

Travelers, Andiamo!

BY GEOFFREY WEILL

At eight, I was obsessed with other people's travels as much as I was with my parents' or mine. I wanted to hear about minutiae most people consider irrelevant. If they went to Rome, it was nice to see their small black-and-white snaps of the Vatican and the Forum, but I was far more interested in what airline they had flown. It amazed and frustrated me then, just as it amazes and frustrates me still, how I could ask Aunt Hilda what kind of aircraft she had flown on her recent visit to Brussels and be met with a disconcerted "I haven't the slightest idea, darling"

Clearly, for almost everybody I knew, the plane or the boat or the train was merely a device for reaching their destination, just as their hotel was simply a place to sleep. But for me all the sight-seeing that must be performed on a first visit to Budapest or Madrid or Delhi—an activity that I really do treasure, to varying extents—is a pastime to fill the day in between the enjoyments of the hotel. It is as if the tour of the Taj Mahal or the hours at the Prado are the price to be paid for what I call the "hotel pleasure."

Because "hotel pleasure" is exactly what it is. Had Freud identified it, it would be part of our language—*Hotelvergnügung*—up there alongside *Schadenfreude* and *Weltanschauung*. I cannot help but note the tiniest details, from the cut of the concierge's jacket to the typeface of the room service menu. Every DO NOT DISTURB sign is a challenge countered by the silent question: "Why?" The opening of every door augurs a seductive array of opportunity: the arrival of a hamburger accompanied by ketchup in an endearing miniature Heinz jar; a trolley bearing foie gras, slices of toast enshrouded in a linen napkin, and a bottle of Veuve Clicquot; a vase of roses with the warmest greetings of the general manager—the signature forged by his secretary. Perhaps it is simply that the wanton possibilities proffered by a hotel—real, imagined, fantasized, realized, unrealized—are infinite. **T&C**

The author, whose memoir *All Abroad* was released in January (\$29, University of Wisconsin), collects vintage travel posters, like this one from Spencer Weisz Galleries by the revered graphic design firm Pizzi e Pizio.

ROMA

