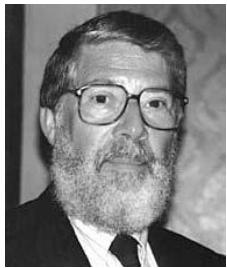


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Wanted - Futures Travel Now!

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Unless and until we can travel primarily as futurists our lives will continue to lack a valuable option. Thanks to the creative travel industry we can now chose among Adventure Trips, Archeological Digs, Cross-Cultural Encounters, Egg Head Cruises, Elderhostel Tours, affordable tours (hostels, etc.), Grand Tours (5-star hotels, etc.), Mystery Tours, and so on. But, we still do not have tours explicitly designed for you and me as earnest futurists, an oversight an entrepreneurial reader of this essay cannot help remedy soon enough.

Over the course of my life, I have deliberately explored a fair sample of sites that may foreshadow the future: In the early 1970s, for example, I toured the British Garden Cities and New Towns, then the cutting-edge of planned community social engineering – warts and all. I have also studied social experiments in Brazil (the Rio favelas). In Canada (Safdie's Toronto Habitat). In Cuba (rural modernization). In England (squatter housing). In Holland (legalized prostitution and drug use). In Israel (the kibbutzim). In Italy (regional economic cooperation). In Norway (cold weather accommodations). In Spain (Gaudi's architecture). And in Norway and Sweden (labor union empowerment).

Back home, as a government consultant in the late 1970s, I assessed future-shaping innovations developers were required to introduce into America's federally-aided Planned Communities. In the 1980s I stayed at and studied trendy new urban communes, exotic Ashrams for Americans, and colorful Hippie homesteads. In the mid-1980s I visited Paulo Solari's Archology, an extraordinary futuristic building site still under construction outside of Phoenix. Across the years I have also visited various NASA bases in California and Florida, toured underground and solar-aided homes, and explored both the Disney Centennial town and the company's plans for its (never built) EPCOT city.

Naturally, all of this has whetted my appetite to explore still other seedbeds for a possibly finer tomorrow. If we had a futures-oriented travel agency eager to help learners like ourselves I would expect it to offer guided trips to every place I mention above, foreign and domestic, and many other such other desirable locations.

Typical of the remarkable sites we futurists might visit are two close to one another in Austria that highlight both preferable and also preventable futures. A half-day visit to each can add immeasurably to our imaginings of both a desirable and/or a horrific tomorrow.

In the self-named "City of the Future," Linz, Austria, we can learn much about advances in information technology highlighted on five floors of the Ars Electronic Center in a world-class Museum of the Future.

Invaluable for hands-on exhibits that enable one to operate IT gadgets and gizmos, the 25-year old Museum of the Future offers experiences similar to those otherwise only known by cutting-edge innovators in Silicon Valley. Many personable young uniformed guides (all of whom speak English) hover about eager to help the novice quickly gain skill at using this or that novel IT applications. The scene of an annual world-wide Conference of Digital Art advances, the Museum is a unique and empowering site for any of us who would try to stay abreast of IT advances.

Just a few miles away, we can spend several hours learning from unsparing exhibits explaining why Mauthausen was the most feared of the many concentration camps operated by the Nazis (from 1938 through 1945 over 105,000 of 195,000 inmates were murdered through slave labor in the quarries or the gas chamber). No visitor will ever forget the monstrous machine-like character of this hellish place, nor the 17 massive and very moving monuments placed around the camp by grieving nations.

Paradoxically, a visit to Mauthausen might seem the very opposite of what futurists would do, but that would be a grievous mistake. Futurists are not starry-eyed types; they want to be as realistic as possible about human nature, affairs, and events – warts and all. Much of the value in a visit to a Concentration Camp is in seeing the thoughtful somber ways of many hundreds of adult visitors – of every type – carefully reading and pondering the multi-lingual educational material. As well, many hundreds of teenagers (some American, most Europeans) are brought daily by their teachers ... the better to deepen their grasp of human possibilities and perils.

Turning away from Europe I would expect futurists to welcome trips to intentional communities in almost every country. I would want to visit the floating city in Tokyo Bay, the Science Center in Osaka, and the Hiroshima Monument. The Tidal Power Station in Newfoundland. Thermal power plants in Iceland. The Opera House in Sydney. Earthquake-defiant massive skyscrapers in Malaysia. The R&D Incubator at Haifa University. And the Yangtze River Dam System in China. Even as partial as is this overseas list it sets me to wanting to check my passport and rush to pack.

Coming closer to home, I would hope a pro-Futures Travel Agency would arrange guided tours of the Media Lab at MIT, arguably one of the most future-shaping sites anywhere. Also, the new Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame in Seattle (“Other museums show you history; only one takes you into the future.”). And the two old neighborhoods in Philadelphia where the City in 2005 pioneered in providing WiFi to low-income households.

We could also be offered guided visits to the Rand Corporation headquarters, the Abt Associates headquarters, and the various major global consulting company headquarters, along with Inside-the-Beltway think tanks (Brookings, Cato, Heritage, etc.). At these sites, we could have seminars with talented communicators, having agreed beforehand to read and ponder relevant material e-mailed along with confirmation of our paid registration. Similarly, the Travel Agency might contract for similar seminars in various cities with outstanding forecasters like Arnold Brown, Joe Coates, Ken Dychwald, Hazel Henderson, Barbara Hubbard, David Pearce Snyder, Edie Weiner, and so on.

In the best of circumstances, a pro-Futures Travel Agency would use its web site to solicit news of places, social experiments, and people worth further consideration. Providers of these leads would get a public vote of thanks, and a significant discount on any tour of their choice. The same web site would feature uncensored feedback from tour participants, a confirmation of the transparency and accountability futurists would expect from any such commercial operation.

How do we get there from here? It will not be easy, as travel agencies I have explored this money-making opportunity with have blinked, explaining that our ranks would seem too varied by age, class, and life style to readily constitute a promising market. They also confess to knowing far more about colorful (musty) castles, must-see (creaky) museums, and well-known (crowded) ancient ruins than about any future-sharing phenomena (built, social, or otherwise).

Which is not to say it cannot be accomplished. All that is required is for one of us to step forward (like YOU!), and help create the world's first travel agency for futurists. That innovative entrepreneur will make a lasting and significant contribution to our lives, to our shared concern – futuristics, and to future generations who are likely

to think of the Moon and Mars when they imagine where to spend their honeymoon, or, their next enriching travel adventure. *"This time, like all times, is a very good one if we but know what to do with it."* Ralph Waldo Emerson