

THE GRAND TOUR OF EUROPE



What, exactly, was the Grand Tour? How did it differ from common-or-garden tourism? First of all, it was a journey to the Continent, primarily to France and Italy, to improve the sartorial, social and cultural awareness of well-born young men, to enable them to make useful contacts, and generally to introduce them to foreign lands and cultures. This does not mean that older men, and even women, did not travel for these reasons, and certainly, by the nineteenth century, thousands of them did. But the Grand Tour was normally an episode in the early lives of the moneyed and upper classes of the eighteenth century.

The idea of a Grand Tour developed out of growing awareness in the seventeenth century of other times and other places. During the first half of the eighteenth century, particularly after 1720, enough young men embarked on a journey to the Continent for it to become an accepted stage in a man's growing maturity; scheduling could sometimes be tricky, of course, since the journeys had to fit into the periods of peace between Great Britain and France.

During the second half of the century, taking the Grand Tour was not only accepted, it was expected, and during the long period of peace from the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, there was a flood of visitors to the Continent. But in 1796, Napoleon occupied Italy, and it all stopped. But the phenomenon of the Grand Tour left behind a notable legacy of art and architecture, and an awareness of the slight possibility that, as Yorick said in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, 'They order, said I, this matter better in France.'

The idea of travel as broadening a man's mind and expanding his range of experience was hardly new. The formal concept was given authoritative support by Francis Bacon. In his essay 'On Travel', written in 1615, he pronounced the journey dedicated to educational travel to be an indispensable experience for a young man ambitious to play a leading rôle in society and politics. Such travels were especially important for those young men destined for a diplomatic career, for which they required a knowledge of languages, of other political systems, of the leading men of other countries, and of geography, roads and fortifications. Queen Elizabeth I supported the teenaged Philip Sidney on such travels in 1572, for example, and the young Joseph Addison, later the founder of and writer for *The Spectator*, received in 1699 £200 from government funds to enable him to travel in preparation for a diplomatic career.

The term 'Grand Tour' itself first appeared in the French translation of Richard Lassels' *Voyage or a Complete Journey Through Italy*, which was published in 1670. This was one of a number of accounts of travel on the Continent, most of which were written by Englishmen, and by the early eighteenth century, there was a steady stream of such publications. The eighteenth century then saw a massive growth in the production of books, newspapers, and other printed material, and this encouraged the development of different types of writing and publishing, including travel accounts.

(Source : <http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-grand-tour-of-europe>)