



**Author Series**  
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**Washington, DC**

**Elizabeth Becker**  
Author and Journalist

***Overbooked: The Exploding Business of Travel and Tourism***

**Patricia Ellis:** So, good afternoon everyone. Thank you all so much for coming. We're very excited about this program with Elizabeth Becker and the Author Series event on her book, *Overbooked*, about the tourism industry. I mean, you're definitely going to learn a lot [*Laughter.*] of things you had not thought about before. [*Laughter.*] And it's really a fascinating book; I highly recommend it. And it is for sale and she'll be signing it after the event.

I'm Patricia Ellis, president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day and this is becoming more and more of an issue. And so, once again we're very excited about it.

I just wanted to mention one other event that we have coming up, and in fact it's next week and it's another Author Series with Shannon O'Neil who is a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. She's really excellent and her book is on US-Mexican relations and it's definitely one that you don't want to miss. So, with that, I want to introduce the WFPG Board Chair, Maxine Isaacs, who is going to moderate today's event with Elizabeth. So I'm going to turn it over to you. And thank you all once again for coming. After they have their conversation then we'll be opening it up to Q&A and I hope we'll have a very rich conversation. So, thanks again.

**Maxine Isaacs:** Good afternoon. I'm delighted that you're all here and I think this will be a great meeting. What we're going to do—I thought would be sort of more informal and a little bit more fun rather than have Elizabeth give a talk, although she's a wonderful speaker, would be that I would ask her some leading questions and then we'll—she and I will have sort of a dialogue and then we'll open it up to questions from you. And please, please feel free to ask anything and everything you like. Do introduce yourself at the beginning of your question. And of course the old Harvard admonition: make sure it's in the form of a question. [*Laughter.*]

So, I am delighted today to introduce you to my friend, if you don't already know her, Elizabeth Becker. Elizabeth and I have been friends for many, many years. She has had a really wonderful career beginning at *The Washington Post* in 1972 when she was promptly sent off to cover Cambodia, which was not an easy assignment in any way. And since then, she has been senior foreign editor at *NPR* and then a national correspondent for *The New York Times*. She has won many awards and is the author of two books before this one; the first one called *When the War Was Over, a History of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge* and then *America's Vietnam War*, which is basically a textbook for high school students about the war in Southeast Asia. She is a person of enormous curiosity and intelligence and also, I think as comes through ringingly clear in all of her work, but particularly in this book, a person of enormous integrity whom I admire very much.

This book is fantastic! I couldn't put it down! It is totally gripping. It's like reading a great novel. It's a very exciting, interesting book. So, if you haven't had a chance to read it, I urge you to do that.

I wanted to just make a personal note, and this is totally not reflective of Elizabeth's views, but what struck me in the book was that it's really a broad discussion about where we human beings are in relation to our planet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And I know that sounds grandiose, but it's raising some very important questions about how voracious we are as human beings in terms of the resources of the planet and how unmindful we seem to be about the consequences of our actions. So, it's almost a commentary on modern times, but that's taking us way beyond the point of today's discussion, so to bring it back to earth. [*Laughter.*]

I wanted to begin, Elizabeth, by welcoming you and telling you how happy I am to see you, always. Let's talk first about the book and what brought you to the decision to write this book.

**Elizabeth Becker:** Well first of all, my last beat at *The New York Times* was international economics and this was from about 2002 through 2006. And I couldn't help but run into the tourism industry. Every time, it didn't matter what the subject was, there it was. It was on the top of the list of priorities for governments around the world, not the United States, but all the others. For instance, I relayed in the book how I was interviewing the Deputy Agricultural Minister of France, asking about how they determine which farms get subsidies, so on, so forth, and towards the end he pointed to the various maps and he pointed to the rail—passenger rail map of France and then a cultural festival map of France. I said, "Okay...what does this have to do with farming?" And he said, "Oh! It has to do with tourism because everything is related to tourism. That's our biggest sector in France; that's where we make most of our money." And duh. And after that it was hard not to avoid.

Then secondly, with so many people traveling you can't help but notice that people understand the world now as tourists not as people who come to gatherings like this or read newspapers. People are traveling now—one billion foreign trips last year for the first time in history. So that's how they know the world now; they don't know it through us experts anymore. So, there are huge, huge issues to be raised and so I said, "Okay, I'm going to look at it as an industry."

**Isaacs:** Let's see. And what did you find when you did begin to identify it as an industry? I mean, to you it was very clear that this is a discrete industry, it's got its own problems, its own issues, but I guess you ran into some surprises?

**Becker:** Oh, well right away. I'll have to say that I started my research at the Shorenstein Center where Max is a professor. And the first thing that I discovered is that in the United States in particular it took forever to accept that this was a one business sector. Even in our GDP it was never there, you'd have hotels, you had airplanes, you had so on and so forth, but to look at it as one sector was a relatively new thing.

And then secondly, how to then define it and measure it, which set me back a couple of weeks [*Laughter.*] of figuring out math and so on and so forth. But it took the United Nations and a group sponsored by something called the World Travel and Tourism Council nearly a decade to figure out something called tourism satellite accounts, which is all kinds of math formulas that I don't understand, so I don't have to repeat them. [*Laughter.*] And that finally, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you could for each country measure how much is—how much tourism contributes to each country and overall come up with a global contribution which last year was 6.4 trillion—with a T—trillion dollars. Separately at the UN's International Labor Organization, figuring out how many people are employed in the industry—1 out of 12 and possibly 1 out of 11 in the world, employed by this industry.

So, for instance during—watching—so now my eyeglasses have a tourism tint to them—so watching how countries are climbing out of the great recession: extraordinary numbers were using travel and tourism money. People like the prime minister of Ireland actually thanked the travelers and tourists to come. Greece—the private citizens, realizing that their government would no longer pay for billboards to entice us Americans, and Brits, and French to Greece, they privately paid for billboards in New York and London and Paris—"Come on, come to Greece." So it's a huge economic engine and because

it's—and then I'll get to the basic spiel—because people think of serious things like war and peace and genocide and finance and Wall Street, manufacturing, blah, blah, blah, and then there's taking a vacation. [*Laughter.*] So, there are serious things and then there's taking a vacation. So, the industry—I call it the stealth industry of the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it's taken so long to realize what we love the most is in fact an industry.

**Isaacs:** Before we turn to that—and that's really the meat of this whole discussion is the policy side of it and of course because we're in this country, about the US attitude toward tourism and the policy questions there—I'd like to stay on the tourism side for one second because the way you view the world of touring and tourism is so interesting. I just wrote down a few of the things, the types of tourism that you identified. The first one—I love the word—voluntourism, dark tourism—which you need to explain, consumer tourism, eco and nature tourism, green tourism, cultural or heritage tourism, and sex tourism—all of which are growing, all of which are important sectors of this industry. But people travel for a lot of different reasons.

**Becker:** And more and more. I'll start with one you didn't even mention: medical tourism.

For the book, I divided it up into three general categories: cultural tourism, consumer tourism, and nature tourism. And then I discussed what it means as a business and then the two giants, China and the United States. And then within all these categories I would go to a country and use that country to discuss different things. But cultural tourism is I think the one that we automatically think of most and France is the capital of it. And done correctly, it helps nourish the actual culture of the country and it has helped save a lot of the most beautiful things in France. Done not so brilliantly, as in Venice, it's overwhelming it and destroying it, because without the right kinds of regulations and figuring out how much a city can hold you have a situation like Venice where there are less than 59,000 people in the city and they welcome 24 million people in that very small little space every year. There's all kinds of citizen activist groups trying to figure out how to convince the local authorities that they can't do it anymore. They've had a successful campaign to move away the big cruise ships which dumped thousands in a day. And they are trying—it's a very simple good governance issue where if the government would simply—the local government—would simply enforce the basic rules, i.e. you can't have illegal short-term rentals, you can't expand the hotel district, you know, just respect the residential property rights, don't allow people to sell phony souvenirs, all kinds of basic things. And, those basic rules aren't followed. So, that's cultural.

On medical tourism, which is sort of—it's dominated by Americans. Countries in Asia and Latin America and a couple in Africa have twinned their ministries of tourism and ministries of health to come up with medical packages. So that, you're an American, you're faced with a \$50,000 operation, you don't have the money and your insurance is not going to cover it, or at least not going to cover a significant portion of it, you can go to the ministry of tourism in Malaysia, look at the package, look at the doctor's qualifications, and for a fraction of that money you can have your operation performed and your recuperation in a gorgeous beach resort. And there are— [*Laughter.*]

Dark tourism is one of the things that just made my skin crawl. As Maxine said, I was a war correspondent in Cambodia and I covered the Khmer Rouge. And I look at Cambodia as an example of getting things wrong. And one of the things they've done is they've hooked up with other countries to have dark tourism, which is sort of genocide tourism, so that you go to a travel agent and you want to see the sites of the Holocaust, the Rwanda genocide, Sierra Leone, and Cambodia. And then you buy tickets to this. Now, I think, you know, this is not saying that I don't think these things should be preserved, but there's a ghoulishness about a lot of these packages that is just—it just, it affronts you.

But the cultural—the roots tourism—a lot of this stuff people have been doing since time and memorial. But when you put it in an industry context—so you have Japan, which used to have hands-off to Japanese-Americans, now they're welcoming them with special packages—“Come and find your roots.” Of course, every Irish-American knows how to find the parish priest. And then Africa, a lot of the best

tourist packages are now for African-Americans. And I quote our President, Obama, his making his trip on that. So, it's what used to be sort vaguely normal, is now you can buy a package. And of course going back to the very first reason humans traveled was the pilgrimage. And religious travel is huge. And the biggest single event—travel event of the year remains the *Hajj*.

**Isaacs:** And you point out that it's also very profitable.

**Becker:** Oh yes, [*Laughing.*], very profitable.

The—this was—you keep discovering these things you don't expect. Saudi Arabia: culturally conservative. I mean everybody—yes it's culturally conservative. Yet, they are not preservationists so that in the last—in less than a decade they've taken the basic architecture, the whole architecture, the sacred architecture of Mecca and changed it so that now these very fancy hotels and strange glamorous things are popping up right in this sacred space, including a tower that looks an awful lot like the Big Ben clock tower in London. [*Laughter.*] And it's making a lot, a lot of money. So yes, it's the basic instincts put on it within the tourism industry context and a lot of money being made.

**Isaacs:** And similarly, with sex tourism.

**Becker:** Well, this is the very—the awful side of it. I no longer laugh when I see, “What goes on in Vegas stays in Vegas,” because that's been an attitude that unfortunately is part of a lot of tourism—is that you go away and can maybe let your hair down—well it's become a huge and often very open lure for, particularly men, although everyone wants to cite the rare female examples, but going and buying young children. It's—there are—I can never remember every figure so I'm not going to say this one, but it's hundreds of thousands. And it's—it drives a lot of the tourism. I was at one conference where they were talking about opening up Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic, and one of the things that they were encouraging was open prostitution because so much of the tourist trade was going from what was Western Europe to Eastern Europe because of “easy lays” as it was put. So I mean, under 21, of course, is the awful part. But in the industry and governments say, some are better than other, but still there's not enough enforcement at all in this pretty awful part of it.

**Isaacs:** So, jumping now—turning now to the policy side—that's sort of a profile very quick of the tourism side—one of the things I thought was interesting was you dated the opening of the world—and when you were—to tourism. And I thought—before I got to the sentence—I thought, “Where would she put that?” and I was imagining a much earlier date—you said 1989. Then you argued that with the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and the Gingrich Contract for America that gradually things shut down. So, there was basically a five or six year window where things started to open up as the—after the wall came down in Germany and things like that—the collapse of the Soviet Empire. And then you argued that the window closed and has stayed closed until very recently. Am I misinterpreting it somewhere?

**Becker:** No it just—maybe—what the world opening up, separate from the US policy—up until the end of the Cold War, half the world was cut off from the travel and tourism industry, period. So that until 1989—well actually the whole world isn't totally open to travel and tourism until maybe the early 1990s. But it took that geo-political earthquake to open it up. And in hindsight, why we weren't looking for this, I don't know because what did the end of the Cold War mean? It meant opening the world, meaning we could travel places, and of course what do you do when you travel? You go travel tourism—duh. So China, the former Soviet Union, all of the Eastern Europe, Central European countries, the Baltic nations, Indo-China: all open. And once that tourism industry starting building up, then the countries that had never paid much attention were doing it as well. So that has been going on and that is the big momentum. For instance, 1995—when you could really say that everything was open there were 500 million foreign trips and it was last year that it doubled to—by then it was to 1 billion.

Now, where does the US fit into this? And this is what's sort of strange. 1994 with the Contract of America, it began that conversation that is still going on—small versus large—smart versus not so smart. And it—the Republican Party decided that tourism was not part of the government—should not be part of government policy—get the government out of tourism. At the very same time, the then President Clinton and Vice President Gore held the first, and what became the last, White House conference on tourism. So, it just was—stars were alighted to have a big conflict. And for the Clinton administration this was smart industry, it was taking advantage of our technological edge here in the United States, the internet was starting, big-body airplanes, this gorgeous country that everybody wants to visit. Let's do tourism. They had all the industry there, they had politicians there. Yay, go tourism. Over at the House, House Speaker—then House Speaker Gingrich—zeroed it out of the budget and got rid of what was a small, but significant tourism—travel and tourism grouping in the Commerce Department and at the same time zeroed out travel and tourism as something that US embassies abroad should be concerned with. So that within a year, if you're a foreigner—if you're Portuguese and you wanted to visit the embassy in Lisbon to say, "What can I do?" the embassy couldn't help you and to this day they can't help you.

**Isaacs:** And tell the Connie Morella story. It's so revealing.

**Becker:** [*Laughter.*] Okay, so this—so here we are and the United States pulls out of the World Tourism Organization and so it's a government out, which is a very difficult position because of course government decides so much about travel and tourism that I argue that it's almost at the heart of the industry. If you can't get a visa, you can't become a tourist. If you can't cross the border, you can't become a tourist. So, there we are. And before we get to Connie we have to go to 9/11.

**Isaacs:** Okay, that's important.

**Becker:** So, this is the American position, which is—it's just singular in the rest of the world in that the [other] governments are pushing tourism and the United States is pulling back. Then we have the 9/11 attacks. And I was in the Washington bureau of *The Times* at that point. I was covering agriculture and I was pulled off and sent to start—to go back to my old beat on the Pentagon and homeland security. And I can tell you the last thing we thought about was tourism. Nobody thought about it! And as the Homeland Security Department was built—the biggest single agency since Franklin Roosevelt—as TSA, our favorite agency on the border was created, [*Laughter.*] no one thought about it! And then all the sudden, the US travel industry said, "Oh wait a minute. We've had flat-lining. We're losing tourists who we normally were so attractive to." In the tourism industry, you want the cultured, wealthy tourists, it's clear. And they weren't coming. They did not like the new visa requirements. They didn't like the way they were treated at the border. So, losing Western Europe, all the wealthy—you name it—the Japanese—all the people you want. And instead, you're getting—I think it was the majority—close to the majority of travelers and tourists were day-trippers from Mexico and Canada. So, it's changing your whole outlook.

The industry hired Tom Rich to be one of their first lobbyists to try to say, "You know, we believe in national security, but can we be a little nicer? Can we figure out some way to bring tourists in?" And...nothing.

And just about that time—Ambassador Connie Morella, who you all may remember as the Republican from Montgomery County who served in Congress, she lost. And then President George W. Bush named her OECD Ambassador to Paris. And this is after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and Ambassador Morella was steeling herself for all the arguments she was going to have to get into about Iraq. And she told me to her shock, the biggest problem she had was US policy towards tourism. [*Laughter.*] I said, "huh?" and she said that whenever a budget issue came up, she was instructed from Washington to say, "cut the tourism research line." [*Laughter.*] And you know her; she's one of the more relevantly polite ladies in the world. And afterwards she just laughed about it and said, "I don't understand it. Is this ideological?". And I said, "It must be."

But anyways, so, this goes on. The industry produced a report called “The Lost Decade” that chronicled how, because of these policies, the US had lost—again I don’t trust myself—but something like \$300 billion in business and x number of jobs because it is so job intensive.

And then finally, it changed by accident. After President Obama was elected, one of the first trips he made was to Copenhagen where he proudly was presenting the argument for Chicago to become the site of the Olympics—the Summer Olympics 2016. And you know, Europe was thrilled that we had this handsome president and his gorgeous wife, they were treated like royalty, blah, blah, blah. And then they had to sit down to the Olympic Committee. And this is the first time that an American President was told the price that has been paid for these border and visa issues. He was told that they can’t imagine having an event like that in the United States and subjecting the athletes and their families and friends to the kinds of treatment that has been reported at the borders. And the one person who would say this publicly was, of course, the representative from Pakistan. *[Laughter.]* And then the industry, there’s Roger Dow, the head of the industry group said, “This is what I’ve been trying to tell you.” So President Obama—Chicago was the first cut and then I looked up the records and we haven’t held a major sporting event since 9/11. So I mean, there’s an issue here.

And then so, later, Valerie Jarrett, one of the senior aids and most trusted of President Obama, invited the industry to the White House just to talk some things over and lo and behold, the president came, joined them, and this has started a new series of changes. It’s not a revolution. And I wouldn’t necessarily think it’s all the way you want, but the president has begun to make some changes both to make the border TSA people a little friendlier, a little more responsive. You can all notice that right? *[Laughter.]* To open up more consulates in countries like China and Brazil, which are huge sources of new travelers and wealthier travelers. I think when President Obama welcomed the Brazilian president...what’s her name...?

**Audience:** Dilma Rousseff.

**Becker:** Yes. He said, besides talking about agriculture issues, he said that they’re opening new consulates and each tourist is a small little mini stimulus package worth about \$6,000 to the American economy. So, the message is getting across. The State Department, Homeland Security, everybody’s trying to figure out some things, but it’s still not anywhere near the level of any other country, particularly a country of our size.

**Isaacs:** Let me ask you a couple sort of broad policy questions. If you were a foreign policy-maker in the Obama administration in this time of sequestration and partisan rancor and all of that, what would be your argument for not just supporting, but actually increasing financial support for tourism?

**Becker:** Well, first I’d broaden the discussion. The industry group is very strong, very good, but I would add to them a group of—National Endowment—it’s humanities—National Endowment of the Arts. It’s a very important—tourism can be very important for our cultural life. So, I would do this whole new thing where you have the industry, cultural public, the governors—they should be there—and I haven’t even gotten into that strange system: the Federal system. This is a major issue. It’s like energy policy. Everybody is involved in energy policy. It affects all of us. Well, I think tourism should be given that kind of level. So, I would have sort of a deputy-level tourism official. I would expand it to make sure that all of the necessary voices are involved in this. And a whole bunch of other things, but yes. I would do what the industry does and just show that economically it’s a very important sector. And I’d put us back into the UN system—I would just put us back into the game.

**Isaacs:** This is sort of the same question I’m asking you, but in a different way. How do you argue—how do you answer the market arguments? That this is a market function, this has nothing to do with government; this is a private sector issue. I mean that’s sort of what you’ve been saying all along. Is there another way of sort of embellishing that?

**Becker:** Oh, it's a very simple argument. The product is the United States. The customer has to come to the United States. The only way the customer can get here is with the approval of the government. So I mean, if the government doesn't understand who the customers are, who they want in—the tourist—then once they get here, how do they figure out—I'll go back to that wonderful family in Portugal—how do they know that the name of our train system is Amtrak? That it only goes on this part of the country? That within the national parks system, how did they find what they want? How did they know what this theme park—how do they know—where's Connecticut versus Massachusetts? Nobody knows any of that stuff.

Now, they finally have put together a website that I think—it's paid for by tax on tourism and run by the industry itself—a group that's all industry which I think should be expanded to include other, broader voices than just industry. But that's a beginning. But it's so not up to the standards of other national sites. That's a beginning, but it should be a very important priority. And it doesn't cost that much money. You know, it's like a PBS board. You should do it for them the same as PBS board, where you have industry, community, blah, blah, blah. And then start telling people how to come around in this country.

**Isaacs:** Now, put on your politician hat.

**Becker:** Oh, I don't have any of those. *[Laughter.]*

**Isaacs:** Now you've got to sell your case to the American public, and they're being told that this is money that's going to come out of their taxpayer pocket. You know, to fund other people coming to this country. Why should they do that? And I think the political dialogue is this degraded that these are not crazy questions.

**Becker:** Well, I think, Americans, the easiest way to sell this is to say, "Not enough people know how wonderful this country is." And it's true. And we haven't even done the public diplomacy piece of this, but it's very hard to find people who come here and don't fall in love with this place. They do. And China of all countries understands this, and they've turned their tourism industry very carefully into a public diplomacy tool. We could as well.

If you encourage people to come here, one, you not only make more money, you're making much more money, but two, you're improving America's stature in the world. So, I think both of those: appealing to their pride in their country and to their pocketbooks. It works both ways.

**Question:** How do you prioritize that though? Because we have a problem with education in this country. A country that really educated—public education was superior. So we have that problem. We have an economic problem now. Most people in this country are not doing as well as they did before. So politically, that's a serious problem.

I grew up in a small town where education was the only way out. If you were black, the only way to succeed in this country was that you had to be educated. And so, in my eighth grade class there were 34 kids, 32 of us had advanced degrees because that was the primary topic of that day. It's not now. And so I think you have to prioritize. What are people really concerned about now? I think now the economy is the biggest issue because it cuts across everyone in the country. So I think it's hard to—I don't know how you decide which is the most important, which you're going to spend all of your political capital on.

**Becker:** Right. I don't pretend to be a politician, but this is one of those easy economic issues where if you want to improve the plus side of your budget, this is money in. It does not cost that much money to promote tourism. When you see the figures for when we did promote it and when we didn't, it's a no-brainer. This doesn't cost a lot of money to promote. This is miniscule. It's a rounding problem over at the Pentagon. It's nothing. It would not—see that's the thing—I don't think this is an economic issue

right now, I think it's a political issue of one party having a completely different view of it than another party and I don't know—that's going to be the problem.

**Isaacs:** Let me just open one other subject for discussion, then we can go ahead and take the questions. And it's this very interesting subject of the nature of journalism coverage of tourism [*Becker laughing.*], which you really address in your book. And it's very tough, I think, as a former journalist, for you to say some of the things that you're saying.

**Becker:** What Maxine's referring to is that one of the ways I started looking at this was, "Why didn't I know more about the tourism industry? Why is this such a surprise to me?" And then I looked at my own profession. The travel section is the only place you read about travel and tourism as one big thing. In the business sections or the economy sections, you read about airline companies, you read about hotel companies, you read about Amtrak, whatever. But, the only time you see travel and tourism as a whole is in the travel section, and that is not a critical section. I defy you to find one article that says, "This is good, but this doesn't work." It's all, "This is wonderful. Eat here, sleep there, go to that play." And *The New York Times*, which is one of the highest calibers, even they said, "We always have the ten best, we never have the ten worst." And that's the best kind of thing. For the vast majority of travel writers, who are freelancers or who are working for websites, or news organizations or media outlets that don't have any money, they accept free trips to destinations, then they write about it as if they were innocent observers. And they don't mention that it was all paid for.

Now, some countries like Brazil or Great Britain, you say in your article, "This was paid for by all of these places that I've just mentioned." But in the United States you could be reading and you think, "Aw, Maxine Isaacs went here and she thought it was cool, I'll go there." And so then—I've talked to all of these different industry, "Why do you do that?" They say, "Oh it's much better than an advertisement because if it's in *The New York Times* then *The New York Times* approved of us. So I go after that and I go to all of the usual places to say this is unethical. It's like if the Democratic Party paid all the political journalists to go to the Democratic Convention and then paid for all of their lodging and food, and then they came back and said, "Oh, the Democratic Party is doing really well!" [*Laughter.*]

**Isaacs:** Well, Elizabeth, you're wonderful. Thank you so much. That's just great. So, Pat, yes, please lead off. And then as you please—as you ask your question please identify yourself.

**Ellis:** Pat Ellis, Women's Foreign Policy Group. One comment and two quick questions. You didn't address the cruise industry which is the way that so many Americans are traveling today. And I'm just wondering if you could say a few things about the positives and negatives of that type of travel.

The other question relates to current crises in the world. Countries like Egypt, a very large percentage of their economy was dependent on tourism. And, like Egypt, now we have Turkey—countries in transition and turmoil—how will they ever get their tourists back if this is an ongoing phenomenon?

And the other question is what is the incentive for countries that do all of this, you know, sex tourism, etc. to take action when they see it as big moneymakers and bringing in a lot of tourists?

**Becker:** Oh, those are easy. [*Laughter.*] Cruises are another—I had no idea what had happened and cruises have changed dramatically. They're now huge, like floating hotels. When you go onto one it's like a skyscraper on its side. It's, you know, up to 4,000 passengers. The positive—the reason why it's so popular—it's relatively inexpensive, all in one, easy-peasy, one bed, one ship where you go to eat, entertainment's right there. It's spoon-fed travel.

The downsides are—I'm afraid I'm probably harsher on the cruise industry than any other in the book, because there's so much to be worried about. I call it sort of the fast food of tourism. And the chapter is called "Destination Nowhere" because you can be on a ship for five days and the amount of time you spend visiting a foreign country is a few hours at a port. And then those few hours are spent on an



excursion where you're in a bus and you see something or you have a very quick swim, or you go shopping, and then you're back. So it's not really a foreign trip. When you see those advertisements you think, "Aw, I'm going to really be in the Bahamas. I'm going to really have a great time. It's like Beat the Clock, if anyone knows that old TV program. [Laughter.] But, that's almost the aesthetics. The tricky part is the damages it does to the destinations, to the environment, the air, and the water. And I go into—the Environmental Protection Agency's done incredible studies on what it does to the water. They just recently changed rules so that they have to improve their fuel because the air pollution's so bad. I use the example of the Vancouver Winter Olympics. They wouldn't allow the cruise ships to come and dock and act as hotels, which often happens, because the fuel pollutes the air so much. So, the only way cruise ships could come and act as hotels was by agreeing to turn off their engines—the fuel driven engines—and plug into the electric system because otherwise, the pollution would have affected the games, you know the snow.

Now, one of the reasons why cruise ships have that kind of reputation is because they have circumvented the rules that all the other aspects that hotels have to follow. They are flagged and registered outside of the United States in, you know, Bahamas, Liberia, Panama are the major ones. So that means that the environmental rules—like a hotel has to have proper sewage, proper water, blah, blah, blah—they [cruise ships] don't. They [hotels] have to have work rules so that, you respect the minimum wage, so on and so forth—they [cruise ships] don't. The safety record isn't brilliant. So for instance, the waiters: \$50 a month wage. I go through all of this.

So after my cruise (it was a Royal Caribbean five-day cruise) I flew back up to Miami and interviewed the CEO. Lovely man, very smart, as I say, the guy that you want to sit next to at the dinner party. And he said, "Yeah that's all correct. We only pay \$50 a month." They have to pay for their own airplane ticket coming and going. And they have a pretty high turnover because it's getting less and less attractive. And then the pollution and the water, I won't go into detail but I go over how much sewage, so on and so forth. It's unbelievable.

War and tourism—sometimes tourists are insane. There's been tourism in Afghanistan all through the war, but that's small, but there has been. Egypt is a serious problem because it's not only turning off tourism but it's turning off the industry. The industry says, "We can't protect the people." And so they have to, and I don't—the Ministry of Tourism was one of the cesspools of corruption as well, so there are all kinds of things they have to figure out. But they have to work with the industry and that's not on their priority list.

Sex tourism—all countries will say that they're doing their best. No one, no one says that they allow sex tourism. All countries—many of them—have incredibly good laws, but they aren't enforced. The question is the enforcement. The US State Department works, the Justice Department works very hard on this. There are amazing non-profits, particularly religious, who will go into these countries and work very hard to help the young women recover from life as a young prostitute. I quote one fellow in there from Phnom Penh saying that it costs—one guy will pay \$50 to buy a young girl. It will cost them at least \$20,000 a year to help her recover from the prostitution. So it's very, very hard. But no, all of the industry, you talk to anyone in the industry, any government official says, "No we hate it. We do not support it." The question is what kind of resources do you put in to get rid of it?

**Ellis:** Quick follow up. Would exposés of certain countries—or is that just a pipe dream, or would any agencies, international or regional, have any clout?

**Becker:** Oh yeah. I mean—it's—I'm a basic optimist. And if you don't do anything it will get worse. And a lot of different hotel chains do better than other hotel chains. Different local groups do better than other local groups. I quote Bangkok, which is one of the original homes, has some of the best records now of reversing it, but it's very hard.

**Question:** Alison McGuigan, the Cohen Group. Though I should declare from a tourism perspective, I was at the Australian Embassy before I joined the Cohen Group. So my question is about US government policy. Is it possible to put tourism under a trade and services? Because in a lot of countries you get high priority because trade is an important issue and fairly well-respected. And if you look at the amount of income and the job creation and Obama's policy on doubling the exports it seems like—would it fit there or is it being rejected from that portfolio?

**Becker:** It being tourism—its traditional home is the Commerce Department, which is not the highest level—I mean the Commerce Department is not the strongest department in the government. But it's in the Commerce Department because it is less about policy and more about statistics and information gathering and things like that. I've never heard any idea like this, but then, I'm not a policy person. Maybe they've talked about it. In my reporting I've never heard anything like that. Although it does—it's considered an export—I mean it's part of the trade figures and the money we receive is part of the exports. So, I mean you're right in terms of calculations but in terms of policy, I don't know that it's even been considered. Is that what it is in Australia? ...Well that's a good idea.

**Question:** Good afternoon. My name is Erinn Tucker. I'm a professor in the School of Hospitality at Boston University. My question for you Elizabeth is, could you speak a little about Brand USA and the creation of the organizations that have come out of the Travel Promotions Act, all of these kind of private, sort of public, attempts to arrange tourism as a national organization here in the US?

**Becker:** Well, Brand USA is the group that is doing the website that I was talking about. Well, first I'll use this as an opportunity to discuss the roadblocks. And one of the biggest roadblocks is our federal system, so that each state has a tourism agency. We don't have a national tourism agency; we have a state tourism agency. So that New Mexico, Arizona, California, Virginia, New York, "I love New York," "Virginia for Lovers," "Florida: the Sunshine State." They each promote themselves. They each have their own tourism bureaus and they love having their own tourism bureaus and they do not like the idea of a national tourism agency. Already, in my discussions of the book, I've run across people who say, "We love our"—you know—"I'm from the state of...Vermont and we don't want to give it up." You have to tackle that first of all. And I can say in this modern world it's a very cumbersome system.

Whenever you go to a big tourism convention, which I've gone to now, a country like Thailand has a beautiful booth with great pamphlets. There are dancers and food and if you want a golfing vacation here's a pamphlet...[*Laughter.*] And then, over there is a string of states. [*Laughter.*] There's Delaware canoeing and Oregon apple picking and California beaches. And they're sort of forlorn and people don't really know what to do. So that is a fundamental structural problem and they have to solve that—and I don't know that there's any—there's no muscle movement there—I mean, tourism as Anne said, it's not—I mean it's not serious. It still is not a serious subject, so I don't know if that's going to change. But you're in the section of the industry that's really hopping. The number of degrees in tourism is exploding with the industry. So that, hospitality, the grandfather of course of that is Cornell, but in forestry departments there's tourism; marine biology there's tourism; business schools of course; economic departments—GW here has a huge—in their business [school]. I go through all of this in the book. I mean, maybe the country hasn't figured it out, but the school—the higher education has figured out that's where the jobs are and they're training people to be a part of it.

**Question:** Evelyn Strauch, teacher of foreign languages and foreign literature. Would the increase in tourism—and I can understand the economic advantage for all the different countries—what about the problem of preserving the tourist sites? You mentioned Venice, but I know Machu Picchu is having a problem, Masada is having a problem. How will the countries be able to keep these sites?

**Becker:** Well, that's one of the reasons I think there should be tourism policy because unless there's tourism policy these are gonna be run over. And it's the local authorities who have to enforce it and the local authorities are usually not strong enough to do it.

I was invited to New Orleans just for that reason because the French Quarter is being overwhelmed. And they can't convince the mayor that more tourism will be helpful to them because they'll be overrun and then they'll be the equivalent of Disney Land French Quarters. Residents are leaving because rules aren't being followed. Galapagos is having the same problem. We can go around the world. I didn't even get into the temples at Angkor. It's every single place and without a strong policy, you're not going to have the right regulations and those regulations aren't going to be enforced.

Bhutan is one I use because they watch how many hotel rooms are built and at what level. So, four stars, two stars, and backpacker. And so, you can't flood it if you don't have places for them to stay. And since you can't just cross the border of Bhutan very easily, that works there. Venice—who gave them permits to dock the big cruise ships? The activists are trying to—just to follow it, because nobody will take responsibility for it. The Italian government is the Italian government. France does it really well because it's a crazy, centralized, Napoleonic country that is terribly proud, if not arrogant, of their cultural sites and who they are. And they are terrific at monitoring this stuff. But, you know, who has the patience for that? The French do, but I don't know if anybody else does. I contrasted Bordeaux with Venice about the ups and downs. UNESCO was supposed to be able to do this but it doesn't enforce its rules, so. I mean, that's one of the reasons—if you don't have a strong tourism policy the most beautiful spots in the world are going to be loved to death—and that's the phrase in the industry—they're just being loved to death. And without that policy, forget it. It's not going to work without taking it seriously.

**Question:** Paula Feeney, Cardno Emerging Markets USA. Namibia—the Namibian industry of tourism is receiving funds from the United States government through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is one of the foreign aid arms of our government, to assist them in developing their national tourism. And my company partner has been asked by the ministry of tourism to help them develop North American tourism in Namibia. And interestingly they said, *Sports Illustrated* is in town and they want to film, or they're coming and they want to film Namibia. This is for the swim suit edition. [Laughter.] So, this came out a few months ago and the way I guess it's done every year, or at least this year, seven continents of the world and *Sports Illustrated* goes with their top five photographers to take pictures. So I think it was 16 pages on Namibia in the swimsuit edition this year. And my question to you is—and of course nobody likes magazines anymore, but it was hugely popular apparently online—do you think this instrument, *Sports Illustrated* to its worldwide population, would impact at all—that way of showing countries—in that particular unique manner, I guess—showing fabulous, in the case of Namibia, background pictures—just spectacular photos, of course with swimsuits also adorning the photos. But do you think there would be any impact at all on tourism or is this simply the delight of the readers of the magazine?

**Becker:** Well, I'm no marketing expert but what I've been told is that this is one of those subliminal things, like having a Pepsi can in the movie, that works. People who are looking at those bathing suits probably have no idea where Namibia is but it might stick in their brain. If they decide to go to Africa and they're given a list of countries where they can go to a game park they'll say "Oh! I remember that name." So that works.

I thought you were going to work from a different angle and that is how to preserve those parks. I was going to say that in Africa now, the strong trend is to preserve the parks by making sure that the local people are part of those parks. That's been the biggest problem. They were inherited from the colonial period and they're looked on as white versus black, colonial versus independence. The country where—I went to Zambia for my example—and the government, the ministry of tourism has programs on TV and on the radio to talk about it, particularly the TV, to show the Zambians what their country looks like. They haven't been because there's such a strong feeling about these parks. They hadn't been, they're taking buses to the parks and having locals involved. The children—parents and children, families would come that were in walking distance and had never seen a zebra or a giraffe or anything else. So that is the main first step in improving tourism is to make sure that the people of that country have an understanding of what the parks are, that this is part of their culture, and that they have skin in

the game. And that's where—like Norway did a tremendous job in Zambia on that. And a lot of American philanthropists are doing this. Paul Allen in Zambia; Greg Carr from the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard, he's doing that in Mozambique; the Oppenheimer family in South Africa are doing similar things. It's all in my Africa chapter. That's—use philanthropists to build it up and bring the locals in. That's the whole, whole thing. The tourists will come, but you want to make sure that it's a part of their culture.

**Question:** Hi, my name is Mariah Morales and I work in land-use planning, somewhat in tourism and I actually came from a cruise ship town in Alaska. Kind of going off the woman's comment earlier about education—in southeast Alaska one of the main ways to make it out is tourism. So even in the US it's just a hugely important vital part of our economy. But my question for you is, having worked in a few developing countries and seeing sort of the position of tourism in various ministries and then looking at the US model, I think it's possible that the stronger position is actually something like the US Travel Association where they are beginning to expand their sort of reach to various impacted groups: business, environment, transportation planning and not creating their own payroll because I think part of the problem with tourism is once you create this sort of special place, all of the sudden you're not involved in the real decisions that moderate and manage tourism like land-use planning or environmental management or you know cultural heritage park planning, those kinds of things.

**Isaacs:** Let me ask you if you would put this in the form of a question.

**Question:** No—that's what I'm asking. I think that it's possible that rather than creating a US Department of Tourism—or I'm not even sure at the deputy administrative level—I don't know if that position is really a tourism portfolio unless it's a coordinated role. But I think the value of having tourism represented more clearly in each of the factions or spots in the US is a stronger role. Also given sort of the state's sense of investment at a local level and distinguishing itself as a destination...

**Becker:** Just what I said earlier, [at the] local level they get drowned out. The tourism decisions are made outside of the land-use people, they're made outside of the community level. They're made industry to maybe the mayor or the governor without any voices. So, unless you make it as in any other—make it part of a public discussion, it's not going to work. However you do it, I'm not the policy-maker.

Right now in Alaska, you've had the worst arguments over cruise ships. And every time a local group works out something, your governor vetoes it. And it's—I go into a chapter on all your things and until there are some basic, "these are our goals, these are our ambitions" I don't think it's going to be part of the conversation.

**Question:** Yes, one of the three kinds of tourism that you've spoken about—cultural, consumer, and nature—I'm an eco-tourist and I wonder if you could speak a little more about that.

**Question:** Hi, I'm Mabel Gómez-Oliver, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Mexican Embassy. I wanted to hear from you what you think the strengths are of this country. The US has been in my childhood always—Disneyland, shopping. [*Laughter.*] It's a wonderful country. I love it. But I would like to hear from you what are the strengths of the US as a destination? In addition to that, I would like to know from your experience what is the real effect of travel warnings and travel alerts issued by the State Department on tourism abroad?

**Question:** I'd like to hear your opinion about open borders and how that may enhance or detract from tourism. Steven Kostant, Fleishman-Hillard.

**Question:** Marcia Wiss, partner with Hogan Lovells and professor at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins. Just narrowing the question to visas, why haven't the governors been more successful? You'd think that the national organization of governors would be very interested in getting people with visas to

come to New York or Orlando or wherever. And also, why has the visa issue not been included in the major immigration debate?

**Becker:** Eco-tourism, nature tourism: it's had a huge impact on the way people think about tourism and I use, obviously, Costa Rica as my example. I go to Costa Rica and describe it. They are—it's an extraordinary national story. They use their wilderness as a basis for their tourism. They've resisted many, many, attempts to instead do the classic beach resort, blah, blah, blah. The whole movement is making for rethinking about what is sustainability, whether you're talking about sustainable hotels, sustainable destinations. All that said, being generous, I don't think that covers more than 8%–10% of the industry. The other side is just as strong. I use Dubai and Abu Dhabi—the UAE—to show that's an incredibly popular space, the most popular place in MENA—Middle East North Africa. They've taken all the tourists from near Egypt. And they have the highest footprint for energy and use. *[Laughter.]* Everybody else is here and they are there. So, you have two very different trends going on here. And to be honest, it's neck and neck! I went to a green tourism conference in Abu Dhabi, but there it's like “how can we reduce the temperature of the air conditioning?” rather than “how can we get rid of the air conditioning itself?”. And it's so typical if you get the backpacker and the five-star, you're seeing real changes in sustainability. Six Senses is this fancy, wonderful resort, boutique kind of chain; they advertise that they don't use air conditioning, they use fans, they have a lot of dirt floors. I mean—it's advertising this sort of expensive—everyone knows it's coming with the resources—but at the same time the energy use just keeps going up.

Mexico—the strengths of the US. Well, every good wilderness project in the world was born of the American experience. Our national parks have done not only great work in our own country, but everywhere, whether it's marine park—or whatever—we are the gold standard, so that's a huge strength. Our wonderful culture—our city cultures—we just have amazing culture. Theme parks are a big deal, in fact, all that has been said about the great French culture; the single most visited place in France is...Disneyland, Euro-Disney. *[Laughter.]* So we've given the world a lot! Musical comedy, McDonald's *[Laughter.]* It's you know—my sad feeling is that our rural culture, not the wilderness but our rural culture, is not what it used to be. And when you think of how much fun people have going to the countryside in Italy, or France, or Germany, wherever, Poland even, and our rural culture is losing out. We don't have the wonderful villages that we used to have. So I think—and shopping, shopping, shopping—it's still the best bargains!

The impact of travel alerts. Countries always complain but I haven't seen that it's a big deal. I think it seems to be more of a hiccup. But I'm not an expert on this. It's long, long-standing wars—and if that alert is part of a trend, then it's going to have a big effect. But sure, every time there's an alert people flip out. But that did not come up that much in my research.

Open borders—in Europe it helps for the tourism. They have, the word escapes me, they have the Schengen region, they work together to have a total tourism policy that seems to work well.

It doesn't come up with immigration except in the sense of tourists overstaying their visas. And that does come up in our immigration debate; you just don't hear it so much. But that is very definitely part of the whole debate. If you read—maybe not into the newspaper article or the website—but if you read into the actual debate, it's definitely part of it.

**Question:** I'm Barbara Cochran. I'm faculty at the Missouri School of Journalism, Washington program. I wanted to ask after the experience of writing the book, how has this changed you, how has this experience changed you as a traveler? What is your next trip *[Laughter.]* and what is your dream trip?

**Becker:** As a traveler, I'm much more conscious of what I'm doing to the community I'm visiting. I never realized that the people being squished by all this tourism—you know you have the governments, the

industry, and the tourists—but the people I never thought of before—are the people that I was visiting. So that I'm very conscious of what travel is doing to a city like Venice and that sort of thing.

I also realized that I can't tip too much the people who are taking care of you. You realize that the locals you see the most are the ones who are taking care of you and they're probably the lowest paid. And if you want to help the country: tip big, tip big, tip big! That's the best thing you can do. Just tip, tip, tip! I mean I thought I was a generous tipper, but I'm really getting into it.

The next trip is actually interesting because one thing I also learned from this is that some of the best kind of tourism is things like I was just talking about the National Trust where—this is in Great Britain—where it's a non-profit, and beautiful big, huge country homes that would be destroyed, they buy; little farm houses that would be destroyed, they buy; village houses in Devon, they buy. They preserve them, keep them as part of things and then they rent them out, so that you're going directly into that local area. So, through a similar sort of thing we just rented a house to celebrate my husband's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in provincial France.

So my ideal—I'd like to go back to Africa. I was shocked at how much I loved it. I couldn't believe Africa and the animals. And my fear is that a lot of these beautiful wilderness areas are not going to be there for a while. So, that's my favorite, Africa.

**Isaacs:** Elizabeth, you're wonderful. Thank you very much, this has been great! Thank you. [*Applause.*]