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THE HIDDEN POWER OF DOORS

Going beyond the threshold to promote the allure of travel

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08 FEB 2016: Abbas Kiarostami, the renowned Iranian film director wandered through his exhibit Doors without Keys at Toronto's Aga Khan Museum as if he was venturing through the labyrinth alleyways of an old city. In fact the 50 doors in the exhibit, printed in full colour and

detail, evoke not only the magic and mystique of exploring the historic core of cities in Iran, Italy, France and Morocco, but also engage visitors with the actual sounds elicited by the neighborhoods where those doors stood witness to time: knocking, creaking and shutting, with kids playing, birds chirping and people in conversation.



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The co-curator of the exhibit, Amirali Alibhai, Head of Performing Arts at the Museum, noted that the power of the exhibit lay with each visitor's imagination, where "taking a chance of stepping through the doorway could provide access to a world that may have been hidden".

He recalled one incident where the child of one his colleagues spent an entire hour in the exhibit and then made up a story about each and every door.

At the entrance to the exhibit, the quote from one of the Kiarostami's films resonated with some of the more memorable travel experiences I've had. "I like my Doors, they are like old friends".



I thought of all the photographs I'd taken over the years of doors that artistically made a statement or personified a neighbourhood: doors of houses, castles, fortresses, estates, shops and gateways, as well as simple mud and straw dwellings in places as divergent as Tunis, Marrakech, Jaipur, Naha, Kathmandu, Lucea, Lhasa, Giza, Kenya and South Africa.

And after seeing the iconic "Doors of Dublin" poster, I remember visiting Fitzwilliam Square and taking my own photos of the individually designed and coloured Georgian doorways, many with their own unique door knockers and boot scrapers.

When I went online to find other cities that celebrated their doors, I found them ranging from San Miguel de Allende in Mexico to Edinburgh, Rome, Boston, Charleston, New Orleans, Philadelphia and many more. Each poster displayed either one door or several; some looking fortified with heavy locks, some roughly constructed out of mismatched materials, some wooden with carvings, some made of metal with bolts and decorations, some simple and elegant or covered in posters and good luck symbols, but all inducing a sense of curiosity and intrigue.



In fact each poster that I found seemed to invite the same questions: Why was this particular door built? What lies behind? Who lived there? Who was locked out? Can I peek inside? What has that door witnessed over the years? And all I could think about was an old Ry Cooder song with the lyrics, “If doors could tell who’s turned the knob/When he’s away out on his job” and concludes “Ain’t you glad that things don’t talk”.

Amirali introduced me to the work of author and spoken word artist, Sheniz Janmohamed who, in her poem War: Door, emphasizes the versatility and impact of “door” imagery. A young girl asks her mother, “Is it really true, that when one war shuts, another opens?”

While doors are not necessarily a travel niche market, they’re a sub-niche of architecture, which is itself, a bona fide area of special interest amongst travellers. There are those with a casual interest in seeing a particular building or structure, such as the Monster House at the top of the Spanish Steps in Rome; those who mix a sense of adventure with the thrill of heights to visit Tokyo’s Skytree or the Canton Tower in Guangzhou; those who appreciate artistic endeavours and will journey to see the works of Frank Lloyd Wright or Moshe Safdie or Frank Gehry; those with a political interest who put 10 Downing Street, 24 Sussex or 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue on their wish list; those with a religious

interest who make pilgrimages to churches, mosques, synagogues, shrines and temples; those with historic interests where castles, grand estates, presidential libraries, forts and citadels are important; and those with cultural interests who may visit iconic structures that capture the 'sense' of a destination, such as St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square, the Angkor Wat complex in Seam Reap, the Great Mosque of Djenné, and the Plaza de Armas in cities such as Cuzco and Bogota.

I guess we take doors for granted. They are just there. Many times a tour guide will point out a particularly interesting door, such as the Imperial Door of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul or the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome or the famous blue doors of Sidi Bou Said. Otherwise we tend to ignore them.

My friend Jennifer, the owner of Jennifer Walker travel noted, "I always wonder what's behind the doors"...and so do your clients.

Doors present travel consultants with imagery-opportunities for office adornment and sales presentations (video and in-person). They symbolically and realistically capture the spirit of a hidden world of exploration and discovery. They inspire, they emote and they energize the desire to travel.



In a photo storyboard of a destination such as Cartagena, for example, a picture of a 17th or 18th century door (possibly with one of the local horse carriages standing nearby) conveys the message that the client is in for a very unique experience. Right off the bat you've grabbed their attention. Or, switch to the doors of an ice hotel in Sweden or Canada; or the tent flaps of a luxury bush camp in Namibia or Botswana, or the cave door of a hotel in Cappadocia or Matmata; or the grand entrance to the castle in Ireland where the client will be staying.

When you think about it, doors are pretty cool. Expressions such as Doorway to... Doors of discovery...Doors of opportunity...Doors Open (or Open Doors)...Doors of Imagination... can be used to market destinations but can also be used to market your agency or your own skills and expertise in looking after client needs: Walk

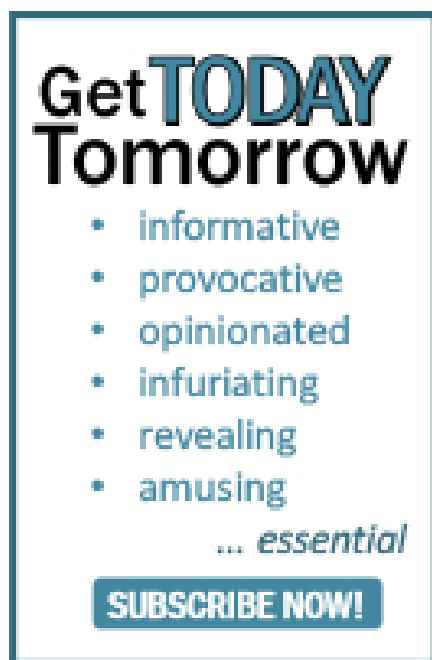
through our door to find a world of hidden treasures –and we'll assist you in experiencing them on your next vacation.

It's time to get a handle on the serendipitous nature of doors. You never know what to expect. It's not just an open and shut topic, but one that hinges on your creative talents to tweak the imagination of your clients and promote the very idea of 'travel'.



The Doors Without Keys exhibit is open until March 27, 2016

Agakhanmuseum.org



DOORS



Amirali Alibhai, co-curator of the Doors without Keys exhibit, Aga Khan Museum

