

‘The Lure of Europe’. Europe in the American Tourist Imagination, c. 1955

These travel guides, published by Fodor in 1957, offer a fascinating insight in the construction of Europe as a vacation destination in the American tourist imagination. Since their inception in the first half of the nineteenth-century, guidebooks in their modern guise played a crucial role in shaping the experience of tourists abroad. On a fundamental level, guidebooks helped people navigate unfamiliar cities, streets and spaces and strangers combat their anxieties over losing their way on their walks. On a more subtle level, they scripted tourist behavior and molded expectations and experiences of travel. Although the post-war period is often presented as the golden age of the family holiday, single tourists were lured to Europe too, in which guidebooks as the following played a pivotal role.

In the post-wars years, Europe came increasingly within reach for middle-class American travelers, both due to economic prosperity as active government policy and involvement. In the years following the conclusion of World War II, tourism quickly became a crucial item on the political and economic agenda of the international community. With the European economy in tatters, the U.S., which had consolidated its international position as global industrial stronghold, was in dire need for an outlet of her consumer goods. Simultaneously, the threat of encroaching communism and totalitarian regimes on the continent loomed large on the horizon. In order to simultaneously bolster the European economies and to avert totalitarianism, the Marshall Plan was devised and implemented. Expanding the European tourist industry was a key component of the Marshall Plan: encouraging American vacation travel would result in economic growth, and simultaneously allow Americans to gain some cultural capital.¹

In order to conform to American taste and preferences, the European tourist infrastructure was expanded drastically.² The U.S. government however also made an appeal to her travelling citizens. In the polarized climate of the nascent Cold War, American tourism was represented as diplomacy, in which tourists were key in aiding the European economy and representing the good will of their nation. From 1954 onwards, a booklet with travel advice was inserted in every passport in which tourists were instructed how to behave as fitting ambassadors of their nation. From 1957 onwards passports even included a personal request from President Eisenhower: ‘You represent us all in bringing assurances to the people you meet that the United States is a friendly nation and one dedicated to the search for world peace’.³

This rhetoric of tourists as ambassadors of good will and representatives of foreign policy is also evinced in a review of the guidebook for men: according to the reviewer ‘a pervading tone of tolerant urbanity and cosmopolitan broadmindedness makes this guide

¹ Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill and London), 33-34.

² See for France: Brian A. McKenzie ‘Creating a Tourist’s Paradise: The Marshall Plan and France, 1948-1952’, *French Politics, Culture and Society* 21 (2003), 35-54, 40.

³ Quoted from: Paul R. Conroy, ‘On Giving a Good Account of Ourselves’, *The Antioch Review* 18 (1958), 411-419, 411.

also one to better Euramerican understanding and a contribution to international goodwill'.⁴

Apart from serving the nation, the main goal of a transatlantic sojourn was, as suggested by this guidebook, the pursuit of the panoply of pleasures the Continent offered. Its conversational, tongue-in cheek style of writing and the accent on pleasurable activities are indicative of a wider shift in the main motivations of travel. The hegemony of the Baedeker publishing as the quintessential guidebook was uncontested until the aftermath of World War Two.⁵ Baedeker employed an aphoristic 'less is more' idiom, which provided travelers with only the most essential information, supplemented by maps. This idiom is closely connected to the ideal type of the targeted reading group. In tandem with the development to a full-fledged consumerist society, a more hedonistic stance towards tourism emerged, a shift to which these guidebooks attest.⁶ The fact that separate guidebooks for both the sexes are published suggests that how one should amuse him during the vacation was subjected to prevailing conceptions of gender. Tourism, as other leisure activities, was an important arena for the molding and expression of gender identities. Apart from biological and psychological traits, an ensemble of perceived differences between socio-culturally construes sexual identity and the difference between male and female and masculine and feminine. As these sources proscribe gender specific behavior, they allow probing how they expressed, affirmed or contested dominant gender roles. In order to do so the guides offered elaborate advice on etiquette and comportment. These historical sources are prescriptive sources: they do not illustrate actual social behavior but reveal how author and reader thought how people should behave and therefore illustrate notions of the ideal behaviour tourists were ought to exhibit.

American Tourists: Travelling Differently

In 1957 the popular illustrated periodical *Life* published an article on the reputation and imagery of Americans abroad. A subsection devoted to American tourist did not leave an all too favorable impression: according to the writer Americans abroad were characterized by suspicion and circumspection of their European host. His second trait was his 'diffuse ignorance of local civilizations, ways and customs.' Although the American was an ardent sightseer, his itinerary was marked by an unengaged ticking off of the sights.⁷ Several publications proposed a new form of travelling, like the supplement published by *This Week Magazine* in 1952, which centered on 'human interest': the 'commingling of pleasure and sightseeing with friendship and experience through human contacts.'⁸ In this way, travel functioned as a vehicle for international mutual understanding and peace. The same magazine offered the American traveler new itineraries which allowed him to immerse

⁴ E.E.N., 'Review: The Men's Guide to Europe by Eugen Fodor', *Books Abroad* 30 (1956), 232.

⁵ See: Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (New York, 2000).

⁶ Harvey Levenstein, *We'll Always Have Paris. American Tourists in France since 1930* (Chicago and London, 2004), 153-187.

⁷ Robert Coughlan, 'How We Appear to Others: 'U.S.. Envoy Ordinaries', Widely Criticized, Still Succeed in Winning Foreign Hearts', *Life Magazine* 43 (1957), 26, 150-154, 153.

⁸ Arthur Haulot and Birger Nordholm 'Understanding through Travel is the Passport to Peace', *Travel Key to Europe* (Published by This Week Magazine', 1952, New York), 6-7. Source in H.A.T.

himself in European culture and actually make genuine contact with Europeans to gain insight in their national character and culture.⁹

Guides like Fodor sought to remedy this negative imagery partly. A guest writer described the female American tourist as one who uses her guidebook to 'check up on the various places to see whether all the statues, cathedrals, towers, and paintings are really in their proper places as advertised.' He reported of the many women in Europe he had seen 'carrying their little guide-book and checking up on the inventory.'¹⁰ Apart from the evident pursuit of pleasure and fun, tourism, as conceived of in the guides, was viewed as a means of acculturation and a vehicle for social and personal improvement.¹¹

Masculine and Feminine Forms of Travel

The post-war years have often been coined as the golden age of the family holiday. However as evinced by these guidebooks, single travelers were an important new travelling public too. A further differentiation is made by publishing two guidebooks tailored to the perceived interests and needs of the both genders. Interestingly, a discrepancy can be detected between the genders. The sections on etiquette in the guide written for men, focus mainly on how to meet and approach women and the dominant sexual mores in particular countries. In addition, the Men's Guide features a section on European women, both respectable and public, broken down by country. Fodor classifies women according to geographical region, 'racial type' and social class, each with their corresponding complexion, personality and which require a different method of approaching and seducing: in Italy for example, the vivacious Roman girl is 'colorful and vivid', Naples is rich in the in the tranquil olive-skinned soft-eyed women and the 'famous venetian blondes', which resembled the models on Titians painting should not be skipped. The best chances of a harmless flirtation were to be found in the larger cities with a girl from the middle classes, a secretarial employee or a shop girl.¹² In characterizing all women in this way, Fodor presents the European woman herself as a commodity to be consumed by the American male and Europe itself is redrawn as a sexual topography where to find respectable women and public women. A similar categorization of the European male is found in the Woman's guide, noting all the peculiarities of the various stereotypes, from the ardent Britain to the sensuous Latin. En passant, the writer of the pieces confirms the superiority of the American husband: Continental males are 'decorative, amusing, complicated and exciting', but in the end she's glad to have an American husband to take her home.¹³ The exploration of the various European male, as a touristic activity, is included in the itinerary.

Almost half of the guide for men consists of the section Europe for Sports, which lists

⁹ Erik Sjögren, 'Human Interest Travel. Add "Life-Seeing" to Your Sightseeing', *Travel Key to Europe* (Published by This Week Magazine', 1952, New York), 21-61. HAT X1/00/952/THI

¹⁰ Eugene Fodor, *Woman's Guide to Europe* (New York, 1953), 71. HAT * FOD-F-957/WOM-1

¹¹ This discourse is also found in other contemporary guides, see for example: Sydney Clarke, *All the best in Europe* (New York, 1955), 1.: 'Without them [Personal interests and hobbies] a tour, however costly, may prove to be a pallid thing, a stint to be done, a succession of sights to be checked off, one by one.' Source in H.A.T.

¹² Eugene Fodor, *The Men's Guide to Europe* (New York, 1953), 28. HAT * FOD-F-957/WOM-1

¹³ *Woman's Guide to Europe*, 69.

where which sports can be best practiced. As opposed to the male guide, the female guide contains more information on the mores and customs of particular countries, the role of women in the family and society. What is striking is the large sections devoted to self-presentation and correct demeanor in Europe, ranging from restrictions to unescorted women in various countries to the correct process of shaking hands with people of various gradations of intimacy. This might be an indication of the perceived inexperience and insecurity of women travelling alone.

A focus on the representation of a particular country, in this case the Netherlands illustrates the different conceptions of correct tourist behavior according to gender. The Guide of Men focuses on a set of touristic highlights in separate sections: the three major cities of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Tulip fields. In the section Travelling for a Purpose, a new trope is added to the itinerary, namely the various projects of rebuilding the Netherlands as the technical process of reconstruction became a trope and the source of fascination for the American male.¹⁴ Other sections focus on expositions on the nightlife in the Netherlands, ranging from high-class clubs to the more interesting but dangerous and seedy Zeemansdijk in Amsterdam.¹⁵ An important section focuses on Dutch women, which are in general 'not particularly decorative', besides from their shapely legs, developed by bicycle riding. According to the writer, Dutch women correspond to two geographical types, namely 'the flaxen-haired blue eyed example from the North, and the smaller more vivacious dark-haired girl from the Southern part of the Netherlands.' The Netherlands held particular little charm for the modern pleasure seeker as it was characterized by 'an Almost Puritan attitude towards the most frivolous things in life, including relation between the sexes.'¹⁶

In the Women's Guide the Netherlands are represented as a 'country of charm, sobriety, common sense and good organization', which means for the woman traveler that she can travel in complete safety.¹⁷ The writer offers an exposition of Dutch society whose main characteristic is balance, as expressed by their ability and habit to cycle and a profound moderation in all aspects of life. Additionally, the section contains more information on the role of woman in society and their degree on emancipation. Curiously, the section does not accentuate tourist highlights but mainly shopping itinerary's in different cities, with a focus on 'authentic' Dutch wares, like diamond-set jewelry, the lovely glass ware, the handsome leather ware, silverwork and modern Delft ceramics.¹⁸

Shopping for pleasure and status

An important activity for both the sexes as delineated in the guides was shopping. Shopping was from the nineteenth-century onwards presented and cultivated as a predominantly female activity. The break from everyday, which was the vacation, allowed men too to

¹⁴ *The Men's Guide to Europe*, 527. Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 182. See also: Sydney Clarke, *All the best in Europe* (New York, 1955), 329-330.

¹⁵ *The Men's Guide to Europe*, 217-218.

¹⁶ *The Men's Guide to Europe*, 37.

¹⁷ *Woman's Guide to Europe*, 218.

¹⁸ *Woman's guide to Europe*, 424.

indulge in the pleasures of shopping: '[S]o for once, shopping becomes a pleasure and not a chore.'¹⁹ In both the guides, the general information on the destinations is supplemented by extensive shopping itineraries in order to buy haute couture, hats, lingerie, jewelry, perfume, furniture, and tableware. An important trope in the contemporary travel literature is the presentation of Europe as a space where authenticity and hand manufactured high quality goods could be purchased cheaply. Magazines like Life Magazine, published articles in which high-quality goods which were deemed as characteristic for particular countries, were presented.²⁰ In publications like the magazine *Holidays*, a journalist accompanies his wife on a visit to the famous fashion house Dior, meticulously describing the process of purchasing haute couture.²¹ Such publications allowed middle-class Americans to imagine to participate in elitist consumption practices. The increased popularity of and desire for 'authentic' European goods, is an indicator of the increased embarrassment Americans felt for the international reputation of their consumption habits which were characterized by materialism and the purchase of undifferentiated, standardized mass produced goods: 'in this age of standardized perfection, there is a special thrill to the object that has been made by hand. Silver from Denmark, tweeds from Ireland, ceramics from France, furniture from Italy, and sweaters from Scotland prolong the pleasure of a trip long after you returned home.'²²

¹⁹ *The Men's Guide to Europa*, 256

²⁰ Europe's Bargains. Here or abroad shoppers can get good buys from 10 countries', *Life Magazine* N. 26 Vol. 32 (1952), 61-64.

²¹ Paul E. Deutschman, 'How to Purchase a Dior Original', in: Ludwig Bemelmans, *Holiday in France* (Boston and Cambridge, 1957), 77-90.

²² *Woman's Guide to Europe*, 25.



'No place for a lady?' Eugene Fodor, *Woman's Guide to Europe* (New York, 1953), 89.



'Scandinavia, the happy hunting grounds of the male sex' Eugene Fodor, *The Men's Guide to Europe* (New York, 1953), 38.



'Make your friend's eyes turn green with envy...' Eugene Fodor, *Woman's Guide to Europe* (New York, 1953), 120.