

## Vacationing Abroad: Ethical or Not?

Due to COVID-19, travelling has garnered an illicit reputation as of late, but does it deserve this treatment, pandemic aside? Since February, the thought of sitting on a crowded plane for hours has been one of dread. Interacting with new people every day and getting to know a new culture hasn't been worth the risk of transmission. However, faraway holidays bring up a multitude of other ethical dilemmas as well, that have largely been ignored in today's society. I know that when I was lugging my backpack around Ecuador with my Pathfinder unit in 2018, worries about the morality of the trip weren't weighing me down as well. Understandably, I was enjoying my highly anticipated adventure. Presently, though, the pandemic has caused me to consider vacationing in a new light. The application of the Four Way Test to vacationing abroad leads me to believe that the way in which I travel should be modified to be better for the planet, future generations to come, the communities I visit, and myself.

To begin, the truth in travelling must be established. Most of the time people fly off to foreign countries to rest and relax. Self-improvement is another common motive, and adventure, new challenges and people, and an overall change of pace are hard to resist. However, travelling to escape problems and challenges at home is untruthful, and flying across the globe isn't necessary to relax, or improve oneself. With some effort, adventure can be found closer to home as well. It is clear that another factor drives vacations to foreign places: the pressure of society. I know that the lure of getting some cool vacation stories, and the fear of missing out, influenced my decision to fly off to Ecuador, though I didn't fully admit this to myself. Travelling can cause deception in relationships with others, too. There were days on my trip when I just wanted to go home. Afterwards, everyone else who went said they had the time of their life, and I didn't want to seem foolish or ungrateful, so I followed suit. It isn't just me; vacation exaggeration means

unpleasant trips are virtually unheard of. The reasons provided for travelling, and how the experience is shared after the fact, are unrealistic.

Secondly, how vacations are undertaken, and the fairness of the process, must be taken into account, starting with the journey. The Earth's future is at stake, and the carbon footprint associated with flying, and travelling in general, is a huge contributor to the issue. While seeing the world is tempting, it is not fair to do so when it puts the home of future generations in jeopardy. In Ecuador, our group of nine spent three weeks in a thirty person bus. Unnecessary environmental burdens, like that bus, are common in the tourism industry. Getaways aren't just unfair to future generations. When westerners fly to exotic locations just to support tour companies, resorts, and restaurants based in their own countries, businesses owned by citizens of the exotic location are cheated. Possible problems with the tourism industry don't stop there; cultural appropriation and animal mistreatment need to be avoided. If an even larger picture is considered, the country itself may be discriminatory; supporting a society that tolerates child labour, or the mistreatment of women, is unjust. Environmental issues, animal rights, and societal ethics need to be assessed when the fairness of travel is questioned.

When properly done, travelling builds goodwill, but it harms international relations when carried out improperly. In Ecuador, one of my favourite memories was joining some seniors dancing on a beach one night during a festival. Their warmhearted inclusion touched and inspired us all. When vacations are used to better appreciate other cultures and meet new people, goodwill follows. However, when tourists remain close minded and disrespect local customs, the opposite occurs. Vacations must involve broadmindedness to improve friendship.

The final part of the Four Way Test acknowledges who benefits from foreign holidays. For the traveller, exploring the world fosters mindfulness and creativity, and it is an easy way to

gain perspective. Even holidays focused on relaxation are beneficial, as long as it doesn't involve avoiding reality; taking a break is an important part of self-care. On the other hand, whether citizens of the visited country profit isn't as straightforward. Tourism is essential to the economies of many third world countries. As mentioned above, however, the country benefits a lot more when local businesses are supported. Foreign owned companies that out-source products end up hurting the local society instead. Even when native industries profit, when tourists flood certain locations, they harm the environment and wildlife, congest communities, use up resources, and essentially, disturb domestic populations. Though recreational roaming benefits the tourist, profit for the community and local tourism industry isn't guaranteed.

The Four Way Test establishes the fact that in how, where and why leisure trips are typically taken in society, they are unethical. Travelling is a privilege, but it is often not treated as such. Foreign vacations do have many benefits, though, that are crucial to the betterment of the world. So can these benefits be reaped without the drawbacks? I believe they can. By taking fewer leisure trips, and using the internet to see the world, I can save money that I can use to help third world countries instead. When I do travel, it should be for the right reasons. I should focus on appreciating the different culture, minimizing my environmental impact, and spending my money wisely. I could purchase carbon offsets, make sure that I support local businesses and ethical societies, and pay fair amounts for services I receive. I should avoid misrepresentation when sharing my journeys with others. These steps would ensure that the vacations I take are moral and equitable. I believe that if applied, they will make travelling a much more beneficial and enjoyable process for all involved.