Travel guidelines

Description

Iâ??m reminded again of the necessity, in certain countries, for the traveller (ie tourist) to submit to the authority of a succession of personal guides. In the Berber village of Chebika our driver and guide, Taher, passed us over to Hassan, a cheery local guide in traditional dress, who not only helped us scramble up the gully to the hot springs but told us of the year it rained and washed away the houses.



Hassanâ??s story has the authority of local knowledge told many times, and with a cast of actors that includes him and his family. Our driver Taher knows about Rommel and grandfatherâ??s part in the North African campaigns.



Back in Tozeur we revisit the medina to photograph the varied doorways in the austere brick walls lining the now deserted alleys. Except this time we encounter an old man, Jamel, pushing his bicycle, with two litres of water strapped to its frame. He looks as though heâ??s on the way home, so we donâ??t mind when he starts telling us about the houses and their doorways.

Before long we are under guidance again, even gratefully, until we end the journey on a terrace with views over the medina, and above a shop. We smile at a clutch of sheepish tourists quietly sipping mint tea, and also empty our wallets of spare notes.

In a free market, commerce latches onto basic instincts, and the habit to deliver guidance is strong in North Africa however it is negotiated. Travel is a companionable enterprise.

Iâ??m reminded again of Tim Ingoldâ??s book about the line. A guideline, such as a preliminary mark preceding an artistâ??s sketch, anticipates the further arrangement of lines, but provides opportunity for deviation.

A collection of guidelines is local and contingent, like the taut warp-threads of the Berber weaverâ??s loom that adjust to variations in the weft, in contrast to plotlines, which mark boundaries, and claim universal sovereignty, like the lines of a planning grid or the bounding boxes on an official form.



The human guide carries the authority of the local context, in contrast to the travellerâ??s equivalent of the plotline: the route plan, the itinerary, which are impersonal devices for obviating the risks of negotiation.

The guideline and the plotline are both necessary, invariably interact, and both submit to communications technologies of some kind, ostensibly plotline technologies in which distance is of no account.

Jamel said he was too poor to own a computer, though his five daughters (and their children) had access. He didnâ??t use a mobile phone, but weâ??ve seen other guides phone ahead to prepare the next part of the journey, and the next commercial opportunity.

Reference

Ingold, Tim. 2007. *Lines: A Brief History.* London: Routledge.

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