

Uncomfortable 'tourism' **AUGUST 4, 2015**

A slight change of focus this evening as I'm finding myself in a more contemplative mood after yesterday's visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau and wondering where we should place the boundaries in tourism.



The first hurdle of my visit was the uncomfortable feeling that it seemed wrong to be going for a second time – I had felt a strong desire to visit 5 years ago as I felt I needed to learn more about this important aspect of modern history but I had never considered going back since. I couldn't escape the feeling that going again felt like it was a tourist attraction rather than the only way we can mark the bravery and suffering of those who passed through the gates – if we can't do anything to turn back the clocks to prevent the deaths of those affected by WW2 and, particularly Nazi occupation, the least we can do is educate people through turning the sites into memorial museums so it doesn't happen again.

Watching the introductory video on the bus ride there reminded me how much I had forgotten and suddenly I was grateful for the opportunity to be going again, to learn more about what had happened. First hurdle overcome.

The second hurdle I didn't anticipate; a feeling of immense anger at people taking selfies. Now I know I'm not known for my love of having my photograph taken so I rarely take selfies but taking a selfie at Auschwitz? I just didn't understand why anyone would think it was ok – in the execution area I couldn't stand and listen to accounts of how people were murdered while others took selfies in the courtyard so I walked out.

This leads me to wonder at what point something just becomes another place on the tourist route, a trivial notion that people visit because a top ten guide tells them too? I strongly believe everyone should visit Auschwitz-Birkenau once, just like they should visit the Genocide Museum in Kigali if they get the chance, but please let's not turn these places into tourist traps where it's ok to take selfies and share with the world on Facebook that you were there like you would on a night out. The people who lost their lives deserve more respect.