



# Travel Industry TODAY



HOME

ABOUT VIDEOS COLUMNISTS CONTACT SEARCH



# TRAVEL EARTHING

Connecting with the Spirit of the Land

Steve Gillick

SHARE ON FACEBOOK



09 Feb 2015: One of the classic Seinfeld lines occurs when Jerry and George are in Los Angeles to track down Kramer, who apparently has been named as a serial killer. Using a pay phone, Jerry calls 9-1-1 to talk to the police. Unable to provide the exact location of the phone booth, Jerry tells George to ask someone. George approaches a

passerby, “Excuse me, where are we?” The man responds “Earth”.



**Get TODAY  
Tomorrow**

- informative
- provocative
- opinionated
- infuriating
- revealing
- amusing

*... essential*

**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**

We have to agree that it’s always a good thing to know where you are—in the universe and on the planet. More and more travellers today are looking at both options to help define their mission in life, their true calling on the planet, and their travel lifestyle.

While the moon has waned in popularity as a destination, I still hold on to my Air Canada “Trip to the Moon” Certificate from 1969. I was told at the time that I would be wait-listed once AC started to fly there.

Sub-orbital flights are still on target, according to Virgin Galactic. The first paragraph on their website makes reference to peering into the heavens and ‘connecting simultaneously with the primal thoughts of our ancestors and the most cutting-edge science of our day’. With over 700 people booked, there are still many challenges to overcome before the inaugural flight. So for the time being, the earth still represents the best

travel option. In this sense, it's important to note that in many ways, 'the primal thoughts of our ancestors' are very much with us.



On my third visit to Thailand in 1993 I decided that I needed to buy a Spirit House. These structures, some looking like small birdhouses while others resembling gigantic doll houses, can be found throughout the country. Spirit Houses are placed outside of buildings, in auspicious locations determined by a priest, to provide a protective place for the spirit of the land on which the building is located. It's a warming thought, no matter what religious beliefs one holds, that respect for the land should be formally acknowledged.

I found a Spirit House shop on a back street in central Bangkok. The object of my obsession was made of wood with roof carvings, a small alter and a railed porch—all areas where decorations of flowers, amulets, coins and personal items could be placed to enhance the 'good luck' value.

At 2 feet long, 2 feet high and weighing in at 5 pounds, it attracted the attention of the attendants when I boarded my flight back to Toronto. One approached to scold me that my large package must fit in the overhead compartment. I humbly explained that it was a Spirit House. Her demeanor immediately changed and she conferred with other Thai members of the

crew. The result was that while I flew home in economy, my Spirit House enjoyed a nice Business Class ride.



We often think that belief in respect for the land was part of the domain of our ‘primal ancestors’ and then we discover that aboriginal peoples around the world never lost this concept. It’s ingrained in their education and beliefs. But part of the joy of travel, is the discovery that respect for the land can be found in many places: farming and fishing communities, market vendors, culinary chefs, architects, scientists, eco-tourists, adventure travellers, wellness followers and others.

It’s a movement known in some circles as Travel Earthing.

If you Google the term Earthing, you’ll find references to real physical connections to the earth.

An example might be someone with foot pain who takes off her shoes, immerses her feet in the grass for 30 minutes and then feels relief. It has something to do with balancing the flow of positive and negative electrons between the body and earth elements. A friend of mine recently captured this idea when she asked if I wanted to join her for a walk on a sunny day to catch some “Ray Juice”; which I discovered refers to the Vitamin D that the skin absorbs from sunshine.

Travel Earthing is taking some of these traditional earthing ideas and translating them into travel-positive ideas and options. Wellness tourism, a global \$3.4 trillion phenomenon, is a good example. While it used to be associated with Spas, it has now nichified into yoga, meditation, culinary travel, hiking, swimming, bicycling, adventure activities and even sports tourism.

I can still picture the yoga-meditation platform at Hacienda San Lucas, a small hotel perched on a hill that overlooks the town of Copan Ruinas in Honduras. Flavia Cueva, the owner, explained that while Yoga was gaining in popularity, the idea of 'connections' to the land and absorbing the positive energy of the mountains, the river and the landscape was equally inspiring, calming and soothing and created its own energy fields.



I fondly recall instances on group tours when we asked the guide if we could get out of the bus for

30 minutes or so and just walk. These experiences resulted in unforgettable memories: once along the Friendship Road between Tibet and Nepal, where we could get a better appreciation of the narrow rocky road and the roaring river below; once along Tiger Leaping Gorge in Yunnan, China where we could breathe in the vistas that would have been missed on a bus ride; and once in the Atacama Desert in Chile, where we got off the bus, climbed a sand dune and thrilled at the setting sun, the cooling air and the sounds of ... well... nothing!

Travel Earthing emphasizes the travel trend toward 'getting down and dirty'. Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials are all in, with the caveat expression, "Take me out and thrill me, but get me home for dinner". In other words, let's connect with the land in any way that gives me a positive, value-based experience but then I want to go to my hotel (or eco-lodge) and have a more upscale shower, dining and sleeping experience.

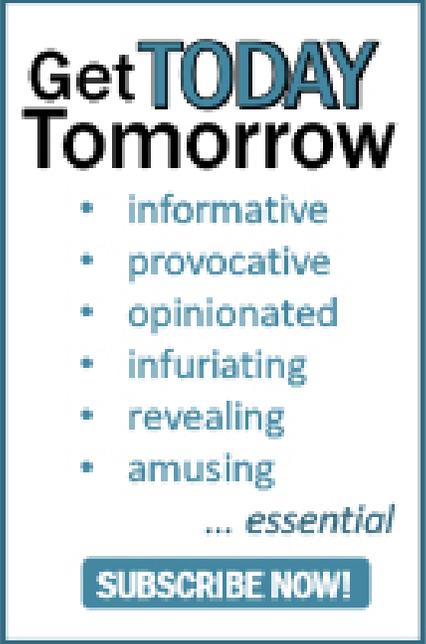
After all these years I still have my Spirit House.



It serves as my connection to Thailand, but also to the concept of friendly spirits happily accommodated in my home. It reminds me that primal thoughts of totems—spirits living in inanimate objects such as rocks and trees and rivers and mountains—still exist in many societies, and that travellers today are tuning into the

movement where participation, engagement and connection with a destination (the land, the people, the culture; in other words, the terroir) is imminently more fulfilling than watching from a bus window, a cruise deck or vicariously, through someone else's tales.

A recent Coors Beer commercial used the expression "Live Vicariously Through Yourself". Travel Earthing would add the words "And your connection to the earth". For many, there is no better way to travel for the time being.



**Get TODAY  
Tomorrow**

- informative
- provocative
- opinionated
- infuriating
- revealing
- amusing

*... essential*

**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**

EARTH



Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

[Read more from Steve Gillick](#)