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# HAPPINESS IN TRAVEL

## Don't Dismiss the Bliss

Steve Gillick

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12 JUN 2012: Supreme, or perfect happiness. Utter Joy. Contentment. These are the popular dictionary definitions of 'bliss'. And there is nothing profound in saying that bliss is in the heart and soul of the beholder.



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I have alluded to the fact that I ‘bliss out’ when I find masks during the course of my travels. But that is not all! Here be it told that I am also a bibliophile ♦ a lover of books and bookstores and I will usually spend some time perusing the shelves in whatever city I happen to be visiting.

There are the legends, of course. In my search for bliss, no visit to Kathmandu would be complete without a visit to the Pilgrim Book Store; or the Ganesha Bookshop in Ubud, Bali, or Kinokunya Books in Shinjuku, Tokyo or the used book shops along Khao San Road in Bangkok. I have found gems in each of these locations and these bookstores have been permanently imprinted in my mind as ‘must re-visit’ pilgrimages.

Every traveller has their bliss wish list. On a trip to Turkey one of the group members was quiet, almost sullen for most of the trip, until we visited a farm in Cappadocia. As soon he spotted some antique farming implements, which we later found out, he collected, this traveller went into seventh

heaven. He cracked a huge grin that did not leave his face for the rest of the trip. He had found bliss!

Likewise on a trip to Cuzco, one of the members was, shall we say, a bit standoffish until we ventured into the Cross Keys bar where football is celebrated with decorations of football shirts and football posters on the walls and ceilings, and re-runs of famous matches on the television set. Bliss knows no bounds until an anxious first-time traveller who feels lost and out of sorts, finds his beloved Manchester United F.C. in a strange place half-way around the world. The kiss of bliss was something not to miss!

Eric Weiner's book, *The Geography of Bliss*, articulates the idea of the quest for happiness through his travels. He combines both personal observation, learned studies and third party information, to arrive at one of his conclusions; that most (not all) people like to be amongst happy people, whether they themselves, are happy or not. People tend to be energized by positioning themselves with energetic people, and travellers connect with both energy and happiness by travelling to places there they can see and be with happy people.

We can hitch-hike off Weiner's ideas to pry a bit into the psychographics of travel; the why and the wherefore. Energetic, happy people tend to live a type of cyclical vicarious existence where happiness is absorbed, given off and at many times, is simply 'in the air'. If you need a shot of energy, then go to the restaurants, bars and attractions where lots of chatting, partying locals or travellers can be found. As a traveller, you add to the cacophony of activity and therefore the cycle continues. You absorb the energy; you

spread the energy to others.

Festivals are great examples of events where one can find happy people emitting and absorbing vibes of happiness. The whole scenario (the gestalt, if you will) pits colour and costume, and drinking and laughter, and contests and boisterous behaviour, against the crowds of locals and tourists who want exactly what they see. It's a kind of atmosphere that gets those endorphins dancing and results in enthusiasm and bliss.

And of course niche markets naturally fall into this category, as the traveller gets pleasure from participating in his/her chosen niche activity (such as bookstores, antique farm implements or a love of football) and the people with whom he/she relates during the activity ♦ whether this is other travellers or the professional participants (a wine maker, an antique dealer, a birding guide etc.). Happiness begets happiness. Bliss becomes contagious.

And let's not forget that there are quiet niches too. Silence, and meditation and reflection are true sources of bliss to many who lead hectic work-fanatic-party-hardy lives and just want to chill out. Chilling out and blissing out, can be one and the same.

In the context of CRM (Customer Relationship Management), travel professionals need to understand what is referred to as the 'exchange of synergies'. We know that synergistic relationships are those where mutually identified strengths and areas of interest are leveraged to produce positive results. In the 'exchange of synergies' scenario, the travel advisor gets to know the client's underlying needs and then finds destinations, situations and

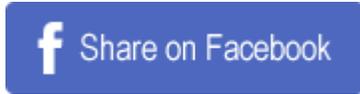
events in order to relate to and satisfy those needs.

The theory behind the 'exchange of synergy' goes back to that cyclical wheel of 'happiness-interacting-with-happiness', where the energy of the traveller and the energy of the travel arrangements, the itinerary, the special events, the accommodation, the food, the niche market activities ♦ the whole picture (there's that gestalt again) produces a wonderful travel experience. And the resulting happiness translates into repeat bookings and word of mouth endorsement.

So next time you have a client in front of you, and the manager talks about "going for the sale," take a step back and breathe. Don't dismiss the bliss factor. Find out what makes your client happy. Do it verbally or hand them a fun survey to check off the activities they love, or ask the question: "If you could wave a magic wand and do or see."

Then talk in terms of matching their happiness with a trip or a package or an independent travel suggestion that breathes happiness too. Match those synergies. Bliss-in-waiting is your hint to realize bliss-fulfillment. It's just a slightly different way of talking travel, but could make a world of difference.





Steve Gillick

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

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