

THE BOURGEOIS EXPLORER:

A Trip Through Time in the Travel Section

By Louise Seamster, a 1st-and-a-half year student in Liberal Studies.

Have you always wanted to camp with the Bedouins? Attend a wine-tasting in a rock cave in Vietnam? Enjoy a “surprisingly civilized” banquet held for you on a beach in Sierra Leone? Soak in your “freestanding terrazzo tub” in Cambodia despite the “people missing limbs” a few feet from your hotel? Do you mourn the crowded beaches of Vieques, which just haven’t been as fun since the U.S. stopped bombing them?

Or does all this sound a little strange to you?

Elite tourism, whether it is embodied through ecotourism, ethnotourism, or luxury tourism, positions itself as an ethical alternative to “mass” tourism. It is my project to prove otherwise. Tourism studies has amply documented the negative impact of tourism on “developing”

countries: its monopolization of resources, its introduction of foreign capital that breaks economies when the capital, inevitably, withdraws in favor of the next hot spot. My own interest lies in the rise of elite tourism and its own specific harms. This article does not focus on the experience of elite tourism, but rather on the perspective of the elite tourist towards the countries he or she visits. The following is a brief study of recent articles from The New York Times travel section, in which I hope to reveal elite tourism’s close ties to colonialism. In fact, I argue that elite tourism itself is imagined as a celebration of neo-imperialism, marking the end of post-colonial autonomy.

The primary goal of imperialist discourse is to distance “our” society from “theirs.” We insist on the remoteness of the Other even as we celebrate our

