



Travel trends'

11/23/2012

Slow Movement: "Precipitation is pointless"

City-dwellers have been chasing snails for some time now. "Chasing snails?" I hear you say. Yes: the ones you will find by the doors to certain restaurants, to state that they have embraced the Slow Food movement and been endorsed by the eponymous association, which was established in 1986 as a riposte to the booming fast-food phenomenon. That snail has since spawned offspring in art (Slow Art), fashion (Slow Fashion) and even gardens (Slow Gardening). Some say it is planning a holiday – a slow, slow journey.

Fast & Outrageous

Benjamin Franklin wrote that "Time is money" back in the 18th century. But the urge to dash has never been as despotic as it is today. Every minute counts... on metro platforms, in traffic jams, in supermarket queues and everywhere else, for everything else, every minute of the day. It's all push, shove and first come, first served. Isn't it?

Modern multitasking men and women are on a crusade to become respectively perfect and ideal. They are waging war on every front: they want an athletic build, thriving career, dream family, seamlessly-synched couple, encyclopedic culture, exhilarating social life and more. So, needless to say, they haven't a second to spare!

In that frantic dash, however, quantity starts undercutting quality and the stress from relentlessly scrambling finally starts undermining health.

Enjoying mealtimes is a long-established tradition in France, where meals have always been special opportunities to share. Lunch breaks, however, have predictably shortened over the past 20 years: a Malakoff Mèdéric Group survey has revealed that employees take 22 minutes for lunch today, versus 90 before.

The fast-food phenomenon obviously has something to do with the time-acceleration phenomenon that we can see in every western metropolis. And fast food promptly came under fire from several fronts, starting with the obesity and other health disorders it causes, and stretching on to the risk of one-size-fits-all global fodder relegating time-honored local treats to oblivion.

That was when people started thinking about time and wellness.

The first slow

Italy's first McDonald's joint opened in Piazza di Spagna, in the heart of Rome, the Eternal City, in 1986.

Over there, rather than bashing it – you don't want to arouse the American behemoth's wrath –, a journalist in the north of the country decided to greet it with a placid philosophy hovering around sweet words such as self-indulgence, serenity and camaraderie.

That was how Carlo Petrini started his Slow Food association. In the beginning, it was merely a club for the most discerning epicureans in Bra, a sleepy village in the Piedmont cum a die-hard bastion determined to fend off culinary invasion. But this Italian was serious about the cause he had embraced and his association's ranks have grown to over 100,000 members today.

This association's goal is to rebuild the bond between consumers and producers in order to promote and protect local produce. Then, by extension, it is striving to safeguard traditional cuisine and authentic flavors. That trend is eminently up-to-the-minute today, in the wake of the sustainable-development drive and consom'action initiative (a combination between consumption and activism whereby consumers make enlightened decisions about what they consume) on a glocal scale (i.e. in the hope of building a global network of local endeavors). Slow Food has kick-started several initiatives such as the Turin Salone del Gusto (flavor fair), running an endangered-food census, and building the University of Gastronomic Sciences.

Accor is involved in this movement via the partnership between Mercure Italy and Slow Food: the brand's Italian restaurants serve locally-farmed treats certified by the association. The Mercure team has been trained in and is aware of the issues associated with promoting biodiversity, and is happy to tell guests about where the regional treats they serve came from. And the menu features delicatessen, cheese and bread to show that slow food is no less exciting!

Time to get it right

Some complain that the Slow Movement condones laziness. But which is lazier: guzzling a sandwich al-desko or lovingly cooking a cozy meal for your nearest and dearest? The answer is beside the point: the fact is that the Slow Food movement has promptly rippled through a wide variety of areas encompassing art, gardening, fashion and even urban planning. In other words, it is alive and kicking to put it mildly.





Cittaslow is only one example. This slow-city movement has led cities to open up more pedestrian and public areas where people can stop and chat, and to provide public transport and small neighborhood shops while protecting their historical heritage, local customs and local produce, in order to earn the label.

Carl Honoré, the Canadian journalist who wrote *In Praise of Slowness*, makes a case for slowing down our pace of life and makes it clear why it is not tantamount to sloth. To the contrary, he says, it is an excellent way to go if you care about yourself, want to take a new look at your priorities and, ultimately, want to harness your energy more efficiently. In diaries, breaks, naps and meditating should be circled with the same red pen as work-related duties.

Slow Travel

And there's nothing quite like a great trip to put you back on your feet – provided, of course, you don't end up frantically dashing to see all the sights!

Slow travelers rank quality over quantity. They will no doubt set out less often and set out for longer, because they want to capture the place's soul while they are there. To do that, they will need an easy schedule and a lot of free time – which is a great way to start clearing your mind.

Slow travelers may well skip a few of the “essentials”, i.e. the must-see spots that travel guides prescribe as mandatory. But they have a good reason. Conversely, they will take time to get lost, chance upon a few well kept secrets, and get curious. A few days later, they will feel at home in their new surroundings, know all about the local customs and get to know a few of the people there. They might even find a local haunt or spot to frequent, and blend seamlessly into the local scenery!

Slow travel is also sustainable and environmentally-friendly, even if that means travelling shorter distances rather than half way around the planet. And slow travelers walk, cycle and perhaps take public transport.

Needless to say, slow travelers also eat slow food! So there is nothing quite like local accommodation with a kitchen to cook local recipes and treat your taste buds to an exotic experience too. The Adagio Aparthotel concept is perfect for that because it provides proper pieds-a-terre with fully-fitted kitchens for tourists. Adagio studios and larger flats are ideal for families and groups of friends, and in lively neighborhoods with plenty of public transport: they put slow travelers right into their element!

Time is luxury

Carl Honoré incidentally sponsored last year's Foire Internationale de Paris, Europe's largest broad-based trade fair. An Ipsos survey for that fair showed that 8 in 10 Europeans want to slow down and it accordingly featured several “Slow” workshops to usher guests onto the path to serenity. These included a “So Slow” relaxation bubble to introduce them to eye and laughter yoga and massage techniques, and a 300-sqm Slow Hotel featuring nine bedrooms and that many different atmospheres, providing unrivalled comfort and the ultimate sleep experience for everyone.

The Slow movement has opened up a new way of embracing time. Deliberately ‘wasting’ time is becoming synonymous with a lifestyle choice centered on wellness. And time has become the symbol of luxury today: it is what we value the most. Luxury experiences or services – travel, restaurants, spas and so forth – are taking over from luxury products. Luxury and upscale hotels have these areas where guests can find the soothing experience they are looking for. The Sofitel So Spas are entirely geared towards serenity and relaxing surrounded by scents. There, time goes by so, so slowly.