

# 4 The Grand Tour

IDENTITÉS  
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Max VOLKHART (1848-1935), *Planning the Grand Tour*

# CLOSE-UP 4

## 1. What was the Grand Tour?

In the 18th century, the Grand Tour of Europe was considered a travel requirement for young, aristocratic British men. This early form of tourism, as opposed to exploration, concerned particular sites that had already been written about (guidebooks were becoming popular).

After visiting Paris, the Grand Tourists travelled to Switzerland, Germany, Spain and sometimes Greece, but the highlight of the trip was Italy.

The young travellers were usually accompanied by a tutor. Since they were wealthy, they could be idle and because transportation systems were slow, they might spend several years abroad.

The main objective of the Grand Tourists was to broaden their horizons and learn about economics, politics, customs, history and languages so as to be prepared for a career in public life. Another purpose of the trip was the acquisition of “taste” through direct appreciation of classical antiquity. The four essential places were Venice (for parties), Rome (for the history), Naples with Vesuvius (for the sense of the sublime) and Florence (for the art) but they also visited rural ruins and archaeological sites.

As transportation systems improved after the Napoleonic wars, the Grand Tour became more and more popular. In one peak year alone, 40,000 Englishmen travelled in Europe. Ancient ruins were very popular places and archaeology really came of age during this period. Some aristocrats, such as Lord Cobham, imported Roman statues to decorate their gardens and even had ruins built on their estates...



François-Xavier FABRE, *Allen Smith Seated above the Arno Contemplating Florence* (1797)



1. Read the text and match each word with its translation: *highlight* (l. 9) – *wealthy* (l. 11) – *idle* (l. 12) – *abroad* (l. 14) – *broaden* (l. 16) – *customs* (l. 17) – *estates* (l. 34)  
→ à *l'étranger* – *coutumes* – *riche* – *domaines* – *oisif* – *élargir* – *temps fort*.
2. Read the text again, then hide it and answer the following questions.
  - a. What social class did the Grand Tourists belong to?
  - b. What places did they visit? What for?
  - c. What made the Grand Tourists different from explorers? (Start from what you have read and add your personal comments.)
  - d. Look at François-Xavier Fabre's painting at the top of the page and comment upon it, taking your answers to the preceding questions into account.
3. Find the sentence in the text that is illustrated by the bottom picture and justify.

## 2. Back home

**Richard Boyle**, Third Earl (*comte*) of Burlington, began his Grand Tour of Italy in 1714. He then decided to revive the work of Andrea Palladio, a 16th century Italian architect who had tried to recreate the style of the buildings of ancient Rome.

Through Burlington's efforts, Palladianism became the national style of Georgian England.

With Chiswick House (see photo), Burlington tried to create the kind of house and garden found in the suburbs of ancient Rome.



1. Observe Chiswick House. Do you think that this kind of architecture was adapted to England?
2. Imagine why some people think that Burlington was not a true architect.
3. Do you care about architecture? Find examples of buildings that you like, present them to the class and justify your choice.

## 3. The collection culture

**Sir William Hamilton**, who arrived in Naples in 1764, had a passion for antiques. He especially collected Greek red figure vases excavated from graves (*tombes*) in South Italy. He was soon to possess an incredible collection, which he later sold to the British Museum in 1772.



**Josiah Wedgwood** (1730-95) and his assistants worked three years to duplicate a Roman vase Sir Hamilton had brought back from Italy in 1783.

The Wedgwood factory still exists nowadays and produces fine quality ceramics ornamented with white relief portraits or Greek classical scenes.



1. Can you explain why Grand Tourists were so eager to bring back antiques? Do you regard that as plunder (*pillage*)?
2. Have you ever brought back a souvenir from a trip? Why and what for?
3. Do you think works of art (such as the Obelisk in Paris) should be given back to their countries of origin? Should they be kept in public museums or in private collections?

## 4. Then and now...

Every object seems to have shrunk<sup>1</sup> in its dimensions since I was last in Paris. The Louvre, the Palais-Royal, the bridges, and the river Seine, by no means<sup>2</sup> answer the ideas I had formed of them from my former<sup>3</sup> observation. When the memory is not very correct, the imagination always betrays<sup>4</sup> her. When I first  
5 revisited my own country, after an absence of fifteen years, I found every thing diminished in the same manner, and I could hardly believe my eyes. (*Letter VI*)

When you arrive at Rome, you receive cards from all your country-folks<sup>5</sup> in that city. They expect to have the visit returned next day, when they give orders not to be at home; and you never speak to one another afterwards.

10 No Englishman above the degree<sup>6</sup> of a painter frequents any coffee-house at Rome; and as there is no public amusement except in carnival-time, the only chance you have for seeing your compatriots is in visiting the curiosities.

The Italians are very scrupulous<sup>7</sup> in admitting foreigners, except those who are introduced as people of quality. But if there happens to be any English lady  
15 of fashion<sup>8</sup> at Rome, she generally keeps an assembly, to which the British subjects go for recreation. (*Letter XXIX*)

Tobias SMOLLETT, *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) (adapted)

1. rétrécir – 2. absolument pas – 3. ancien – 4. trahir – 5. compatriote – 6. rang –  
7. ici, réticent – 8. de la haute société

1. What were Smollett's impressions when he visited Paris for the second time?
2. What problems did he meet when visiting Rome?
3. Was it easy for him to meet Italians? Why?
4. Whom did he meet and where?

Joe and Debby are American tourists in London. They are visiting Fred, an American professor of literature who works in England.

Fred holds out his cup for more coffee. "I get the weird idea sometimes that I'm not really in London; that this place is not London, it's some kind of imitation."

"That's just how we felt when we got here." Debby leans forward, her square  
5 cut brown hair swinging. "Especially every time we went to look at something, say Westminster Abbey or the Houses of Parliament or whatever. They were smaller than we expected, and overrun with busloads of American and French and German and Japanese tourists. So we decided, the hell with it."

"Of course that's inevitable anywhere," her husband explains. "Tourism is a  
10 self-degrading process, kind of like oxidation of iron." Joe has a fondness for scientific metaphor [...] "Some place is designated a sight because it's typical or symbolic – it stands for the ideal Britain. So hundreds of tourists go there, and then of course all they see is other tourists."

Alison LURIE, *Foreign Affairs* (1985)

5. Read the extract from *Foreign Affairs* and find the equivalents of these words (in the right order): *étrange* – *se pencher* – *virevolter* – *envahi* – *penchant* – *attraction touristique*.
6. In what ways do Smollett's and Alison Lurie's characters share the same experience of tourism?



**Tobias SMOLLETT** (1721-1771) started working as a surgeon (*chirurgien*) in the Royal Navy. His career as a writer began with *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), a picaresque novel. It was followed by several other novels in which colourful adventures are mixed with grotesque characters and satire of 18th-century society: *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771).



American writer **Alison LURIE** (born in 1926) often draws satirical portraits of upper-middle-class academics in a university setting (Lurie has taught at Cornell University since 1970). Her most famous works: *The War between the Tates* (1974), *Foreign Affairs* (1984) (which won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for fiction), *The Truth about Lorin Jones* (1989).