

I Don't Want To Make the World Feel Smaller

Should we really want travel make our world feel “smaller”?

Last week I took a flight on Delta Airlines, and their pre-flight advertisement followed this theme of a smaller, more accessible world as it showed beautiful images of people frolicking in tropical water paradises. etc.

I don't blame the good marketers of Delta for pursuing this theme: it's a common one.

The world must once have felt very big. I imagine the feeling of European sailors in the days of Columbus or Magellan.

As our world has grown more connected – by flights, by container ships, by the web – we have also come to think of it as a smaller place. It's hard to feel the same distance from China or Morocco when you know you can get there in a day by plane.

But this feeling of distance – great or small – is simply a matter of imagination. Landmasses (setting aside continental drift) have more or less been equidistant for millennia. Nothing has changed about actual distance. But we have imagined the world as shrinking in proportion to its accessibility.

We imagine “making the world a smaller place” by growing our means of going around the world.

Why couldn't we imagine a bigger and deeper world instead?

Viewed properly, I think travel ***can*** make the world larger – in making a reality out of foreignness, or in taking us deeper into the experience of different cultures. The travel and access we have now makes it possible for humans (who might previously only have **imagined** a big world) to experience just how much more there is of a place than the imagination will hold or allow.

The triumph of making the world feel smaller only goes so far. People want bigness. People want to be awed. People want to feel small sometimes, so that in going on adventures they can feel large.

I think right about now we really want our world to feel bigger.

Maybe Delta could appeal to that longing, which will surely grow with time.

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