

Read the text and choose one paragraph (A-E) for each gap (1-5).

The curious history of holiday souvenirs – and why we feel compelled to buy one

By Annabel Fenwick Elliott 2 August 2019 • 11:00am



The souvenir industry thrives wherever tourists venture CREDIT: istock

It's certainly not 'cool' to collect souvenirs.

Most of us who partake do so somewhat sheepishly, meandering the cluttered aisles of an airport gift shop in search of the least offensive made-in-China fridge magnet to commemorate our holiday, which was almost definitely not in China.

American writer John Walker Harrington called it in 1906 when he declared his country's "incipient mania for cherishing the useless" to be reaching fever pitch.

Tacky souvenirs, he wrote for American Magazine, "brought to this country in the baggage of tourists" and "propagated with amazing rapidity", were getting silly.

"Unless such manifestations are checked, millions of persons of now normal lives and irreproachable habits will become victims of faddy degeneration of the brain."



It happens to the best of us CREDIT: istock

The mass-production of cheap(ish) souvenirs - a term that in English dates back to the 1700s - did indeed reach epic proportions during the 20th Century, in line with the spread of travel and the emergence of tourism as we know it today.

1

Academic researchers have pinpointed five categories for the items we collect on our travel: "piece-of-rock", meaning physical fragments like shells; "local products", think Swiss chocolate and Moroccan rugs; "pictorial images", including postcards and calendars; "markers", i.e. mundane objects like T-shirts and mugs which are branded with a particular location; and "symbolic shorthand", accounting for miniaturized Eiffel Towers and New York snow globes.

The first two, as the new book, Rolf Potts' *Souvenir*, delves into, are the sorts of keepsakes we've been collecting since the very beginning, while the last three are all mass-market products that are relatively new in form. Let's peer a little closer.

Where did it all start?

We know early humans decorated their caves and rounded up objects inside them - so in a sense it's always been in our nature to hoard items of importance to us. We were also innate hunter gatherers, routinely on the move, accumulating items along the way.

As far as recorded cases of travel souvenirs go, these date back as far as Ancient Egypt, and include those - for one - of Prince Harkhuf, who travelled to Sudan around 2,200 BC, and brought back with him leopard skins, ivory and **incense** to present to the pharaoh.

By the time the ancient Greeks and Romans had laid down their roots, manufactured keepsakes like painted pots and miniature silver monuments had become something of an industry around sites with particular cultural significance for travellers passing through - Alexandria among them.



Egypt's Great Pyramids CREDIT: istock

Souvenirs in the age of pilgrimage

Here's where the concept really began to evolve. When we weren't busy conquering our neighbours, and long before we travelled for pleasure, it was for pilgrimage, and everyone wanted to bring home a so-called piece-of-rock as a memento: a small trophy to prove they'd completed it.

2

"Tradition asserted that the footprints of Jesus could still be **discerned** in the exposed dirt," writes Potts. "Eager to possess a bit of the dust that had touched the messiah's feet, visiting pilgrims began to spirit away fistfuls of the sanctuary floor in such **profusion** that the shrine's caretakers were forced to haul in fresh dirt every few weeks."

Some pilgrims were downright **obnoxious** in their insuppressible urge to take a piece of the Holy Land home with them. Potts cites one notorious example of the man who'd been allowed to kiss the True Cross on Good Friday, and managed to chew off a small hunk of it to steal away in his mouth.

Not dissimilar, today, is a football fan's desire to own a shirt worn or signed by their favourite player, as if said player's essence could somehow be transferred by mere touch.



The Sanctuary of Ascension in Jerusalem CREDIT: istock

Scholar Beverly Gordon remarks: "People feel the need to bring things home with them from the sacred, extraordinary time or space - for home is equated with ordinary, mundane time or space."

By the Middle Ages, perhaps in response to **overzealous** pilgrims like the cross-muncher, relics - tokens sold with the promise (almost always false) that they'd belonged to or have been touched by religious icons - were **doing a roaring trade**.

"Peasants' skeletons were passed off as those of saints, and duplicate relics - including multiple heads of John the Baptist - abounded in competing basilicas across Europe and the Near East," Potts states.

Gradually, however, intellectual curiosity surpassed pilgrimage as the main motivation for travel, and as more of the world was explored, objects were sought out less for **veneration** and more for education, presentation, and sheer novelty.

Those funny little spoons

3



Among the many keepsakes on offer, he explains, the most popular of all were the commemorative spoons, which sold by the tens of thousands and prompted contemporary newspapers to herald a "souvenir spoon **craze**".

But this wasn't by chance. It was a calculated effort, backed by a clever marketing campaign on the part of American silversmiths. In a promotional pamphlet distributed two years prior to the expo, the Jeweler's Circular Company of New York announced: "From Maine to California, from Minnesota to Florida, the cry is for souvenir spoons."

One company wove an intriguing story that the fashion in Europe among esteemed travellers was to collect a spoon from every country they visited. It was entirely fabricated, but it **struck a chord**, the self-invented industry **cashed in**, and location-branded spoons remain in gift shops around the world to this day.

Postcards

Ah, the humble postcard. Pointless really (Dear Granny, we're having lots of fun on the beach, the end) except perhaps to put a literal stamp on the fact that we're on holiday.

4

Today, post is passé, but many of us put the same effort as we did browsing the gift shop for the nicest, most envy-inducing postcard, into framing the nicest, most envy-inducing Instagram shot.

What makes a good souvenir?

Potts spent several days at the Las Vegas Souvenir & Resort Gift Show, the industry's largest convention, in the hope of answering this question.

"Most souvenirs, I learned, are designed to be eye-catching, small in size, easily portable, not too fragile, and not too expensive," he says.

"Travellers often don't think about souvenir purchases until they walk into a gift shop so qualities like attractiveness, simplicity, novelty, or humour are meant to inspire an impulse buy."

As for the more quirky and original articles, tourists aren't as keen, on the whole.

5

Summarising the entire concept neatly, one salesman who'd been in the business since 1971 told him: "At the end of the day, people don't get too philosophical when they go to a big tourist destination. They just want something that proves they've been there."

Paragraphs:

A

Which started to become problematic as Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem came into fashion in around 500 AD. Particularly popular was the Chapel of Ascension, a spot commemorating Jesus' supposed last days spent on Earth before ascending to heaven.

B

"Statistically speaking, T-shirts, hats, key chains and bottle openers sell far more, year in year out, than more imaginative or specialized keepsakes," he notes.

C

This is a form of souvenir which didn't spread until the late-19th Century, but once it took hold, was a phenomenal success. In the year of 1904, people in Sweden - with a population then of 5 million - sent more than 48 million of them. By 1906, distribution company the Post Card Dealer was reporting sales of 750 million in the UK and more than one billion in Germany.

D

"If one were to pinpoint a single moment when souvenirs came of age as an organized, globally minded American industry," Potts writes, "it might well be the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, which attracted 28 million visitors to Chicago over the course of six months."

E

But this was inevitable. Humans have always liked collecting things, and boasting about where they've been. Holiday souvenirs are the pocket-sized tokens that scratch the itch.

Connect 18 words/phrases in blue from the text with their meanings:

Feel compelled ; sheepishly ; meander ; tacky ; propagate ; irreproachable;
mundane ; account for ; incense ; discern ; profusion ; obnoxious ;
overzealous ; do a roaring trade ; veneration ; craze ; strike a chord ;
cash in.

_____ **the feeling or act of very much respecting someone or something:**

Gandhi became an object of widespread _____ because of
his unceasing struggle for freedom and equality.
I cannot find words to express the _____ I feel for those men.

_____ **to see, recognize, or understand something that is not clear:**

I could just _____ a figure in the darkness. It is difficult to _____ any pattern in these figures.

_____ **very ordinary and therefore not interesting:**

_____ matters such as paying bills and shopping for food do not interest her.

_____ **in a way that is embarrassed because you have done something wrong or silly:**

He _____ admitted he hadn't done his homework.
The 35-year-old man grinned _____ when officers asked why he didn't have a licence.

_____ **a substance that is burnt to produce a sweet smell, especially as part of a religious ceremony:** an _____ burner/stick

_____ **very unpleasant or rude:**

Some of his colleagues say that he's loud and _____.
When she's in a bad mood she's _____ to everyone.

_____ **an activity, object, or idea that is extremely popular, usually for a short time:**

Cycling shorts were the latest _____/(all) the _____ that year.
The _____ for health foods has become big business. The _____ for ballooning is a case in point.

_____ **of cheap quality or in bad style:**

The shop sold _____ souvenirs and ornaments. She reads those _____ romance novels.

_____ informal, often disapproving **to make money from a situation, especially in a way that is not fair or honest:**

They have _____ at the expense of ordinary sports fans. Miller can _____ **on** her basketball talent by advertising athletic shoes.

_____ **to spread opinions, lies, or beliefs among a lot of people:**

I wasn't sure how my dad would react to me _____ing the rumor, but he just shook his head, looking all dazed and confused. Such lies are _____ed in the media.

_____ **to sell a lot of goods very quickly:**

It was a hot sunny day and the ice cream sellers were _____ing _____. In hot weather, shops _____
in cold drinks and ice cream.

_____ **to walk somewhere in a slow relaxed way rather than take the most direct way possible:**

We spent the afternoon _____ing around the streets of the old town.

_____ disapproving **too enthusiastic and eager:**

He had to be protected from _____ fans. They were a little _____ in eliminating risk.

_____ **having to do something, because you are forced to or feel it is necessary: [+ to infinitive]**

He _____ to report the incident. She _____ to resign because of the scandal.

_____ **to say or do something that other people agree with or have sympathy with:**

Their story is bound to _____ **with** all parents.
The speaker had obviously _____ **with** his audience.

_____ **(of a person or their behaviour) free from fault and impossible to criticize**

I forgot, in the rush to appear flawless and _____, that it was far more important to be real than perfect. In Paris, the nightmare next door is more likely to be an elegant, worldly couple with _____ manners.

_____ **a very large quantity of something (SYN abundance)**

Mr. McDonald said that **a** _____ **of** Italian restaurants and a shortage of French ones downtown had influenced his decision. Roses grew **in** _____ against the old wall.

_____ **to be the explanation or cause of something (SYN. explain)**

The poor weather may have _____ed _____ the small crowd.
Oh well, that _____s _____ it (= I understand now why it happened).
The differences in achievement between the pupils are partly _____ed _____ by differences in age.

WELL DONE!