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Manoj Chopra
University of Central Florida, Manoj.Chopra@ucf.edu

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Traveling Expands Your Boundaries of Cultural, Social Experiences

By Manoj Chopra
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Why do we travel? And what does it do to our psyche?

This year has been one with a number of interesting travel excursions for me, some work related and others more personal with family. As 2017 draws to a close, I am headed out again with my family to visit India.

We often travel for work to accomplish certain tasks that are not possible without face-to-face-interactions, in spite of the tremendous growth in technological communication. For instance, we may attend a conference in our professional disciplines to present a paper or interact with our peers. We may attend a meeting of a board or committee where a compressed schedule is prepared for us to have discussions and possibly vote on certain changes. These work-related trips often require preparation, such as developing and rehearsing a presentation or reviewing the meeting materials.

I had the opportunity to embark upon three work-related trips this year and all resulted in interesting post-travel thoughts:

- One was to attend the NCAA Committee on Academics, where we discussed a number of emerging topics on the horizon of student-athlete academic and overall well-being. These were interesting experiences that fall somewhere in the middle of the scale of apprehension and euphoria. However, at the same meeting, we also discussed the issues of academic misconduct and the institutional lack of control of these critical areas of student life. These are definitely topics on the extreme end of the stress scale.
- The second trip was one that involved travel to one of the most interesting places in the world: Saudi Arabia. I was there in early December for a visit to an institution seeking accreditation. My experience with the stopover in Dubai and the affluence of Saudi Arabia was memorable and eye-opening. The hospitality offered to me, and the respect for my work, was indeed unprecedented. This travel was an example where it started very much to the left on the apprehension scale and finished up on the far right of the euphoria and satisfaction scale.

- The third work-related trip was to Atlanta to chair the meetings of the faculty athletics representatives of the American Athletics Conference and also attend the annual conference of the Faculty Athletics Representative Association. The meeting of the AAC group required significant preparation and was quite stressful as we had a very full agenda and it was my responsibility to shepherd the various topics that are of critical importance. It was quite rewarding as I was able to interact with colleagues from all over the country and listen to some influential speakers on topics of current interest such as concussions in sports or sexual assault on campus.

A trip that I took this summer with my wife to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary more than made up for any stressful experiences. We went to Paris and Barcelona and enjoyed the unique flavor of the rich experiences offered by these two amazing cities. We found nice, small boutique hotels to stay in the heart of the cities and were able to mix the organized sightseeing activities with our own excursions using public transportation.

We were able to also fulfill one of my obsessions: trains. We took the high-speed TGV train for a day trip from Paris to Lille, where we stumbled upon a local festival in the town square. A euphoric and very memorable experience.

Everyone should try to fit in some travel in their lives that expands their boundaries of cultural and social interactions.

Once we overcome the apprehension of upcoming travel, whether due to the unknowns related to visiting somewhere for the first time or having to prepare extensively, we should certainly make the most of the experiences.

After my experiences from travel this year, I am less apprehensive and expect to enjoy all the benefits that may come with each trip. I want to go beyond any limits of my current understanding of the places visited and learn more about them.

I want to experience the euphoria!

Manoj Chopra is a professor of civil engineering in UCF's Department of Civil, Environmental and Construction Engineering. He can be reached at Manoj.Chopra@ucf.edu.