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DEAN COURT

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STUDENT DECLARATION

“I, Susan Bell declare that the thesis entitled *Dean Court, Backpackers in London*, is no more than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices and references. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

ABSTRACT

Dean Court - Backpackers in London, is a non-fiction text focusing upon young (18-25) Australians living and working in London in the 1990s. The creative work emphasises the relationships between travellers living in a semi-permanent hostel in London's inner-city district of Bayswater whilst the exegesis explores the position of *Dean Court* within contemporary travel literature.

Dean Court – Backpackers in London

A Critical Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

When I proposed my application for undertaking a Masters in Creative Writing, my intention was to write a book about my experiences as a backpacker living in London. This period of my life had a powerful effect upon me, not only because I was fulfilling a personal goal in travelling but also because my unexpected discovery of a vibrant sub-culture of Australians and New Zealanders living in London, in long-term accommodation hostels, was to dominate my early travelling experiences.

My introduction to the backpacker community was quite accidental and, at times, gave me cause for misgivings. However, it also gave me an insight into the necessity of cultural bonds for the long-term survival of expatriates. In retrospect I now view the hostels as culturally significant, a unifying force that allowed me and many other backpackers to cope with living in a city as large and alienating as London.

The thesis and exegesis are focused on backpackers who chose to live within a community of expatriates, bonded together through common experiences and the need for friendship while living in London. It is not my intention to offer any insight into why expatriate communities gather together and remain within their cultural group. From observation I guess that it is easier to live with those with whom one shares a common cultural background than those who don't. Or as Madan Sarup writes in his essay *Home and Identity*: 'Fellow members of one's own group are thought to be human and trustworthy, in ways that others are not. One's own group provides a refuge.' [Sarup 1994: 102]. Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and, to a

lesser extent Canadians, gather into cultural groups in designated suburbs of London and are the focus of the creative text.¹

My experience is only one of many open to Australians living in London. Thus, neither the exegesis nor the creative text makes any attempt to describe or research alternative Australian backpacker lifestyles. Whilst the four years I spent living in London was not limited to hostel accommodation - indeed it was only a small part of my journey - it remained significant as a starting point for friendships, adventures and inclusion within a unique environment. My aim is to explain and hopefully amuse readers who may or may not have experienced something similar. To my knowledge, and as my research into the genre of backpacker literature demonstrates, there is no other creative writing on this theme.

This exegesis explores how the changes in travel culture have allowed a “niche” for a creative re-examination of the backpacker in London. Partly this is explained by my study of the current trends in travel literature. But it also has something to do with the way in which backpackers view themselves and their role as travellers and the way in which marketing affects their self-image. The research component notes the growth and developing trends in the backpacking industry, including successful multi-national organisations that appeal to the youth market: STA Travel and Student Flights, magazines, books (*Lonely Planet*, *Let's Go*), and Internet sites. All of these factors have contributed to my interest in writing and researching the lives of a new generation of backpackers.

¹ While there are many hostels within England, I am specifically referring to hostels that provided ongoing accommodation. In popular hostels such as the Youth Hostel Association (YHA), there is a restriction to three days accommodation during the busy summer season and five days over winter. The YHA hostels are suitable for travellers on a quick visit to London. However, for those planning to live and work in London, the long-term hostels are often the first place that inexperienced travellers stay and for many it is their only accommodation throughout their working holiday. These hostels, situated in the inner city areas of Bayswater, Paddington, Earls Court and Holland Park, are areas containing a thriving and diverse sub-culture.

The exegesis is divided into eight chapters that demonstrate why a creative re-examination of the backpacker in London will offer an alternative to current travel literature. The first chapter, “Changes in Travel,” briefly evaluates how technological and material changes have contributed to differences in travelling in the 1990s and 21st century. These changes have shaped the experiences of contemporary travellers and provide an opportunity for a new text about Australians in London.

The second chapter, “Autobiographical Journeys” in the 1960s, establishes why previous writing by Australians in London in the 1960s/70s is no longer relevant to a new generation of travellers. This is divided into two sections. In the first section, the focus is on earlier writings by Australians who lived or still currently live in London including Richard Neville, Clive James, Geoffrey Robertson and Bill James. These texts highlight the different reasons why Australians went to London in the 1950s and 1960s, reasons which, as I will argue, no longer motivate contemporary travellers. The second section demonstrates how the lack of contemporary writing about Australians in London, with the exception of several journalists and a brief acknowledgment by author Peter Moore, provides an opportunity for a new text on Australians in London.

The third chapter, “Backpacker Journeys”, encompasses a literature overview of the *Lonely Planet Journey* series, identifying the themes and trends currently popular in their published titles. This has implications for my novel *Dean Court*, and I shall discuss how the creative text is positioned within this field. The chapter also includes comparisons of author technique in either maintaining or losing reader interest.

The fourth chapter, “A Collection of Travel Literature”, identifies current themes in travel writing including eco-tourism and “responsible” travel. The source material is drawn from a collection of newspaper articles and texts that examine the

current issues within travel literature. This evaluation includes examples of the negative criticism generated in the media and in travel texts on eco-tourism, guidebooks and backpacking. My research will show how *Dean Court*, while acknowledging these issues within the text, is different from the current literature due to its focus on travellers living in London.

The fifth chapter, “Marketing the Backpacker Experience,” examines the marketing campaign of the Student Travel Association. Drawing on this research I will discuss how STA has successfully branded a travel identity that has significantly contributed to consumer perceptions of tourism and travelling. Student Flights, Lonely Planet and Intrepid Travel are included as further evidence of branding the travel image to attract a specific market for their services. The effect these companies have had on travellers and travel writing, though this is somewhat problematic to prove, is drawn by an examination of Peter Moore’s text, *The Full Montezuma*. Moore represents the current Australian backpacker, and his adventures through South America will be analysed in chapter six, “Moore Montezuma”, in relation to issues raised within the exegesis.

The concluding chapter, “Who are These People and Why are They Here?”, concerns the writing of the novel itself, the reasons for writing about Australians in London, and how my experiences reflect the current trends and issues involving backpackers in London. Furthermore, I will illustrate how *Dean Court* can make a contribution to the genre of Australian travel literature.

Changes in Travel

The method of travel has changed considerably over the past thirty years, and consequently the stories of travellers change too. Australians travelling to London and writing about their experiences is not new, indeed travelling to the “mother country” forms much of the narrative of the ‘grand tour’, and numerous short stories, novels, articles and poetry have been written about it [Portman 1996: xi]. However, the need for the “grand tour” and its documented narratives gradually faded once Australians became comfortable with their cultural identity:

The Australian versions of the grand tour and cultural pilgrimage were overshadowed by the transitory visit, revisitings and tourism, all using Australia as a “home” base, and less frequently confined to the umbilical route to London. At the same time expatriatism became a less common option or necessity as Australians became more satisfied with their own culture and more confident about it [Hergenhan & Petersson 1994: xv].

Despite the changes in Australians self-image there has not been, in recent years, a lengthy non-fiction or fiction text written about the contemporary experience of Australians in England, except in short articles. ‘...the enormous impact that tourism has had, and continues to have, on Australian culture – on Australia’s sense of itself and its place in the world – has not been reflected in the nation’s writing’ [Huggan 1993: 170].

Whereas travelling on a boat to the UK, stopping in exotic locations along the way, formed part of the process of arrival in the narratives of earlier travellers, this is

no longer part of the modern backpacker story as transnational flights arrive within 24 hours. This of course means that a five-week journey on a ship to the United Kingdom was 35 days longer than a 24-hour plane flight and gave an opportunity to familiarise oneself with fellow travellers. The sea voyage was one where ‘gossip, quarrels and scandals were rife,’ and ‘when people are wrenched out of their natural environment, all their foibles come to the surface’ [Portman 1996: 52]. Thus, in the earlier narratives, the journey to the United Kingdom was at least as interesting as the arrival.

In addition to changes in transport, there are restrictions on Australian travellers working overseas. At the time I travelled to London, work visas were limited to two years, though this could be stretched by frequent trips outside the U.K. and must be taken before the traveller had turned 27. More recently the British Government has imposed further restrictions, limiting the working holiday to one year. These restrictions, added since the 1970s, while limiting the amount of time spent in the U.K., encouraged a service industry based upon the backpacker market. Top Deck Travel, Backpackka, Australian Temps, STA Travel and Flight Centre all cater to today’s backpacker.

Another fundamental difference between Australian backpackers in the 1960s and now is the technology currently available to them. Instant communication via telephone or the Internet allows the traveller to be in contact with friends or family at the touch of a button. One can book a flight without venturing to a travel agent or enquire on-line about employment and accommodation without a trip to a travel bookshop. These services create an information database that was unimaginable for earlier generations of travellers. A contemporary traveller has a wealth of Internet sites to choose from, including the *Lonely Planet* (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>) and *TNT* (<http://www.tntmagazine.com>) with home pages and recommended links to a

smorgasbord of traveller information. There are links to on-line journals, travel magazines, articles from overseas papers including *The New York Times*, (<http://www.thenewyorktimes.com>) and *The Sunday Times*, (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/section/0,,2086,00.html>), web sites devoted to travellers' worst travel stories (<http://www.noshit.com.au>) and sites for backpackers looking for accommodation in London (<http://www.spareroom.co.uk/>).

The electronic age has facilitated access for travellers to a range of resources on the Internet and the introduction of the e-tag², a recent development, adds to the enormous changes that have occurred within the backpacker industry over the past 20 to 30 years. The Australian traveller can now work overseas for an Australian temping company, drink in bars for Australians, travel with Australian companies and receive current news from Australian magazines, websites or e-mail.

The growth of these service industries and the restrictions placed upon the modern backpacker means that many of the earlier travel narratives of Australians in Britain are of more historic interest than a reflection of current experience: their place in the readers' framework has changed. The Australian reader in the year 2005 has a different perspective on being Australian than those travelling in the 1960s and 70s. I believe there is a growing, but as yet under-researched interest in Australians living and working in the U.K. In addition, there is a small but increasing genre of specific 'backpacker' literature, to which my text *Dean Court* will make a significant contribution. The thesis, therefore, is important in developing a new perspective on some contemporary changes in travel literature.

² Lonely Planet in conjunction with Telstra is providing a service, similar to Hotmail, whereby a traveler can keep an e-mail address to which worldwide access is available.

Autobiographical Journeys in the 1960s

Travel writing it seems has reached an impasse in which the writer's characteristic response is either to repeat or to parody the experiences of previous generations. ...however, not all writers wish to go down this track and rather than abandoning that relationship, we simply need to redefine it.

[Jas: 1999: 246]

Elsner Jas writes that each generation has the opportunity to seek alternative ways to define their travel experience. This chapter argues that the Australian experience in London in the 1990s and 2000s differs from that of the 1960s and 1970s, and demonstrates how *Dean Court* offers a fresh perspective of Australians in London.

While the method by which Australians now travel to London has changed, as discussed in Chapter One, the aspiration of Australians in London is also changing. In this sense, the difference in generations of travellers can partly be defined by their expressed, collective reasons for travelling. For example, in the 1960s, Australians had a general desire to leave a perceived cultural wasteland. If this now sounds clichéd, it is precisely because it is a recurrent theme in the genre reflecting this period. Clive James, writing about his University days in Sydney recalls how culturally backward he found Australia in the 1960s. He mentions that staging plays by Beckett and Pinter '...was a challenging proposition for Australian students who were accustomed to a solid show of Philistinism even from the Arts faculty'

[James 1985: 76].

Jenny Kee, an Australian fashion designer who also left for London in the 60s says, 'Australia was a cultural desert then. Menzies was in office; it was an extremely conservative society. I was starved for excitement. When we beat a path to London, it was not popular to be Australian. At that stage people still considered you a convict. Australians in London are now the hip elite' [Kee 2004: 54].

Geoffrey Robertson writes, 'Growing up in Sydney in the fifties and the sixties had been the cultural equivalent of living in a suburb of the Isle of Wight, without the pop festivals' [Robertson 1998: 7]. Whilst Richard Neville recalls, 'Being white and privileged, as we were, gave no immunity from a feeling of cultural suffocation, a sense of the deadness at our nation's core' [Neville 1995: 20].

Travelling to the U.K. equated with the cultural journey and, like preceding generations, was a pilgrimage of the 'colonial' to the 'mother country'. Unlike previous generations, however, the travellers of the 60s and 70s discovered a new agenda. Bill James, co-founder of Top Deck Travel, writes,

We were after all baby boomers, children of the 1960s, a time of social and sexual revolution, a time to throw off the shackles that bound our parents' generation. It was a time to discover who you really were and what life was all about, in a way that today's generation, having been raised in a more liberal society, has never felt the need to do [James 1999: 36].

In many of the autobiographical texts of Australian travellers in the 60s there are common points of reference such as the Overseas Visitors Club, Carnaby Street, 'swinging London' music and fashion, Oz Magazine and the impact of Germaine

Greer and her book, *The Female Eunuch*. All of these stories give the impression that Australians in London were part of an exciting and culturally stimulating place to live, unlike the country they had left.

However, one aspect that emerges as a central difference between earlier generations of Australian travellers to the UK, and an Australian traveller today, is the change in the economy and work situation. Clive James notes, ‘At that time an Australian visiting Britain had all the advantages of British citizenship, including the opportunity to emigrate home again at a cost of only ten pounds sterling’ [James 1985: 76]. Bill James writes, ‘There were no restrictions then on Aussies working in the UK so you worked in a pub or got part-time work in an assumed profession’ [James 1999: 34].³ Australian travellers, unlike James and his contemporaries, have now been restricted to a set period of time with conditions placed on their visas. The change in visa and working conditions is expressed in *Dean Court* by the exchange between Louise and the custom official:

“Are you aware of the conditions of your working visa?”

“Pretty much.”

“You get two years in the country in which you can work in three month blocks.

Each time you leave the country you will get the time spent outside of England added on to your visa.”

“Uh huh,” she nodded.

“If you over extend your visa you will be deported.”

She nodded again and he stamped her passport.

“Your visa expires two years from now, on the 27th December 1994.”

[Bell 2005: 22]

Considering that Australians currently face further restrictions to their visas, it is inevitable that the Australian experience of living in London has also changed, even if, at the very least, of the amount of time spent living and working in London. Peter Moore, a successful Australian travel writer is the only one who has written, albeit briefly, about the Antipodean scene in London.⁴ His text, *The Wrong Way Home*, reverses the backpacker journey along the once popular hippie trail, overland from London through India to Sydney. The original hippie trail however originated in Sydney, travellers making their way to London via Asia and the Middle East.

Moore begins his journey with a contemporary account of the backpacker scene in London in the 90s:

...I bought it [train ticket] from a company that advertised in *TNT*, a magazine that mysteriously appears outside tube stations in places like Clapham and Ealing and Shepherds Bush, and other places cheap enough to attract slumming Aussie backpackers. It claims to be a 'guide to free-spirited adventure' but in reality it's more of a 'how to' guide to the debauched lifestyle that passes as living as an Aussie in London. ...My first taste of this Antipodean lifestyle came during my very first weekend in Britain. Barely off the plane from Turkey, I was invited to an expat cocktail party. That party was pretty indicative of the Antipodean scene in London. Every night someone was having a party or there

³ An assumed profession was what one had trained for in Australia though were unlikely to continue after living in London for several years.

⁴ There are however, stories that appear in newspapers and magazines about Australians in London, see page 15 of this exegesis.

was a backpacker pub offering a pint for a pound. If you were really hard pressed, there was always an Australian band to see [Moore, 2000: 1/2].

This lifestyle could, in part, be a consequence of visa restrictions as Australians, aware that their time is limited, are in a state of permanent holiday mode. *Sons of Bazza*, an article by Amanda Hooten, has an unfavourable view of the current backpacker scene. This reconfirms stereotyped images of Australians in London, a view that I hope to shift in my text *Dean Court*. Hooten writes:

Why do they come? Do these travellers still feel the pull of history? Or is it something else? On arriving in London, the average Australian backpacker generally finds accommodation with a friend, a friend's friend, or someone else in the backpacking loop. This loop is really a communication network based in London and stretching across Europe, cushioning the backpacker (in theory) from the worst excesses of international travel. It might seem bizarre to outsiders, but without it the average 19-year-old would be dead five minutes after arriving at Heathrow, killed by culture shock and cold. When, after several lifetimes, the British winter finally ends, the average backpacker gives a shriek of joy and heads south as quickly as his pale little legs can carry him [Hooten, 1999: 31].

Hooten's observations are cynical and stereotypical, grouping a large section of Australians together and labelling them unfairly. This is why *Dean Court* will seek to offer a more favourable and balanced view of backpacking to that of Hooten and to a lesser extent Moore.

The Sunday Age features a regular section titled ‘London Calling’, focusing on expatriates and their reasons for leaving Australia. These articles offer a more positive reflection of contemporary Australian experiences. Though they do not focus on backpackers, the regularity of these articles implies that there is a renewed interest in the Australian experience in London. Similar to the text *When London Calls – The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*⁵, a collection of interviews with Australian expatriates who pursued creative careers in London in the 50s and 60s, these articles focus on the current employment pre-occupations of Australians in London.

Graham Huggan, an academic whose research focuses on Australian travel writing notes that, ‘...in the '80s and early '90s, a new genre of Australian literature has arguably emerged: a genre I shall refer to here - tongue-in-cheek - as the “Australian tourist novel” [Huggan 1993: 70]. Despite the emergence of this new genre, there has not been a text that deals specifically with backpackers living and working in London and I believe *Dean Court* can help to fill this gap.

⁵ Whilst the text, *When London Calls – The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, contains autobiographical stories about Australian’s in London, they are not relevant to this exegesis. The majority of stories concern the arrival of Australians in the 1950s, which is earlier than the focus of this exegesis. My intention was to raise awareness of the texts that are now being published as examples of the renewed interest in Australians in London.

Backpacker Genre

While the previous chapters have explained why a creative examination of the Australian backpacker in London is appropriate, this chapter places the text within the travel literature genre. I have researched a variety of titles published by Lonely Planet as well as a selection of mixed travel writing by a variety of authors. The books discussed in both this chapter and the next highlight either current trends in travel writing (as in the Lonely Planet titles) or the commercial and professional success achieved by some travel writers.

A survey of the fiction/non-fiction travel literature available quickly revealed a growing genre catering to the backpacker. Having already cornered a lucrative market in backpacker guidebooks, Lonely Planet started publishing a collection of non-fiction titles in 1996. These texts are marketed as *Lonely Planet Journeys* the titles differ in location, writing styles and quality. Random House and HarperCollins have previously published some of the titles. This does beg the question of whether Lonely Planet was hoping to ‘cash in’ on a new but potentially lucrative market. Having already established themselves with both the Lonely Planet and Rough Guide travel series, they are in a unique position, with brand name attached, to entice the backpacker readers.

However, despite the association between backpackers and the Lonely Planet guidebooks, few of the published titles are about backpacking, with the exception of *Kiwi Tracks – A New Zealand Journey*. The authors undertake well-planned travels that involve a set purpose and duration. Author Robert Dessaix regards travel planning as essential groundwork:

Do your homework, then spend long enough for something to happen, for it not to be a purely passive experience, but not so long that it becomes familiar because I don't think that you can interrogate what you're looking at once it's familiar in any useful way [Dessaix 2000: 3].

Dessaix's instruction suits the format in the Lonely Planet Journey series. In *Gates of Damascus*, the Dutch author Lieve Joris specifically travels to renew and write about a friendship with a female academic from Syria, whom she'd met some years earlier at a conference in the Middle East. Joris's journey to Syria to stay with her friend Hala becomes a west meets east tale of cultural differences: political, familial, economical, food and the limits to freedom under a military dictatorship. The author examines her feelings about Syria by constructing her tale around Hala, waiting for the release of her husband Ahmed, a political prisoner. Hala's fear of Syria's secret police and suspicion of everyone's political agenda gradually rubs off onto Joris. The juxtaposition of the imminent release of Ahmed, the Syrian election and the author's growing awareness of overwhelming oppression pervading every aspect of life carries the story through to an anti-climactic ending. The style is somewhat formal and self absorbed. She observes rather than participates.

Alternatively, *Shopping for Buddhas* is American author Jeff Greenwald's attempt to discover his own spirituality through a quest for the perfect Buddha. His style is less formal than Lieve Joris' because he is aware of his own sense of the ridiculous and the awkwardness of westerners in religious societies like Nepal.⁶ However, he enjoys the company of the Nepalese, the visits to the spiritual retreats and is prepared to blend in and to self-critique while Joris remains unself-critical and

⁶ See also Sara MacDonald's observations on page 30.

an observer. His one criticism of Nepal, in terms of human rights, becomes an exploration of how and where these abuses are occurring. Greenwald notes:

What exactly are the dynamics of responsible travel in the late twentieth century? Is a part of it knowing, insisting on knowing about the human rights situation of countries that one visits on vacation? During the next week, I became increasingly curious about this hidden aspect of Nepal – the world of royal privilege, political intrigue and human rights abuses that exists in the shadows of the sacred mountains [Greenwald 1996: 12/13].

Jeff Greenwald explores a complex culture, understanding that he, as a westerner, is merely an observer who can return to his own culture at any time. His budget is limited, though the time frame of his spiritual quest is open-ended and includes three trips to Nepal, of which his third is the subject of this story. His continual sparring with spiritual leader Lalji is a constant reminder of the failure of his quest. The search for the perfect Buddha and spirituality must also involve a questioning that probes behind the mask. When he examines the negatives of Nepal, particularly the facade of paradise, he brings the text to life and gives it meaning.⁷

Full Circle, by Luis Sepulveda, a political exile from Chile, recalls his travels through South America, during which he reveals a knack for getting himself into dangerous situations. His journey is that of the exiled, as one character remarks; ‘Well, either you’re here because you’re crazy or because you can’t stay in your country, and either of those reasons is fine by me’ [Sepulveda 1997:164]. The exiled

⁷ The question of whether the traveller should be more responsible whilst visiting politically oppressed or poor countries is becoming increasingly prominent in travel literature. Intrepid Travel, an Australian based tour company specialising in Asia has based their company philosophy on helping developing countries. See chapter 5 for further analysis.

writer longs for his homeland and his connection with loss, whether emotional or political pervades the text: the middle-aged virgin searching for a husband, the writer Bruce Chatwin lost within his own stories and unable to decipher the truth from fantasy, crazed pilots and travellers, and an assortment of political, emotional and social exiles. Sepulveda links short stories about his travels through South America, by depicting his journey as outbound, or outside South America, as opposed to inbound, in which he revisits old friends and countries. Sepulveda identifies with life's exiles and the text concentrates upon the quirks of emotional, political or intellectual displacement.

Sean and David's Long Drive follows the exploits of two Australian men in their late 20s exploring their homeland. The narrative falls flat due to the ranting of Sean and an irritating style of self-mockery that the author lacks the skills to sustain. The layout of the text resembles diary entries. Condon continually notes minor details such as the food, the weather, the time and the day without investing them with any overall significance. Thus the text is a series of short paragraphs appearing as a set of short entries. This does, however, have the merit of giving the text a more immediate feel, as though the events described are recent. Furthermore, the text lay-out emphasises the short paragraphs by segregating them with asterisks to make it look as though Condon has transferred the diary entries from one notebook to another rather than having used them as a reference for a more structured and distanced text. However, the constant breaks in the text with the asterisks and short paragraphs upsets the tempo. The reader is given quick impressions of people and places before Condon is off again; his style is similar to watching a video clip or eating a take-away meal; the impression doesn't last long. Condon repeats the diary entry style in his second adventure, *Drive Thru America*, which can be characterised, in his own terms, as

‘another smart-arse gonzo trip around the second-hand pop culture delights of the US’s crummiest joints’ [Condon 1998: back cover].

Thematically, the Lonely Planet Journey series, with the exception of *Sean and David’s Long Drive* and *Kiwi Tracks – A New Zealand Journey*, are set in exotic locations.⁸ The author Alex Garland sums up the appeal of Asia as a locale for writers. ‘You automatically get a sense of alienation and separateness when you set something abroad, which is useful in quite a pragmatic way.’ [Garland 1999: 8]⁹

In her essay *Re-Branding the Tourist*, Dea Birkett argues that tourism has many negative connotations and that there is a split between those who consider themselves ‘real travellers’ to tourists. Hence, Lonely Planet, long associated with backpacking and travelling, (explored further in “Marketing the Backpacker Experience”) would avoid publishing titles that are closely linked with mass produced travel:

Tourism, a term which could once be applied worldwide, will, with the exception of a few popular places like Goa and Thai beach resorts, come to mean a geographically defined area of travel. In short, it will mean the non-exotic [Birkett 2002: 12].

Given that Lonely Planet is partly responsible for disparaging the concept of the tourist, it is worth noting that the texts published are mostly set in countries that are yet to be inundated with tourist infrastructure¹⁰. I believe that *Dean Court*, a text

⁸ I use the term exotic in reference to Middle East or Asian countries that are locations currently popular in travel texts. It is not within the scope of this exegesis to examine any further link with the wide body of academic literature devoted to the theme of the exotic and its subsequent connotations.

⁹ The Lonely Planet series also includes a number of other titles, *Islands in the Clouds*, (a journey into the New Guinea highlands); *Tales of an African Sunset*, (an expatriate Nigerian woman notes the changes in her homeland after 20 years absence); and *The Rainbird*, (a journey through the jungles of Gabon in Africa).

¹⁰ This will be explored in the chapter on STA travel in Marketing the Backpacker Experience.

set within an urban environment, will sit favourably as an alternative to the preoccupations and destinations of contemporary travel writers.

A Collection of Travel Literature

In search of travel texts that are relevant to the creative writing component of the thesis *Dean Court*, I have included the classification of mixed genre. This chapter deals with a number of issues, particularly the current pre-occupations of many travel writers including eco-tourism, environmental and moral issues as well as criticisms of backpacking and travelling. However, first I will engage in a comparative analysis of several texts to support my preference for writers who can maintain reader interest.

‘If you don’t have conflict, there is no potential for the characters’ notes Reg Watson, former screenwriter for the Australian soap ‘Neighbours’ (Watson 2004: 7.) This is also true for travel texts. Conflict as a central narrative theme in travel writing is evident in Bill Bryson’s *Notes from a Small Island*, Bob Geldof’s recollection in *Worst Travel Journeys*, Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* and Alex Garland’s *The Beach*.

In Davidson’s book *Tracks* the continual conflict in the love/hate relationship with her stubborn camels, the monotony of the harsh terrain, the silence, intrusions by curious strangers and the invasion of privacy on her journey of self-discovery becomes humorous. Initially, Davidson’s aim was to be the first woman to cross the desert with camels. Her writing is refreshing because she took an approach that was different: not everybody would want to train camels and walk through the desert. The reader wants answers to questions such as, what kind of a woman would want to do this? Wasn’t she afraid to be by herself? What if she got raped? In contrast, going to Damascus to stay with a girlfriend in *Gates of Damascus* seems somewhat mundane and unchallenging. Davidson is alone and her journey is one of self-discovery, an exploration of her strengths and weaknesses. Joris, however, is rarely without company yet displays little willingness to test herself in any way. Where Davidson

uses humour to get through difficult situations, Joris becomes analytical, unable or unwilling to laugh at herself.

Like Davidson, Bill Bryson uses conflict as a means of creating humour. In *Notes from a Small Island*, a succession of ill-mannered Bed and Breakfast owners pop up surprisingly often in his journey around the U.K. However, the ill manners of those he meets serve as an insight into aspects of the British character, creating a sort of love/hate relationship that Bryson plays with throughout the text. Unlike Davidson, Bryson's journey is not one of self-discovery but a gentle probing of what makes the U.K. unique. The blend of history, geography, culture and climate is dissected during Bryson's travels with a sense of pleasure and enjoyment. But it is Bryson's ability to use unpleasant incidents or conflict as a source of humour that is the key to the text and helps to explain its popularity.

In contrast, Paul Theroux's journey around the U.K, *The Kingdom by the Sea*, is not infused with humour although there is plenty of conflict. Indeed, Theroux and Bryson travel to the same locations and by similar means but where Bryson makes light of inconveniences, either by people or transport, Theroux sulks. Bryson, aware of the contrast between the two writers, contemplates how their journey around the same country and using the same transport could be so different. Theroux encounters innumerable distractions from strangers on trains, yet Bryson, presumably a friendlier and more amiable person than Theroux, meets no one. Bryson hints that Theroux may be exaggerating his unpleasant encounters. Theroux, as a traveller, so dislikes uninvited conversations that he is unable to turn them into relevant observations of the people, to the detriment of his narrative writing. Bryson, however, gives the reader a more vivid impression of the U.K because he allows strangers to intrude and speak in

their own voice. In this way Bryson is similar to Greenwald, reflecting the place rather than absorbing it into a study of himself.

Alex Garland's novel, *The Beach*, is a work of fiction but has enough evidence of the author's travels and knowledge of backpackers to give the text authenticity. Indeed, Garland notes that the novel was a good way of stringing all his back-packer stories together [Bunbury 1999: 8]. Richard, the central character, stays in a hostel and is given a map to find an island paradise. The island, however, has more in common with William Golding's nightmare vision of brutality and bullying in *Lord of the Flies*, than with a tropical paradise. Garland admits that 'The germ of *The Beach*, was a succession of late night tussles about the moral questions posed by backpacking through traditional communities.' The travellers cause havoc to each other and the island because they are unable to live responsibly in paradise. In an interview with Stephanie Bunbury, Garland explains his resistance to the romance of the exotic: "I hate this thing about Asian people being so friendly... All these daffy little truisms that Westerners like to trot out about people around the world just get on my nerves" [Bunbury 1999: 8].

Travel writers like Garland, Kaplan observes, are '...distinctly removed from exploration of geography and habitats to those of moral or inner conflicts of taste' [Kaplan 1996: 7]. The moral, political and environmental dilemmas encountered by travellers also drive much of the narrative in the following texts. Bob Geldolf, in *Worst Travel Journeys*, describes a night in a Bangkok bar and questions when a traveller should draw the boundary between titillation and exploitation. Is the curious traveller contributing to the continuation of a degrading and dehumanising trade simply for entertainment? He reflects:

Show me something that makes me wonder why I want to see it, something that makes me sick and sad for us all, show me something where the other side of us is made real, except we don't have to live it or die it. ...I was afraid of the physical danger if we continued our journey into degradation, but I was more afraid of the mental danger [Geldof 1991: 146].

The theme of westerners contributing to environmental, moral or political corruption for an unspoiled travel experience is continued in *Green Dreams*¹¹. Stephen Benz writes about the financial and environmental conflicts inherent in eco-tourism:

Eco-tourism was primarily for well-heeled holidaymakers more interested in sport than ecology. Sure they wanted Costa Rica's natural beauty preserved, but they wanted it preserved as a playground to which only they – those with money – had access [Benz 1997: 122].

Mari Rhyden, an Australian author whose text *Slow Travel* follows her journey around the world in a sailing boat, writes how tourists are often detached or shielded from the reality of poverty:

Poverty was not hidden, though tourists did not want to see it. That is why most of them were carefully put on private buses from airport to resort to safari park, bypassing any uncomfortable brush with suffering that can so take the pleasure out of a luxury holiday [Rhyden 2004: 231].

¹¹ While *Green Dreams* is another Lonely Planet title, I wanted to include it in the mixed genre section as relevant to negative criticism directed at eco-tourism and backpacking.

By the year 2020, the World Tourist Organisation has estimated that there will be 1.56 billion 'tourists' travelling at any one time [Leech 2002: 75]. With the explosion of travellers, however, the development of alternative travel experiences becomes a necessity.¹² John Urry, whose contemporary research focuses on the sociology of place, comments that '...the consumption of tourism demands new and newer places off the tourist trail. An array of tourist professionals develops who attempt to reproduce ever new objects of the tourist gaze' [Urry 1995: 133].

The search for alternative travel experiences poses a problem for journalist Thornton McAmish because '...the irony that escapes many of us travellers is that in seeking authentic foreign cultures unspoiled by tourism, we spread airport lounge culture around the world' [McAmish 1999:7]. Tourism lecturer Dr Heba Aziz blames the proliferation of guidebooks which '...have created another form of institutionalised tourism.' She believes that 'travellers are spoon fed information on where to eat, where to stay, what to see and even how they should feel after they have seen it.' This runs counter to '...everything independent travel was once supposed to be' [Cadwalladr 2000: 2].¹³ Dr Aziz's comments are reinforced by the travel experiences of Emily Barr:

I spent the past six months in Asia, and the sad truth is that backpacking is a painfully predictable affair; all the stereotypes are true. The Khao San Road in Bangkok and similar ghettos elsewhere are packed with people who think they

¹² Responsible travel generally means that travellers leave minimal environmental, social and cultural impact whilst generating benefits for local communities. [Goodwin 2002: 22]. Companies like Intrepid Travel, STA Travel and Lonely Planet - see next chapter - would consider themselves as promoters of responsible travel.

¹³ Dr Aziz was interviewed by The Sunday Age for the article, 'Bonfire of the Guidebooks', see bibliography.

are seeing Asia, while they eat a banana pancake and reminisce about the lovely expresso in Krabi...The chief culprits for these kinds of changes are the Lonely Planet guidebooks [Barr 2000: 11].

Furthermore, Paul Goldstein expresses concern about the attitude of backpackers in his essay, *Can We Care Enough*:

Backpackers can bring a great deal to local communities. Sadly this is not always the case. The type of young traveller described appears to have bags of attitude andchutzpah while actually they are doing little more than trawling from one travellers' hovel to another with a Lonely Planet guide hanging from their back pocket. ...Backpackers go to Nepal instead where they eschew anything remotely organized and try as ever to get everything on the cheap, while convincing themselves that they occupy the moral high peaks....An odious sub-culture can develop where the intention is not to meet the people and encounter the culture but vie with fellow travellers about who can travel the most and spend the least [Goldstein 2002: 42].

Sarah MacDonald, an Australian journalist who lived in India for two years writes in her book *Holy Cow*,

Israelis are the nubile young gods of the Lonely Planet scene. The Indians don't really like the Israelis, for they travel in packs, they're loud and they demand cheap prices (some will bargain for hours over fifty cents.) A few hotels here even refuse the backpackers admission [MacDonald 2003: 281].

Her observations substantiate the criticisms made by Paul Goldstein, Emily Barr and Dr Aziz, namely that backpackers are merely following another form of mass tourism, albeit a cheap one. In turn, travel writers are reflecting on the validity of travelling at all.

Brendan Shanahan, author of *The Secret Life of the Gold Coast* and former backpacking enthusiast, analysed his motives for travelling, only to draw an uncomfortable conclusion.

“Why are you travelling?” a confused African villager once asked me. I said to see the world. “No,” came the bewildered reply, “*why* are you travelling?” ...I have come to understand that the only reason I travel is to better know myself. That travel is a fundamentally selfish act was a disturbing but inescapable conclusion [Shanahan 2004: 2].

Mari Rhyden was concerned that the travellers she met were often narrow minded and critical of other cultures:

Travel is supposed to be a Good Thing. It is supposed to broaden the mind and thereby make us better people. That was my justification for travelling but I was starting to wonder. Even if today’s tourists...diligently visit art galleries, great heritage sites both religious and historical, pretty villages, people with different customs and food, are we changed? Are we better? Does travel provide succour to the soul? [Rhyden 2004: 89].

Sarah MacDonald believes that even when travellers participate in spiritual or religious ceremonies they have only a superficial understanding of the process:

Many young travellers who take the vow don't seem to realise quite what it means...I watch a group celebrate their new spiritual status by toasting each other with warm beer...One guy sporting a Free Tibet t-shirt and a halo of blond corkscrew curls demands a bodhisattva discount on the bill

[MacDonald 2003: 158].

In *Raising Alexandria*, the author Tony Perrottet reveals how the former ancient wonder of the world, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, has been found resting on the ocean bed not far from its original position on land, and the salvage operation involved in getting it ashore. The writer queries whether archaeological finds should take precedence over modern needs. For example, should apartment blocks be built over the ruins of ancient buildings? How much does the tourist trade cater to foreigners at the expense of the citizens? [Perrottet 1999: 44]

The issue of responsible tourism, increasingly popular in travel literature, will continue to be raised, alongside the conflict between preserving monuments of the past over the needs of people in the present. If, as Urry notes, '...the consumption of tourism demands new and newer places off the tourist trail' [Urry 1995:133], then contemporary travel literature will reflect these trends.

Big cities like London continue to attract backpackers and this could be the new location for travel writers seeking that market. Urry comments that travellers are attracted to cities because they offer cosmopolitan and sightseeing opportunities. [Urry 1995: 133] The current focus on undeveloped wilderness and the moral

dilemma some writers feel in travelling at all, misses a major re-exploration of young Australians in an urban environment. A travel text is as much about the mental journey of the traveller as the physical one. The theme of travellers showing a moral responsibility during their journey has become an issue mentioned frequently in contemporary travel writing, positioning *Dean Court* as a novel offering a different perspective on travel.

Marketing the Backpacker Experience

Travel writers are increasingly concerned with environmental and moral issues encountered while travelling. In this chapter I explore a possible explanation for travel literature following this trend. I believe that several travel companies have actively contributed to splitting consumers into two categories, tourist and traveller. These corporations tend to denigrate tourism by associating it with everything negative while elevating ‘travelling’ as a good thing, enabling them to capture a large consumer base. Parts of this consumer base are the travellers in *Dean Court* and this is reflected in the novel. However, I wish to explain how corporations ‘brand’ the travel experience, thus impacting on consumer choices and on travel literature. I have chosen several companies that dominate the backpacker market, including Student Travel Association (STA), Lonely Planet, Intrepid Travel and Student Flights.

STA is a company offering flights, accommodation, job networking and an extensive website that includes travel advice, immunisation details, exchange rates and a message board. STA is a recognisable brand with many shops worldwide. Their promotional material is an upbeat and covert appeal to a consumer base consisting of millions. The material below is quoted from the STA website:

Our target market is not defined by age, but rather by attitude. We have found that more people, not just students, want authentic, real value travel options.

STA Travellers relish the journey more than the destination and they want to learn something from the people and places they visit. They are not content to just take in the sights through the foggy windows of a tourist bus.

Our customers travel for fun, adventure, education and for the experience.

STA Travellers are anyone passionate about travel and wanting to travel to learn, about the world and about themselves.

As a general rule they are often aged 18-29, mostly single, studying or very well-educated, employed part or full time, culturally aware, environmentally conscious, enjoy a challenge, and hate to be categorised.

STA Travellers are passionate about travel. They love being first to know, grab a bargain, talking, learning and success. And they hate anything too trendy, ignorance, apathy, and being spoken down to.

STA Travellers want flexibility, reliable service and support. They expect the best value, quality, information, assistance and advice. They come to STA Travel because their friends' recommend us and they trust us. We have been around for a long time and we don't make promises we can't keep (<http://www.sta.com>).

In addition to this promotional material the company spokesman Matt Sallman responded by email to my query of how STA provided 'experiential travel', with the following information:

We promote experiential travel to those who want to learn, and educate themselves through experiencing different cultures, religions and environments. We are achieving this through our unique product mix and promotional activities and by offering the best possible prices and information delivered by the best possible team of Travel Advisers [email 3 July 2003].

Matt Sallman referred me to an STA promotional campaign that he described as ‘humorous.’ I have chosen these two pictures as the best of the campaign that



emphasise Sallman’s point. The first image sets a traditionally dressed Burmese woman in a contemporary urban setting. The accompanying text on the top right hand side of the picture reads ‘Paduang Women, Burma’ identifying her, for those who may be unaware, of this particular ethnic group.

The unique neck rings, also provide clues to her background. Indeed, it is unusual to see a woman from this traditional group sitting in a car. The image is quite startling

because she is dressed in bright, traditional clothes with prominent neck rings yet sitting in the driver's seat of a car, either stuck in traffic or waiting for a passenger.

The picture is cropped to frame the woman within the car. Whether this has been done to emphasise the neck rings or as a way of deflecting information about the background is unclear. Her hand is against her head, which is tilted towards the camera, giving the impression of encroaching boredom. The mundanity of her situation, in western terms, experienced by anyone who has been stuck in traffic, is at odds with our concept of traditional Paduang village life. The woman appears to be aware of the camera and is letting the traveller in on a secret. The secret of course is that while the tourist might believe in a traditional Paduang village, it is in fact an illusion. The Paduang women are as much a part of modern civilization as the rest of us.

Yet the picture is also comical, being at such odds with preconceived tourist ideas of the exotic and how Paduang women live and travel. STA are implying "tourists" are presented with false images of the Paduang women when observed from tour buses in remote villages. The STA travellers however, having bought their 'experiential travel' ticket will see Burma differently, they are 'experiencing' the real country long after the tourist bus has returned to the hotel. 'Take the Road Less Travelled' is the catchphrase used by STA to sell an experience. Only real travellers, of course, will see the authentic Burma rather than a manufactured experience.

Similarly, the picture of three Israelis by the telephone booths highlight the real Israel missed by tourists. Two of the Israelis are dressed in traditional clothing and associated with the more orthodox element of their religion. Intent on their phone



calls, they are oblivious to each other while an off duty soldier, or so one assumes from the gun hanging from across his shoulders, is slouched into the phone booth. The juxtaposition of the conservative Jews with the off duty soldier would reflect the nature of living in the modern Jewish State, a place of religious extremes and one under the constant threat of violence. The

scene is both shocking and amusing to someone not part of the culture. The youth of the soldier, who may have returned from the Occupied Territories, compared to the Orthodox Jews, who do not serve in the Israeli army, could also be making a statement. Two worlds within the one culture, two ideologies operating side by side. The text in the top right hand corner states the time and place of the photo, 'Jerusalem, 7.00am, Israel'. The writing draws our attention to Jerusalem as a holy

city and one in which conflict is ever present. The writing also indicates that the traveller is out and about and privy to this image while the tourist is still in the hotel, probably contemplating a cooked breakfast. Given the current violent political situation in Israel, the scene seems relaxed; the soldier is completely at ease with his gun and so are those standing beside him.

The phone booths are also indicative of the modern technological age as opposed to the two religious Jews, seemingly timeless in their adherence to their practices. The composition itself with the black, blue and white at the bottom of the picture complements the clothing worn by the soldier. His blue jeans match the blue of the STA logo while the white t-shirt balances the white text below making the logo as much a part of the photograph as the people represented.

The advertising campaign would confirm STA's assertion that they are selling "experiential travel". This is partly achieved by avoiding the images of a "tourist brochure," which might display the architecture and history of the country, but not the reality of human existence in day-to-day Israel. 'Take the Road Less Travelled' implies that the STA traveller has the educational and observational skills that enable them to have a wider appreciation of travel than the tourist does. In this sense the industry succours its target market by flattery and appeals to those believing they can achieve a unique and alternative travel experience among the tourist hordes. Therefore, the perception that real travellers will get off the 'beaten track' and find stimulation in the otherwise hidden local community is similar to the appeal of eco tourism. The emphasis is on the 'educated' or intelligent consumer willing to learn and be sympathetic to the cultural implications of tourism. STA demonstrates their dismissal of tourism by the line that real travellers '*avoid the 'the foggy windows of a*

tourist bus.' The tourist doesn't even get the satisfaction of being able to see out the window properly. Therefore, a real traveller, according to STA, is not a tourist.

In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein explains the strategies employed by companies to brand a product, which allows them to have power in the market:

The products that will flourish in the future will be the ones presented not as commodities but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle Brand X is not a product but a way of life, an attitude, a set of values, a look, an idea, 'IBM isn't selling computers, it's selling business solutions. Swatch is not about watches it's about the idea of time. Similarly Diesel Jeans philosophy is "We don't sell a product, we sell a style of life. I think we have created a movement...It's the way to live, it's the way to wear, it's the way to do something [Klein 1999: 23/25].

STA has positioned its brand in the market by selling 'experiential travel'. Consumer researchers concluded after their investigation of generational trends that 'diversity' was the 'defining idea' for Gen-Xers, as opposed to 'individuality' for boomers and 'duty' for their parents [Klein 1999: 123]. Thus the way in which STA advertises its product and presents an image of travel is not unlike that of the Benetton advertisements. Klein believes the Benetton advertisements '...were ads that careered wildly between witty and beautiful challenges to racial stereotypes on the one hand, and grotesque commercial exploitation of human suffering on the other' [Klein 1999 126]. While the STA campaign is unlikely to offend consumers, it is worth noting the similarities. In this sense the advertisements are challenging stereotypes: the Paduang woman in the driver's seat of a car rather than cooking, childrearing or making

clothes in a traditional village and Israeli Orthodox Jews using a phone box next to an off duty soldier in troubled Jerusalem.

STA has more than 100 shops around the world and a well-maintained Internet presence that offers on-line booking of flights and accommodation, travel tips, tours, employment and study guides. The websites are specific to each country but they all have similarities in layout and services. Hence, whether it is Canadian, American, Australian, Malaysian, or from the Philippines, the advertising material targets the same audience. The website actively encourages consumers to become part of a select club of intelligent, unique travellers who roam the world in search of 'authentic' rather than 'manufactured experiences'. The reality, of course, is that with so many backpackers looking for 'authentic' and 'individual' experiences there can be little left that is unexplored.

STA also demonstrates an aggressive and expansionist marketing plan by 'aiming to see its logo displayed in all shop windows'. STA's strategy is similar to the tactics described by Klien in *No Logo* that was successful for McDonalds, Starbucks and The Gap. STA's plan to be in every store front is akin to corporations who '...saturate an area with stores...McDonalds has perfected the scorched earth approach to franchising, opening neighbouring franchises and mini outlets at gas stations until an area is blanketed' [Klein 1999:152]. Thus while individual stores may suffer from increased competition, the overall sales for the corporation increase. STA is no different to any other corporation in aiming to distinguish their brand by selling an 'idea' or a 'concept', in their case one of anti-tourism. This is all part of what Dea Birkett describes '...as the phenomenon of re-branding the tourist, thus disguising any link between tourism and travel' [Birkett 2002: 8].

Similarly, Student Flights, an offshoot from the parent company of Flight Centre, is aiming at the backpacker market. The promotional material downloaded from their website, attracts the budget traveller.

We are here to provide you with affordable travel solutions, specialising in 'cheap airfares' for students and backpackers. Through us you will have access to exclusive international and domestic airfares and holiday deals, as well as a wide range of exciting products including adventure holidays, backpacker offers, international work exchange programs and much more! (<http://www.studentflights.com>).

Student Flights are also keen to promote a particular brand of travel. The reference within the advertisement to international work exchange, adventure holidays and backpacker special offers, avoids mentioning the word 'tourist'. Yet Student Flights are only imitating the companies that have successfully promoted their brand of travel for many years, most notably Lonely Planet:

During its early years Lonely Planet articulated an 'alternative' form of tourism which many of the contemporary commentators were struggling to define and they helped establish the 'backpacker' culture which has become increasingly mainstream since the 1970s [Kenny 2002: 111].

Synonymous with the backpacker story is Lonely Planet, established in the early seventies by Maureen and Tony Wheeler, a successful travel publishing company selling guidebooks worldwide. The company has expanded over recent

years to include a web site, magazines, television shows and travel literature (as mentioned in Chapter 3). Based in Melbourne, though not exclusive to Australia, Tony and Maureen Wheeler have helped alter the travel landscape. The success of Lonely Planet has led to accusations that they are responsible for turning backpacking into another form of mass tourism, [Dr Aziz argues it is a form of institutionalised tourism, see page 27], where consumers buy the books and follow the recommendations within the guide. Travel journalist Carole Cadwalladr believes guide-books are essentially about branding:

Buying a guidebook is like buying a newspaper – the readers are a catholic selection of people who essentially have in common only that they buy the same newspapers. Lonely Planet if you're a gap-year backpacker; Cadogan if you think you know about art; Time Out if you're an urban weekend-awayer; Michelin if you're a Francophile motorist; Eyewitness if you like looking at pictures; Let's Go if you can bear the Americanese; Rough Guide if you've never quite got over not being a student anymore; and Vacation work if you're a quirky individualist [Cadwalladr 2000: 4].

The Lonely Planet guides initially appealed to a similar market as STA and Student Flights (though given the continual expansion in all areas of its operation it is not specifically dealing with the youth market any more)¹⁴. Research undertaken on the guidebooks traces the way in which Lonely Planet began differentiating between traveller and tourist in their guidebooks and thus became aligned with a particular image of travel:

¹⁴ Not that STA and Student Flights restrict themselves to the youth market, it is just that they are still more closely associated with budget or backpacker travel than Lonely Planet.

Throughout the series, references to readers were made in terms of travellers as opposed to tourists, reflected in the subtitles of many of the guides themselves--they were 'Travel Survival Kit(s)'. Wheeler made this distinction in the second and third editions of South-East Asia when he wrote that "the difference between a traveller and a tourist is often that the traveller does the walking". (9) Crowther made a more acerbic distinction in his 1977 guide to Africa: "you're not going to become Marco Polo overnight. Unless you're into travelling as a way of life, don't tell yourself that you're not a tourist if that's what you really are". (10) Clearly, the label of traveller had to be earned; and as such, it was implied as superior to the label of tourist [Kenny 2002: 111].

Lonely Planet identifies the new target market as Adventure Travel. The origins of Adventure Travel can be found in the New Zealand marketing of extreme sports.¹⁵ Queenstown in New Zealand has been known since the 1990s as the 'Adventure Capital of the World'. As each new travel location becomes exploited, new experiences are emerging that appeal to the 'real traveller' or the backpacker, hence the popularity of eco-tourism and high risk sport.¹⁶ With the recent addition of *Kiwi Tracks*, one could presume that Lonely Planet will continue to publish titles on locations of current interest.¹⁷

The popularity of eco-tourism and its emphasis on valuing the indigenous culture is one, which, among others is aggressively promoted by the firm Intrepid Travel. The company was established sixteen years ago by two backpackers who have

¹⁶ Another reason why travel literature is increasingly reflecting current trends in travel such as eco-tourism.

replicated their Asian experience, of contributing to the local economy by using public transport, house stays and eating in family run restaurants, into a slick operation offering small group ‘adventures’ in many parts of Asia.¹⁸ But the advertising material, both in their magazines¹⁹ and on their website, is conscious of how they relate to the traveller; hence at no stage do they call the consumer a tourist. Instead, they address ‘cultural adventurers’, ‘explorers’, and ‘backpackers’; all terms that avoid reference to the tourist. The company does not use brochures as these would be associated with tourism. Dea Birkett argues that every aspect of tourism has to be disguised, thus the magazine is a way of voicing concern over ecological and cultural issues but the travel information is subtly displayed on the pages. She calls the new travellers the un-tourist who, ‘...avoids tourist infrastructures including hotels and stay in tents, a cabin or ‘local style houses’, and travel in small groups’ and ‘...are easily identifiable because they are very concerned with appearing to hold the ‘moral high ground’ [Birkett 2002: 8]. Surely then, the motivation behind STA’s ‘experiential travel’ advertising slogans, Lonely Planet and Intrepid Travel is to encourage the consumer to identity with the ‘un-tourist.’

The way in which the individual consumer differentiates between the tourist and the ‘un-tourist’ is best summarised by John Urry and Brendan Shanahan:

The tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself...all over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behaviour, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs [Urry 1995:133].

¹⁷ This information was gathered from an email to Lonely Planet querying the current trends in travel. [Email August 5, 1999]

¹⁸ Information gained from the Intrepid website (<http://www.intrepidtravel.com>)

However, the ‘untourist’ as Brendan Shanahan notes, is seeking the opposite:

For the seeker of ‘authentic’ experience, the tourist city is nothing but an imagining, a mirage, an inconvenient hallucination on the way to something more sustaining, more *authentic*. People talk about Milonos as if it wasn’t Greece, about Pattya as if it wasn’t Thailand. ‘That’s not the *real* Africa’ the dedicated ‘traveller’ (never ‘backpacker’ or ‘tourist’) will tell you, as though what was African – or Greek or Thai, for that matter – was something external, something that might be pointed to or eaten or photographed (always to the benefit of the traveller), rather than something that came from within; as though the man selling T-shirts outside Planet Hollywood in Kuta Beach had less right to be Balinese than the Hindu priest at the volcano shrine [Shanahan 2004: 3].

Kaplan notes that the quest for ‘authenticity’ is understood as ‘... relief from a culture that is perceived to be fake and empty, shifts the responsibility from the individual to an amorphous expression of anxiety’ [Kaplan 1996: 61]. As the popularity of these companies increases so, too, will the appeals of eco-tourism for the environmentally conscious traveller. The duality of identity between tourist and traveller/backpacker is a central theme running through much contemporary travel literature. The attraction of backpacking is that it is a cheap and transitory method of travel. The backpackers at *Dean Court* often arrive in London on a tight budget. However, increasingly, issues of moral obligations and responsibilities tied into educational qualifications and career aspirations are beginning to change the concept of backpacking. The power of marketing and branding is in itself part of the

contemporary experience of travel that divides its consumers into two distinct categories: the traveller/backpacker and the tourist. Each group reflects its awareness by placing themselves at the opposite end of the travel spectrum. In this sense, the backpackers at Dean Court are also caught in a hierarchy, particularly when Louise talks about the Newcastle Boys and makes observations of them being the undesirable element that gives Australians in London a bad name. Early in the text, Louise's position as an 'un-tourist' is made clear when she contemplates, then discards, the idea of using a hotel for a few days. She rejects the hotel because her perception of travelling is that backpackers avoid accommodation associated with 'tourists'.

Similarly, when Steve and Louise go to Amsterdam for several days, they don't see themselves as tourists; instead, they maintain their identities as travellers because they stay in cheap backpacker accommodation in the red light district of the city. Yet Steve and Louise engage in tourist experiences, hiring a boat to paddle along the canal (feeling a sense of superiority to the tourist barge that almost runs them down). They go to the Vincent van Gogh museum to look at the paintings and Louise tries the hash cookies. They walk around Rotterdam and buy postcards when they get to the port. Their only acknowledgment of being tourists are their forays into the Red Light District and the Hard Rock Cafe [Bell 2005: 140].

The perception of the traveller or backpacker as involved with more authentic travel experiences because of their accommodation choices and tight budgets only make them cheaper tourists rather than superior travellers. However, this delusion as to their true status is becoming evident in backpacker stories. Steve and Louise are similar to the backpackers observed by Emma Barr in Thailand who follow the Lonely Planet Guidebooks, while believing they are engaging in authentic travel experiences. This is not to imply that their travels through Amsterdam are less

favourable than anyone else; I'm merely establishing that travellers do have a distorted perception of themselves and the resultant distorted interactions with other travellers or locals will be reflected in the writing. For example, Steve and Louise position themselves differently to the American girl, who associates everything she sees with her hometown of San Francisco. They feel a sense of superiority to her, due in part to her being more willing to acknowledge she is a tourist than they are. Her constant comparison of Amsterdam to San Francisco irritates them, as they want to believe they are experiencing something unique.

In the next chapter, I explore how the contradiction between traveller/tourist identity surfaces throughout Peter Moore's *The Full Montezuma*. This text encompasses many of the issues discussed in the exegesis and offers insight into how the 21st century consumer perceives their traveller identity.

Moore Montezuma

The Full Montezuma is Australian travel writer Peter Moore's journey through South America shortly after the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Mitch. Moore, a relatively successful writer with five titles to his name, including the text mentioned in chapter one, *The Wrong Way Home*, is representative of Generation X travellers given that he is roughly the same age and of a similar socio-economic background as the backpackers in *Dean Court*. Moore's self-defined 'world traveller [Moore 1998: 110] is critical of tourists and backpackers (seeing them as little more than tourists) while he utilises guidebooks and stays in much the same accommodation as those he criticises. It is interesting to note that he has a sense of superiority as a traveller, because he catches public transport and has '...seen parts of Guatemala that most travellers, quite sensibly it would seem, avoid' [Moore 1998: 228].

I have listed the number of times that Moore refers to his guidebook to emphasise his dependence on them:

After reading in our guidebook [12].

I have a guidebook fetish – at least half that weight was the small library of books on Central America at the bottom of my pack [21].

It wasn't until I got my guidebook back that I could translate what he said [27].

I'd read about Chacahua in my guidebook [45].

which our guidebook described as the 'best deal in town' [77].

A traveller sat warming her hands and on noticing our guidebook – the new Lonely Planet guide to Mexico – asked if she could read it while we ate [81].

Our guidebook described the road from El Naranjo to Flores as ‘shocking’ [118]

The Jaguar Inn, wasn’t renting out camping equipment anymore – despite our guidebook saying it did [119].

Our guidebook described the road to Melchor de Mencos as one of the worst in Guatemala [126].

Our guidebook made it sound like a crime zone [149].

To describe Punta Gorda as sleepy, as our guidebook did, was an understatement [164].

I was aggravated by a nagging suspicion that the GND (girl next door) had deliberately brought a small bag so she wouldn’t have to help lugging guidebooks [261].

And Teleferico de San Jacinto, an amusement centre in the south of the city with a gondola ride that our guidebook said ‘was a must’ [284].

Our guidebook had said it was the best deal in town [293].

The only other place recommended in our guidebook was, Geminis, had been turned into a disco [295].

I pulled out my guidebook and pointed to Las Manos...although my guidebook clearly stated that the road to El Paraiso was sealed [305].

Our guidebook said it was popular with holidaying Costa Ricans [340].

Which our guidebook said displayed an entire human torso [354].

Our guidebook insisted that it was more ‘tranquil’ than Cahuita. I found it to be bigger and more rundown, and overrun with gringos [360].

Worse, all the budget hotels listed in our guidebook were full [441].

Our guidebook described it as a ‘product of Mayan civilisation in decline’ [442].

I sat down with our guidebook [446].

Moore's reliance on guidebooks to help him through South America, is as Dr Aziz pointed out (see Chapter 2) just following another form of institutionalised tourism. The fact Moore is so unaware of his status as a tourist is further established when he makes disparaging references to them:

The large number of tourists didn't bother us. We had suspected that Antigua would be like this [185].

Like Prague, Antigua was crawling with them. They sat in courtyard cafes sipping on lattes or browsed through antique stores, others wandered the cobbled streets taking photos of villages. You'd find them in their greatest numbers down at Parque Central [184].

We were disturbed by a family of German tourists twenty minutes later [121]. Later as we waited for arriving passengers to disembark from the boat taking us to the mainland, we counted just four tourists getting off [250].

Anyone who has wandered along the lonely planet trail knows the drill [345].

Our time in Costa Rica had been quite the anthropological journey, following the holidaying habits of touring Americans. We set off bright and early the next day, hoping to avoid the tourists and at least have a little time at each of the ruins to ourselves. Whilst we were struggling to get from one ruin to another on crowded local buses, the French tourists had the services of a large air-conditioned coach [69].

Moore also uses the word 'swarm' [69] to describe French tourists visiting an archaeological site, which is insulting considering they were engaged in similar activities as Moore. However, when it suits him he is happy to use the 'tourist' services available: 'And if we climbed the volcano as part of one of the tours organised in Antigua, not only would we get a lift straight to the top of the trailhead, we would also be accompanied to the crater by an armed guard' [190]. Moore sees no apparent contradiction in his self image as a 'world traveller' when he relies on technological tourist infrastructure.

Moore's disparaging comments about tourism can be explained partly by his sense of superiority at being the 'moral traveller' because he utilises public transport and accommodation, as a means of contributing to the local economy. However, his choices are no doubt due to the fact it is a cheap rather than that Moore has any benevolent feelings towards the locals. He admits, several times in the book that he likes a bargain and is 'tight fisted'. Travellers like Moore only serve to verify Goldstein's observations, noted in Chapter 3, that they 'try and get everything on the cheap, while convincing themselves that they occupy the moral high peaks' [Goldstein 2002: 16]. Whilst Moore perceives himself as a superior traveller he merely attests to the success of the Lonely Planet, STA and Intrepid Travel philosophy that has infiltrated consumers' perception of what constitutes a traveller. Birkett writes, 'Local culture is very important to the 'un-tourist, whereas the mass tourist is believed to both shun and obliterate it [Birkett 2002: 9]. But Moore has clear expectations of what constitutes travel; when his girlfriend refuses to climb volcanos he complains, 'I saw it as almost an 'un-traveller' thing to do [326].

Moore also attacks backpackers, equating them as little more than glorified tourists:

I was annoyed that I had to share it with a group of smelly backpackers and not the GND²⁰ [328]. Obviously sharing a room with scruffy backpackers had upset her more than I realised [335]....it was hard to be romantic when we were financially bereft and sharing with a gaggle of backpackers [336].

He also is critical of the eco-tourism operations that he sees during his journey:

We arrived in Fortuna, a small town in the northern highlands of Costa Rica to find it overrun by American DINKS....on two week eco-tours...they wandered the neat and clean streets with fresh haircuts and earnest expressions...there was a flurry of activity as other eco-tourists arrived back in new Japanese vans from guided tours [331].

American eco-tourists love Costa Rica...Offer security and a pristine rainforest and it seems affluent, conscientious tourists will beat a path to your door. And, if you're lucky, they'll bowl over the most undesirable grubby backpacker in the process [332].

Nicaragua, it seems had become a summer camp for American's with a conscience [316].

The few tourists who came to Nicaragua, spent most of their time here [349].

Back at the guesthouse a new batch of eco-tourists had arrived [350].

Moore is typical of the un-tourist and therefore his work reflects the infiltration into the traveller psyche of the ideology of companies like STA, Lonely Planet and

²⁰ Moore's abbreviation for the girl next door.

Intrepid Travel. It also confirms how Moore's lack of critique allows him to propagate the idea of what constitutes good and bad travel. The tourist is bad, whereas his form of travel, on the local buses for instance, is good.

Dean Court, full of the "smelly" backpackers so detested by Moore, reflects some of these emerging issues. However, the text, without being as self-reflective or as critical as Moore's, offers a refreshing alternative to the pre-occupations of contemporary travel writers.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE AND WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?

‘Writers of course, by their nature, draw upon their past – it is almost, literally, the inner savings account from which they draw their emotional capital’
[Iyer, 2000: 137].

Louise, the central character, arrives in London without a job, accommodation, friends, relatives or travel plan. She finds herself at Dean Court, a hostel run by a South African and full of Australians and New Zealanders. Dean Court becomes her home for four months and the novel describes the general experience of Australians in London. Louise is also a vehicle for my voice and I would like to spend some time in this chapter comparing the character’s experiences to my own experience, and also on how the novel has evolved to reflect the thoughts and observations I made during my time at Dean Court.

Until I arrived in London, on my first solo overseas journey, I was ignorant about backpacking and the existence of long-stay hostels. Backpacking, by its nature, is associated with low budget and nomadic travel. However, the travellers at Dean Court were neither nomadic or on a low budget but could more accurately be described as long-term tourists. Louise reflects my nervousness and bewilderment, ignorant of the backpacker world. Within the first few minutes of arriving at Dean Court, I/Louise met women from Melbourne, Perth and Queensland. In fact, try as I might over the next four months, I had very little contact with the English. Yet within

the novel, while these women offer friendship easily, in reality it took several weeks for these events to happen. This has been changed due to narrative convenience.

Such a large Antipodean network existed because there was a thriving industry of pubs, entertainment, magazines, accommodation, jobs and tours specifically marketed to this demographic. My intention in the novel is to portray the hostels as paramount in maintaining and encouraging the national identity and the patriotism of its inhabitants while providing, through friendships and community, coping mechanisms, initially needed to survive, in a city as formidable as London. However, while the hostels were important in fostering a national spirit, this is not to imply an endorsement of them. In fact, I believe that the hostels could initially offer the traveller a source of comfort and security, but in the long term they could be suffocating, exclusive and actively encourage the sort of behaviour dismissed as loutish. For some travellers, the hostels took away their independence by alienating them from the English population and keeping them isolated. The sheer volume of Australians and New Zealanders in these hostels was also a covert way of deterring travellers from other countries. The strong national bonds already formed in these hostels were not meant to actively deter the other nations but the cliques that existed were a deterrent nonetheless. The network of bars, travel companies, temping agencies and magazines, could successfully enable Australians, if they desired, to live, work, travel and sleep in London without ever socialising with the English. What this meant was that there was limited opportunity for expatriates to experience anything other than an Australian or New Zealand cultural framework transplanted to the other side of the world.

Of course, I do not mean to imply there is any kind of conspiracy to keep Antipodeans inside a cultural boundary as there is a conscious decision made by

individuals to participate in this lifestyle. There are just as many who choose to remove themselves to live and work in London, although it is impossible not to come across Australians or New Zealanders somewhere.

However, before I continue, I think it relevant to explain the circumstances of my participation in a lifestyle that I'd assumed I would reject. As mentioned earlier, my inclusion within this large 'Antipodean' group was accidental. Like many of my generation I had the opportunity to travel to the United Kingdom on a working holiday visa. The impetus for these travels was an English friend, who shortly before I arrived in England, left to pursue her travels in Europe. I became of necessity a backpacker, a form of traveller that I'd had little contact with, or knowledge of, prior to my journey to London. My introduction to the backpacking experience began when I arrived at Heathrow airport early in the morning. I was lonely, scared and desperate to find accommodation. I sat in the airport, surrounded by strangers, hoping I didn't look like an obvious target for pickpockets or psychopaths as I flicked through a guidebook. I rang a number of hostels but all of them were either full or closed. I began to panic and as my eyes rested upon a tourist hotel help desk, I seriously considered booking into a hotel that was 90 pounds a night. Yet I knew that at such a high rate I wouldn't last more than a week before my money ran out. I also knew that going to a hotel would compromise my perception of myself as an independent traveller who could thrive in an unfamiliar urban metropolis, and I rejected the idea of being a tourist, believing that backpacking was a spontaneous and superior form of travel.²¹ I returned to my guidebook, *Let's Go Europe*, and rang the last hostel listed there. Finally, I managed to reach a hostel that was open and had a bed available. I was told to get a tube to the suburb of Bayswater where I would then find Dean Court.

²¹ Chapter 4 and 5 discuss why the tourist/traveller split is reflected in the perception consumers have of independent travel.

I immediately jumped in a black cab and on a grey on an overcast and wintry day, curious about Dean Court and whether I would find anyone to talk to. Similarly, Louise arrives at Dean Court in a black cab only to find she'd committed some sort of error by ignoring the advice of Gill, the South African landlady.

Dean Court and its sister hostel next door, The New Kent, typified London's long-term accommodation hostels. They had six floors, each level with several rooms sleeping six to eight people. At their maximum, the hostels accommodated over 50 travellers, achieved by cramming beds into every possible space. Louise notes the space restrictions in her first few hours at the hostel when she wonders why there has to be so many people crammed into a room. The overcrowding caused an unceasing demand on the facilities, resulting in constant blockages of showers and toilets. In the kitchen, notices on the walls reminding people to clean and put away their dishes were generally ignored. Plates often piled up in the sink and the bench tops were cluttered with cups and cutlery. There was no curfew though people were rarely out after midnight - most pubs, even those with entertainment such as bands or cabarets closed by 11pm, allowing people to catch transport home before midnight. The majority of travellers were under 25, a demographic more inclined to accept sub-standard accommodation. The price for a bed and breakfast was 49 pounds a week. The average wage of a backpacker was around 90 to 150 pounds, making this sum a significant deduction from a paycheck. However, the attraction for many people at Dean Court was the comfort of living and socialising with other expatriates. Surprisingly, the people in Dean Court didn't mix with those in the New Kent, considering that the backpackers in the accompanying hostel were less interesting. This is mentioned in the creative text:

“Gill puts all the boring people in New Kent,” said Rachel

“Well I guess that means I’m not boring.” Louise said, wondering why Gill had chosen for her to stay in Dean Court [Bell 2005:].

Elsner Jas writes that:

Contemporary travellers, no longer experience their journeys as either linear or circular. The scenery is secondary, the characters move through it, exploring aspects of their own personality rather than the geography [Jas 1999: 246].

Dean Court is about the characters that inhabit the hostel and thus there is little descriptive writing about specific geographical landmarks, with the exception of Rachel’s reflections on a London bus and Steve and Louise’s journey to Amsterdam. Pico Iyer observes in *The Global Soul* that ‘...experiencing the human culture of a place is more rewarding than acting with its geography’ [Iyer 2000: 133]. The geography is not important within the context of the novel as the characters, often due to the preoccupations of youth, have little interest in anything other than their relationships:

People these days are more likely to talk about who they met, rather than the sights, when they return from holidays....People are getting used to this new world we live in. At Lonely Planet, we have the view that you have to keep travelling. Next time when people travel, they might think of talking to a local, interacting more [Billett 2004: 17].

Hence, the creative piece is based on a combination of personal reflection and autobiography. It shares a similar style with Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks*, in the test of

self in an alien environment and in the urban context. The narrator, a woman in her 20s, relates the backpackers' experiences of the city rather than focusing on the city itself. Another comparable text would also be Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, where a young woman arrives in San Francisco and the story follows her adventures, focusing upon her introduction to the local setting. However, the style will be more a sustained narrative than an episodic one.

In the *Art of Travel*, philosopher Alain De Botton writes:

If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest – in all its ardour and paradoxes – than our travels. They express, however inarticulately, an understanding of what life might be about, outside the constraints of work and the struggle for survival [De Botton 2003: 9].

While Dean Court revolves around an urban setting, it is as relevant to frame this narrative as a travel experience. The inspiration for a character-driven text is in part due to the limitations placed on narratives of linear journeys, as noted earlier with *Gates of Damascus*. In the process of writing the text I was not only examining my past behaviour but also giving greater depth to the people I'd met on this journey.

A more satisfactory genre was fiction – essentially a true story written in a fictional narrative style. Fiction has been linked to the rise of New Journalism that reached a peak in the 60s and 70s. The celebrated writers of New Journalism included Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote and Hunter S. Thompson. A successful example of this genre is Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. The author used the method of fiction, which is 'discarding the style of journalism to evoke the emotions and

motivations of its convicted killers.’ New Journalism was able to ‘...get inside characters’ heads, to engage the reader by utilising every available method in fiction’ [Sauerberg 1990: 6]. This was different to traditional realism; a style of writing that meticulously recreated an environment:

Traditional realism assumes the fictional universe to be a satisfactory verbal rendition of an intrinsically coherent analogy to a reality which is seen to exist out there...Documentary Realism in contrast explicitly or implicitly acknowledges borrowing from reality. ...is intended to enhance the sense of authenticity of the narrative...as the adaptation of a wholly factual series of events to a traditionally fictional narrative pattern and sometimes as a combination of both [Sauerberg 1990: 7].

Essentially, *Dean Court* is based upon fact. There is a hostel called Dean Court in inner city Bayswater in London and travellers who stayed there appear in the text *Dean Court*. In the same way Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, engaged its reader with ‘a narrative form that employed all the techniques of fictional art but was nevertheless immaculately factual.’[Sauerberg 1990: 20].

I had thus found the genre that I felt most comfortable writing, not quite New Journalism as in Capote’s novel but akin to documentary realism. This narrative style enabled me to give perspective to the people at Dean Court from their own point of view, while Louise remained an invented character with strong associations to the writer. In many ways, writing *Dean Court* has also involved a visual style, one that lends itself to film or video. The characters journey through a visual landscape, full of brown and grey hues, that, once in Europe, turn to blue and green. In this sense,

England becomes the drab, wintertime, enclosed island and Europe offers the freedom of youth and adventure. Yet the oppressiveness of London in winter is offset somewhat by the warmth of the characters and their sense of adventure.

My inspiration for writing this novel also raises the question of memory. How could I write my memories in an engaging way, while remaining true to both the spirit of the hostel and the people? I decided to write an ensemble piece whereby several of the characters contribute towards the narrative.

Naomi Klein observes that each generation needs to define itself from the previous one and travel was still an area where there is a chance to create something new: ‘You could scour Southeast Asia, like the world-weary twenty-somethings in Alex Garland’s novel *The Beach*, looking for the one corner of the globe uncharted by the Lonely Planet to start your own private utopia’ [Klein 2000:70].

Seth Mydans, a journalist for *The New York Times* writes that travelling is an opportunity for self-discovery:

In this ever more homogenous landscape, one thing remains fresh: the attitude of the young travellers. Like those who went before them, they are on a voyage of self-discovery, as much as discovery of the world. And that, unlike the well-beaten path to Kathmandu – is always, whatever the generation, vivid, challenging terrain [Mydans 2000: 11].²²

I believe that *Dean Court* can add a fresh perspective on the Australian experience in London. I hope to engage the reader by writing about Antipodean

culture, rather than writing about the current fad in travel, like eco-tourism and ‘experiential travel’. Sarup writes, ‘On the one hand, it is interesting to leave one’s homeland in order to enter the culture of others but, on the other hand, this move is undertaken only to return to oneself and one’s home, to judge or laugh at one’s peculiarities and limitations’ [Sarup 1994: 101]. Ultimately, the text *Dean Court* focuses on human interaction and how Australians can observe their culture through the framework of long term accommodation hostels.

²² The full title of the article is ‘Journey of Self-Discovery is the Only Road Left Untravelled’, which seems to be a play on the STA advertising campaign of ‘Take the Road Less Travelled,’ discussed in the chapter, “Marketing the Backpacker Experience”.

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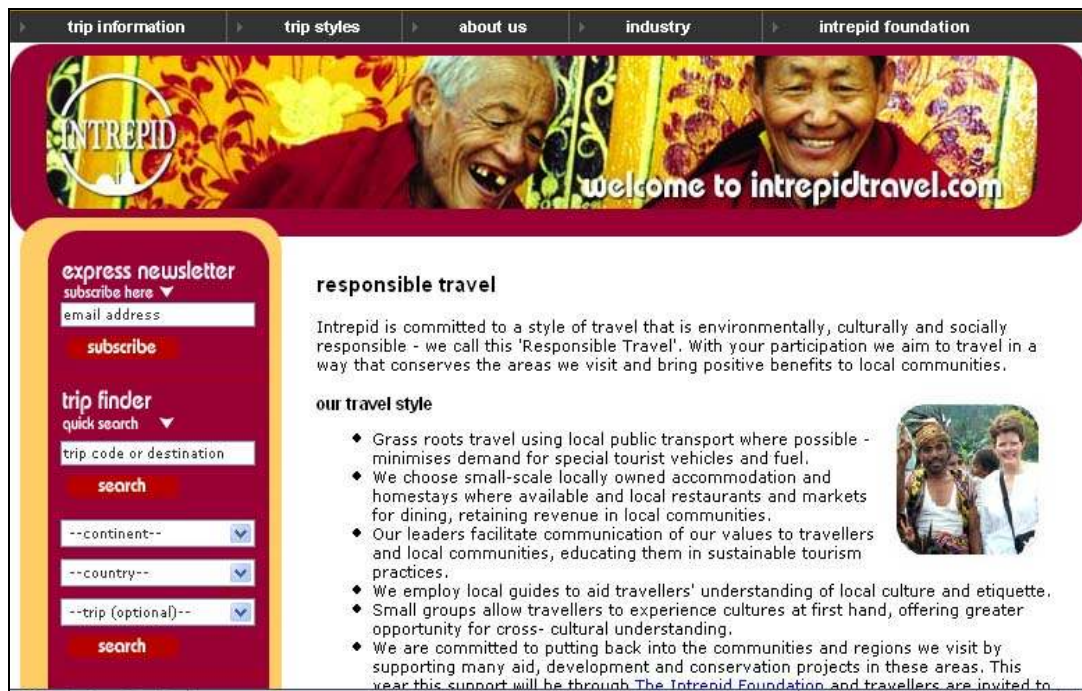
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