterecorder" can be improved upon at the same time they deify Jerry Lewis. About the only item the French have successfully prevented from crossing their borders is deodorant, and you'll find that out before you've gone one stop on Le Metro. The only reason why France isn't just a suburb of Berlin is because of England's revulsion to having Krauts within swimming distance.

To save your sous while experiencing the same thing at home, we recommend you cease bathing, quit working from June to August, and cultivate utter disdain for . . . I don't know, how do you say . . . everything.

This chapter continues its review of France by exploring the coincidental connection between the country's love of atomic power and the horrendous smell, why Disney thought a country with the surliest population in Europe would be a good spot for a fun park, and whether a bicycle race is a valid national treasure.

Chapter 7. Italy – "Please Stop Touching Me"

American males invariably remark upon the beauty of Italian women in this land of high fashion and low class. American women, on the other hand, tend to return with slightly different impressions – several of which are still smeared on their clothing. No need for girls to brush up on that high school Latin, because blending will be done for you, physically, whether you

welcome it or not. Riding in a taxi in southern Italy, one of us struck up a conversation with a cheery driver who asked where we were from in the States. “New Jersey,” was the reply, guessing that anyone with Italian genes would instantly recognize the place. Several minutes later it was determined that the driver had met one of our travelling companions days earlier. “Oh you met, Caroline?” “Yes,” the driver said fondly, “she was a great lay.” Lovely.

The disaPoints of interest in classical Italia abound, and *Let's Stay* leaves few pottery shards unturned. The Vatican City might be a nice place for the latest thinking on population control, but be careful if you piss them off. Say the wrong words and the last thing you'll see before the Pearly Gates is a Swiss Guard's battle axe swinging towards your neck. Just ask John Paul I, Pope from 1978 to 1978. From the Coliseum-turned-cat-farm to the Hammurabic legal mores of charming Sicily, we tour the boot of Europe with fresh eyes. Images of world-class soccer, stylish Vespas, and roomy Fiats make our chapter on Italy a swirl of right honest commentary on the EU's bottomless money pit.

Then, of course, we offer suggestions for creating the same experience stateside: for an entire spring, sit outside in the sun between 10:00am and 2:00pm and every time you get the urge to shower, apply imposter cologne instead. Then as you get a little tipsy after that ninth glass of vino, brood about how your family was cheated five generations ago by your next door neighbor and what you're going to do about it.

Chapter 8. Ireland – “Subtitles Required”

Forty million Irish-Americans claim the Emerald Isle as their ancestral home, admiring its terrible beauty, its charming citizens, and its vibrant literary and musical ethos. But aren't you worried by the fact that a country with only three million citizens has forty million descendants scattered across the globe? You should be. What sort of misery could generate such a durable

and enthusiastic diaspora? The Irish kind, featuring a capital city once decrepit enough to be used by Hollywood as a set for Communist Bloc countries during the Cold War, seven-hundred-year old sectarian “troubles” over a plot of real estate just a tad less appealing than Beirut, and a national beverage that doubles as dinner.

The Irish may be terrific artists but that’s only because the entire population lost their right brains during that shortage of vegetables they experienced a while back. Where else in the world would a country be decimated by famine when none of it is more than seventy miles from the sea? Evidently the fishing rod was imported to Ireland about the same time as the bell-bottom. And judging from the trendy lads loafing about in the ubiquitous fish-and-chip shops, both have been extremely successful ever since.

If you’re looking for a good time in Ireland, you’ve got one option: the local. If you can manage to squeeze into a pub through the throng of children enjoying the “family atmosphere,” you’ll be greeted by the country’s only industrial effluent: second-hand smoke. In Ireland, “direct deposit” means the coal company hands you a carton of cigarettes every Friday and picks up your tab at the bar. You’ll be expected to meet the nightly quota of three pints and ten smokes as you answer questions about whether you know “Michael” back in America because “he lives in San Francisco too.”

In a countryside devoid of civilized landmarks – and bomb-free rental cars – hitch-hiking is the only method of transportation. And after a long day of standing by the side of the road in the hot sun, you’ll be able to refresh yourself with a tepid pint of pumpernickel that you can drink with a fork; it’s about as refreshing as strapping on a feedbag of sawdust. Don’t worry though, now that Ireland’s in the EU, this one’s on Germany.

One of Ireland's most interesting events is the annual Orange Day parade featuring droves of Protestants marching drunk through Catholic areas of Belfast. If this intrigues you, but not enough to leave your Lay-Z-Boy, replicate the experience by organizing a local Klan rally in Compton or Watts.

Chapter 9. Germany – “Two Easts Don't Make a West”

On November 9, 1989, the news networks had one of those easy ratings nights. They dug up some Checkpoint Charlie file footage, got a British expert on camera in front of a bookshelf, and then went live to the remnants of the Berlin Wall. German strangers were hugging each other. The Fatherland was back. An experiment in mass-psychosis was reborn.

Today Germany's increased landmass and domination in the Nordic Combined makes it difficult to ignore. But we still recommend you try. If the United States took down the fences below San Diego and welcomed Mexico's unskilled jobless with open arms, would California be an appealing place to visit? Well then, why are you planning on going to Germany? Between 29% unemployment and the 18-hour workweek, there are a lot of Gerries sitting around doing nothing more than cutting their hair a little shorter to welcome the Turks.

Sure, the Fatherland's expatriates have made the world a better place. Henry Kissinger is great on A&E, ex-Nazis put an American on the moon, and we knew a German exchange student who turned off the shower while he lathered, just to save water – and to make completely obscene noises. And, if you happen to run into a nice Bonn resident at Saigon's Museum of American War Crimes, they'll offer you a reassuring shoulder: “All countries have skeletons in their closets, you know.” Thanks, Klaus. That makes me feel better about my napalm-spraying and My Lai massacring Uncle Joey here.

But that doesn't mean you need to visit the country where these people were actually bred. If you want the same effect as a cholesterol-building German adventure, there's no need to cross an ocean. Just stay where you are and shove a hot dog – heavy on the sauerkraut – into your face. Not the same thing? Fine, swallow two. *Let's Stay* continues its look at unified Germany with a review of Berlin's aesthetic trade deficit, reasons why the country ignores world fashion but heaves a collective *achtung* when *Baywatch* comes on, and the finer points of German engineering that turned a high-velocity train into a claustrophobic death torpedo unsafe at any speed.

III. Asia

Chapter 10. India – “945 Million Reasons to Leave”

In our first look at Asia we examine India – the place where it all began, the mysterious subcontinent of Hindu passivity and vegetarian delights. Cows graze next to taxis in the city streets. Soldiers toting M-16s walk with interlocking pinkies. People shake their heads when they mean “yes.” When the story of Gandhi was put on film in 1982, there was no need to call for extras in the funeral scene. Tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of Indians poured into the streets – simply upon hearing that some likeness of the great non-violent leader had returned. The wide shot from atop a building was beautiful. Throngs of humanity jostling together in remembrance of their leader, packed tightly together, touching each other with love and affection. Hundreds of thousands of human beings, living and breathing together on one small city street.

But what the filmmakers didn't know was that this was just a normal shopping day in Delhi. Had there been no casket taking up street space, there would have been eighty more people pushing each other in its place. The myth of India brings up images of soul-cleansing religion but the reality is that you'll be waiting in a long line to see it. India is crowded. Those

945 million people are increasing their numbers quickly – to the tune of 31 each minute – and in the next century it will overtake China as the most populous country in the world. Two billion people fenced inside a militaristic regime free of human rights is one thing. But 945 million people freely getting in your face, reaching in your pockets, and asking you for money is quite another.

From Chennai (Madras) in the east to Mumbai (Bombay) in the west, we tour this massive land of re-named cities as best we can. That's because traveling in India is hard and you're likely to get nauseated doing it. Remember those sacred cows picking through garbage lying on the street? Where do you think that milk in your cereal comes from? If you're left-handed, you'd better learn to eat with your right. Christopher Columbus never made it to India – evidently neither did his shipment of flush toilets and bathroom tissue. Aside from general commentary on this giant land of desperate poverty and nuclear capability, we pinpoint the disaPoints of interest for American tourists. From the plundered aesthetics of the Taj Mahal we travel to Goa, the hippie Mecca of south Asia – a place where dozens of Americans who love India stay for months. But remember, they're all on drugs.

Want an Indian experience at home? Want one different than having your sphincters opened at both ends after another meal at the local Bombay Club restaurant. Take an eight-hour bus ride with 300 people you hate.

Chapter 11. Thailand - “Where Immune Systems Go to Die”

In *Swimming to Cambodia*, the monologue-artist and traveler Spalding Gray mentions the Thai word, “sanug.” Its meaning is a combination of English words, meaning fun, having a good time, and relaxing. On many levels this is what Thailand is all about for American tourists. Right in the middle of overly traditional Asia, here’s a nice little pearl of hedonism. When you go to Southeast Asia, Thailand is the place you’ll start. And if the Thai tourist authority has its way, it’s the only place you’ll go. There are beautiful beaches partially obscured by marijuana plants and women that make you wish you’d left the wife behind. If you’re in Bangkok for a business conference you’re really going to enjoy yourself when you have some free time. Bars just aren’t ordinary bars here. They have women who want to meet you. Desperately. And those women have numbers pinned to their dresses, and price tags that make you say “Oh what the hell.” Bangkok is the Amsterdam of Asia, the sex capital of an entire hemisphere.

But traveling in Thailand requires one to look at things a little more closely. After you’ve caught a good buzz on a few ass-tasting Singha beers, you might zone your cloudy vision in on the neck of that sexy woman sitting on your lap. My, look at the size of that Adam’s apple. Then that deep voice that you just thought was sexy and feminine starts to make more sense. Face it, you’ve just been slipping 100 Baht notes to a very attractive, exotically Asian, young man with great legs. But let’s say you beat the odds and actually wind up with someone who doesn’t have a Y chromosome, well now you face another set of odds that aren’t as good. Whereas all prostitutes are registered and regularly screened in Amsterdam, they don’t fiddle around with such messy bureaucracy in Bangkok. Something like 30% of all hookers and other sex workers in Pat Phong have AIDS.

One of the more interesting subdivisions of Thailand is a country called Laos. If your goal as a traveler is to come back with tales of far-flung lands, then you definitely need to swing through here. Just going to a place called Laos sounds cool. For only a few Kips you can lounge an afternoon away with a few beautiful women at an outdoor café in Vientiane. Or take it from our friend, the great Swiss traveler Marcel Stöessel, who reminds us “while you sit on a basic ‘toilet’ in the tropical forest of Laos, you think about who you are.” For those lucky few who follow the Ho Chi Minh trail all the way into this deserted jungle, Laos offers peace of mind, if you can avoid the inane Swiss tourists.

But that’s about it. The only attraction to Laos is, well, saying you’re in Laos. Getting the Laotian effect without leaving the United States is fairly easy. Just visit Delaware – the only other place so small and unimportant that it hurts.

Chapter 12. Indonesia - “17,000 Islands & No Place to Go”

The *New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, once asserted that, pound-for-pound, Indonesia is the most misunderstood country in the world. Right there we have the beginnings of a great travel résumé builder. Traveling across the globe to unlock the puzzles of the world will put you way ahead of your boring neighbor who once took the kids to the Grand Canyon. Basically, Indonesia is the most populous country that you’ve never heard of.

In a nation of 17,000 islands it’s hard to know where to start, but regardless you’ll need to tie a handkerchief across your mouth. Essentially, they’ve slashed and burned all the trees off the world’s fifth largest island, left it as a desolate breeding pit for thousands, and called it Sumatra. If the 300 million smokers in the country don’t wreck your respiratory system, the nation’s permanent ground fires most certainly will.

But besides the gas mask bring your drum of hydrogen peroxide, because you can't spell Indonesia without infection. One hangnail ignored for part of an afternoon will have you Medivaced to Singapore with an unidentified mono-culture tracking up your finger. We recommend you just ignore the green puss that mysteriously appeared after you touched a doorknob at the first bar you went to in Jakarta, because it will probably be eaten by the flesh-eating virus that you get after you kiss one of those charming Balinese maidens. *Let's Stay* wades through Indonesia by exploring the Australian majority in Bali, the coincidence that the entire upper tax bracket is named Suharto, and Pol Pot's old branch office in East Timor.

Getting the Indonesian experience at home entails going to Blockbuster and selecting *The Year of Living Dangerously*: the 1983 film in which Linda Hunt won an Oscar for playing a small Indonesian man. That should tell you something right there. Column inch-for-column inch, this film is the most referenced thing about Indonesia, and you can find pieces of its title punned into every news article about machete-waving rioters taking over the country. So rent the film, ignore Mel Gibson, and it's as good as being there. Probably better.

Chapter 13. Vietnam – “Why Are We in Vietnam?”

In the winter of 1997 the *New York Times Magazine* ran a fairly eye-catching cover story on Vietnam. There was a young American lounging in a bar and he was surrounded by five Vietnamese women. Americans too young to remember the war were heading off to jump-start their social lives and to cash in on the rising Dong, the flacid local currency. The war was over, but all those exotic things that had mesmerized American GIs were still there: the stunningly submissive women and cheap nights at a bar.

But like a resilient venereal disease, pieces of the war live on. Green pith-helmeted soldiers still approach you with loaded guns and demand your money. Don't worry, they leave

your Dong alone, but they want your dollars. “You gih me ten dolla!” they said to one of our friends as he accidentally stepped off the path at the Ho Chi Minh museum. Little kids looking for tonight’s food money will approach you with shiny Zippos and fake dog tags that were supposedly worn by American soldiers. “John MacGregor,” the engraving says, “SSN: 126-76-22, Religion: Protestor.” Price, two American dollars.

As you stand next to Europeans shaking their heads at the Museum of American and Chinese War Crimes, be prepared to pretend you’re a Canadian. You paid money to see pictures of GIs smiling into a camera, with severed VC heads in the foreground. But keep in mind your guide probably fought alongside your dad. Many of Saigon’s tourist chauffeurs were in the South Vietnamese army, and at first they smile recalling their service with the Americans. Then their face gets a little sadder as they tell you that their lieutenant rank bought them three years in a re-education camp after the Americans picked up, left the country, and went on with their lives in 1970’s disco clubs.

From the Hanoi Hilton, to the De-Nutritionized Zone, to the Mekong chapter of Delta-Delta, *Let’s Stay* returns for another tour in Vietnam. Want the same experience without actually going? You can’t have it, man, because you weren’t in The Nam! You weren’t there, man. You weren’t there.

IV. Africa

Chapter 14. Egypt – “Let My People Go”

Just mention this classical corner of Africa and it conjures up images of the world’s oldest tourist attractions: the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the River Nile. The myths of Egypt run long enough to fill a book of their own. They already clutter everything from Caesar to the Bible to the unauthorized biography of Yasser Arafat. The age-old tales of this majestic civilization have

always been required reading for every American third grader, and much of that romantic mystique has found its way into American travel agencies. Charlton Heston led his people out of the country in the early Hollywood version of *Moses*. Today the Egyptian government is eager to lead you back there.

They certainly have their work cut out for them. For the same reasons that most Americans don't immediately think of the Middle East when they schedule vacations, an Egyptian holiday requires some careful planning. In the fall of 1997, a busload of German tourists was hit by gunfire not far from the Valley of the Kings. The culprit was an Islamic fundamentalist and, understandably, he murdered a few Western tourists to get his political view on the evening news. But even this shameless stunt for media attention pales in comparison to his religion's Hajj – a breakthrough marketing concept invented in 1973 by Saudia Airlines to boost summer cash flow. *Let's Stay* provides a fire-arm-free tour of Egypt with critiques of the sewage plant at Alexandria and the upriver hive of well-funded terrorists eager to tip the moderate government back a few centuries.

Whatever classical angle it tries to spin on itself, Egypt is a 62 million person dirt pile that's not quite worth the roundabout airplane ticket it takes to get there. Why sit for hours in the claustrophobic death trap pyramids when you can stay in the United States and visit the Morocco section of Epcot? For an experience that's similar and only slightly more expensive, *Let's Stay* recommends a nomadic walkabout without water where Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona meet – don't forget your Kalashnikov and religious hatred.

Chapter 15. South Africa - "The Cape of No Hope"

Now that South Africa is a socially acceptable tourist destination, well-meaning Yankees who once confused the country with a Paul Simon CD are flocking there to visit "Africa's

California.” But basically, they just want to see what happens when 5% of the population subjugates the other 95% to build themselves a utopia – and they’ve already been to Washington, D.C. Now that everything has been “fixed” in South Africa, those “Smash Apartheid” T-shirts are horribly passé, and its time for the socially conscious to reinvest in the “Free Tibet” collection. Don’t feel bad Nelson, the Kurds were never trendy.

One way to enjoy South Africa, now that you can do so without perpetuating the racist hierarchy, is to go on one of the many fantastic safaris, where you can rent an entire family to do your cooking and laundry for \$7 a day. The sights are tremendous and guilt-free, if you’re white. If you’re not, well, the new South Africa looks about as emancipated as the old Mississippi. The only real change in the country is the absence of public necklacings – a cheery method of conflict resolution where the loser wakes up with a burning tire around his neck. Much of the fighting has died down since either the Hutus or the Tutsis lost the 1994 elections but emerged victorious after the disappearance of forty percent of the electorate – wait, no, that’s Congo or its neighbor, The Congo.

In any event, the Mainly-Zulu Inkatha Group – not to be confused with the Predominantly-Zulu Inkatha Group, which recently clashed with the majority-minority-Zulu Inkatha group – toned down its attacks following merger talks with Coopers & Lybrand. *Let’s Stay* continues this hard-hitting survey by explaining how one night in an Afrikaner bar will reveal how they came to be known as the Boers. Then it’s on to the Kimberly Diamond Mines for a full-body cavity search by a charming old dentist whose good name was preserved after a hung jury at the Nuremberg Trials. This chapter also includes ideas for a cheery family picnic on the Skeleton Coast – a nice sandy death tarmac 1,000 miles from the closest act of racial violence – in South-African-controlled Namibia.

If you want to see a racially torn California where you don't speak the language, one already exists a lot closer to home. And at least ours wasn't turned down when it jokingly asked to host the Summer Olympics.

V. Oceana

Chapter 16. Australia & New Zealand – “Nations on Parole”

On New Year's Day 1901, Britain gave Australia its independence. Since then, it has sort of been America's colonial cousin – countries once owned by the Brits that bailed to get some sun. Ask any American the Australian word for beer and you'll get a quick answer: Fosters. “It's Australian for beer mate.” Right? Wrong. In fact Australians regard their domestic beer – first brewed in New York more than a century ago – about as highly as Americans regard Milwaukee's Best.

Ancestors of the Empire's hardened convicts have spawned a peculiar melanoma culture stretching from the skin cancer-ridden Great Barrier Reef to the Outback's pathetic animal death camps that they call kangaroo zoos. Pleasures are simple in Australia, and if you're a young man venturing into a crowded pub, you should keep that in mind. Scratch on your back at the pool table and the din of inane chatter will soon give way to a booming chant of “Flop it! Flop it!” That's right, you're kindly invited to lay your genitalia on the table. No worries, mate. I got winner.

Save the wildly expensive plane ticket and the insanity of twenty-four hours on a plane with nothing but recycled air to keep you company. Get the Aussie experience in America. Spend a dark winter in your basement whitening your skin until it's nearly invisible. Then, in June, lay in direct sunlight sans Coppertone and engage in peppy small talk for the next couple of

months. *Let's Stay* tours the world's only demi-continent, issuing travel advisories on baby-stealing dingoes and hardy Aryan blokes with the brainpower of Ayer's Rock.

Just a hop, skip, and a three-hour plane ride away is New Zealand – a country just like Australia but without all the intellectual snobbery. There are more sheep than people in this remote slice of the South Pacific, and soon it will be clear to you that there are more parasites and fleas than there are sheep. Think before going because once your schooner docks in Auckland harbor, and you realize you can't subsist on a diet of rugby alone, you'll soon be asking yourself what nearby landmass you can escape to. You've got two choices: the *Crocodile Dundee* rough cut or an icy polar slab on loan from Hell. Replicating the Kiwi experience in the U.S. is impossible, we're afraid, because we're not sure if there's even one available in New Zealand.

VI. Getting Back and Spinning the Lies

Chapter 17. Debriefing & Damage Assessment

Often when traveling you'll hear the phrase "reverse culture shock." "Oh my God, it was like reverse culture shock" some blonde anthropology major will spew out after a semester abroad. What it refers to is that unexpected feeling people get when they return home to their native country. All the annoyances and ass-backward customs that you've slowly learned to live with are suddenly sucked away and you're confronted at the airport with a smiley-faced greeting and a painfully trite, "How was it?" What you'll hear is that reverse culture shock is all about coming back to find that America has become unfamiliar. But what it actually feels like is not something unfamiliar, but something *too* familiar: public water fountains aren't just a cruel joke; supermarket shelves contain actual food; toilets contain water that wasn't there two weeks ago. It's like downing a tall cold drink on a blistering summer day. You can't believe it's really there, so you drink it so fast it feels a little weird. Reverse culture shock is little more than relief

overload. In the final sections of *Let's Stay*, we welcome U.S. nationals back with tips on how to forget the wasted time and money.

While you're filling out that landing card, pound it into your head. You had a damn good time. The decision to go to Europe instead of a guaranteed-fun Virgin Islands vacation was the right one. Putrefied cheese versus Disneyland? That's a no-brainer. So step one is selling yourself on your own crap. The alternative is admitting that you made a grandiose mistake and will be paying for it in many credit card statements to come.

Chapter 18. The Spin: Bragging, Lying & Shading the Truth

What everyone will ask for, obviously, is pictures. That's because staring at a photo album and politely muttering "wow, that's beautiful," is far less labor intensive than listening to you ramble on about places they have no interest in and can't even remotely picture: "OK, so then we left the hostel, to meet Thanos, this guy who sold us the baguettes and also liked Julie, but first we noticed our Eurail cards were stolen so we had to, like, tell Thanos's friend Yanni, that we would be late. Wait no, was that before we met up with those Belgian guys? I forget." Good Lord. Stick to visuals if you want to have any chance of making your friends irrationally jealous about your trip.

The rule of thumb is that pictures are better when you're in them. An out-of-focus snapshot of London's Tower bridge looks pretty unimpressive to people who have seen it a hundred times in the World Book Encyclopedia. If you can frame yourself with a native of one of the far off lands you visited that's even better. You sitting there in your Umbro shorts and Patagonia pullover next to a toothless old pregnant woman will certainly convince others that you successfully mingled with the fertile citizens of the world. Sure, if you look very closely

into the woman's eyes you can tell she's thinking about how much money she'll charge you for the picture, but your friends won't know that.

Whether you went away for three days or three months, you will get asked the same question from everyone. Don't be disappointed by its crippling unoriginality, just be prepared for it. Three words: "How was it?" You will already have convinced yourself that it was "awesome" but don't just say that and walk away. You're letting them off easy if you do. The proper transition line to "How was it?" is "Oh, awesome, we were able to move around so cheaply that we covered a lot of ground. Twelve countries in a week." Their logical follow-up to your half-truth is "Wow, where did you go?" Here's where you make the most of padding the travel résumé.

The travel résumé is about political boundaries. It's about borders you crossed, stamps you got in your passport, and famous cities you can rattle off quickly. It's all about loosely distorted facts. If you stopped in one particular country to change planes, this nation gets a spot just like any other on your résumé. If you flew from Bangkok to Madras and had a layover in Colombo, that's three countries you visited, not two. Sri Lanka, a small island engulfed in dangerous political violence – it's a gem and you did nothing to earn it.

Lying is the final touch, but like all the others it must be done skillfully. If you know somebody who went on a 13-day trek in Nepal, copy that file to your mental hard drive. You might have gone on a two hour stroll near those same mountains but you and your friend still came away with the same verdict: "The views were awesome." Therefore, you've done it. As a final tactic to reinventing your days on the road, *Let's Stay* points out some helpful hints at stretching the truth. Lying to others is the best way to lie to yourself about your delusional thinking that made you leave the United States.

DELIVERY

Let's Stay is a flexible manuscript inasmuch as its length can be altered simply by our adding or deleting specific country chapters. As an initial prognostication, however, we believe it will be 100,000 words long. Because much of the research, and almost all of the outlining, is already complete, we can promise a rapid completion timetable – almost certainly within six months.

¹ See Tommy Wright, *Sampling and Census 2000*, AMERICAN SCIENTIST May 15, 1998 at 245; *Travel Briefs*, AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN May 3, 1998, at J2.

² See Paula Crouch Thrasher, *Going Places*, THE ATLANTA JOURNAL AND CONSTITUTION Jan. 11, 1998, at 5K.

³ See Laurent Belsie, *Air Quality Diminishes as More Drivers Speed*, THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR Jun. 12, 1998, at 3.

⁴ Barbara Williams, *Tourism Vital to Economies*, DALLAS MORNING NEWS Oct. 13, 1996, at 12G.

⁵ See Robert Dahlin, *Staying Ahead of the Curve: Publication of Travel Guides and Reference Books*, PUBLISHERS WEEKLY May 25, 1998, at 21.

⁶ See Conde Nast Appoints Millard List Manager, DM NEWS Sept. 15, 1997, at 34.

⁷ See Karen Boycias, *Studying Abroad*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS May 23, 1997.

⁸ See Lorraine Sharp, *Ignore Youth Market at Your Own Peril*, TRAVEL WEEKLY May 15, 1997, at 89.

⁹. See Adrienne Drell, *Don't Let Theft Ruin Holiday Trip*, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES Nov. 24, 1996, at 5.

¹⁰. See Rhoda Amon, *Surviving the Call of the Wild*, NEWSDAY June 30, 1996, at 15.