

# Time Tourists

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**E. W.:** Good evening, this is Ernie Weaver welcoming you to „Pack up your troubles“, the holiday programme. Tonight we bring you a unique experience: the chance to listen to a human being from the year ... 3003! Our guest from the future is Georgina Herbert, the founder-manager of a company called „Time Tourists“. Ms Herbert, as you can imagine, this sounds incredible to our listeners! Perhaps you could start by telling us just how you were able to travel back in time to be with us in 2003!

**G. H.:** Well, time travel has been possible since a groundbreaking series of experiments by Professor Zweistein in the late 70s. After that, things literally took off and the first trials took place in the mid 80s. There were setbacks of course. One spectacular disaster killed seven technicians en route for 19 July 1969 to observe the first moon landing. But with the world's scientists working together and the tourist industry providing the cash, these teething-troubles were soon cured and time travel could be opened up to the public. These days, anyone who can afford it can take a trip into the past.

**E. W.:** For us time travel is still science fiction! Although there is some interesting work being done on Black Holes, I believe. Can you tell us anything about that?

**G. H.:** I'm afraid I'm not allowed to. The most stringently imposed condition of time travel is that we must not under any circumstances influence the course of history – I'm sure you can see why! Telling you what I know might change the direction of your research.

**E. W.:** Frustrating, but obviously you can't risk destabilizing your present.

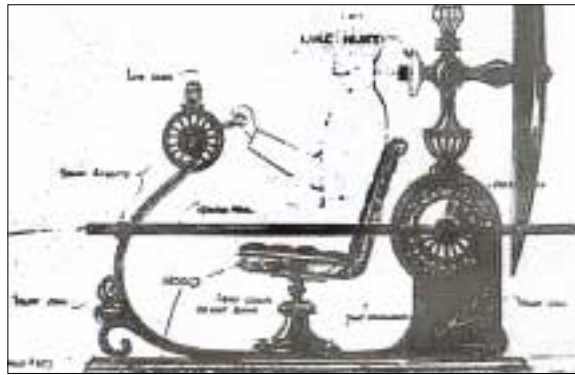
**G. H.:** Exactly.

**E. W.:** Tell us about your company. The name, „Time Tourists“ suggests a travel agency.

**G. H.:** And so we are! We organize holidays in the past. My agency is just one of thousands – if the most successful! You see, time tourism has become the favoured holiday of the affluent.

Let me explain. In our age we have to live with the effects of global warming – I think I can tell you this, after all it's no secret!

The sea has largely reclaimed the continents; land has become scarce and there are few places left for holidays that are not too hot. As you can imagine, the few bearable resorts, the forests and fjords of the north, for instance, get hopelessly overcrowded. Holidays have had to be staggered throughout the year,



Herbert George Wells: The first Time Tourist?

with people going in alphabetical order. It's not much fun, especially since a greedy tourist industry has wrecked the resorts by throwing up cheap ugly accommodation and amenities.

**E. W.:** That sounds familiar! Some of the most beautiful places on earth have already gone that way – many Greek islands, for instance, and parts of the Spanish coast.

**G. H.:** Yes, I know. But you can imagine: just as your well off holidaymakers hide away in exclusive venues, the advent of time travel has meant that the wealthy of our age prefer to visit the idyllic countryside and beaches of the past.

**E. W.:** How does time tourism work?

**G. H.:** Well, people come to us and explain their desires. Most of them just want to spend a couple of weeks somewhere beautiful – which for us means cool and green, with luxuriant vegetation and flowing rivers. These are the easiest holidays to arrange. We sit the customers in the virtual reality room and they go through our subliminal brochures until they find what they're looking for.

Others have specific wishes, such as those who are interested in history or literature. You see, the masses receive very little academic education – children are taught the basics: reading, writing and arithmetic, and big business does the rest – so most people learn very little that is not production-related. But those who have the leisure to be curious visit the public learning centres where they read virtual books and attend virtual plays or concerts – and that whets their appetite.

The more adventurous often want to visit a certain time and place, in order to witness some historical event. One favourite is Paris on 14 July 1789, another is London on 2 September 1666 – we've seen some spectacular photos of the Great Fire! Another is Washington on ... oh, but I can't tell you: it's in your future. Not so distant, either!

**E. W.:** That is really tantalizing! But tell me, people from 3003 must look different from the locals: don't they have problems with that?

**And how do they understand the languages of the past?**

**G. H.:** Well of course we had to develop the appropriate technology before we could go public with time travel. Travellers go through an induction process during the flight. They come out of it looking like the locals – we provide appropriate clothes – and conversant with local speech and customs. The transformation is temporary of course and lasts only as long as the holiday.

**E. W.:** I see. But when someone visits, say, the Storming of the Bastille, don't they risk getting hurt?

**G. H. (sighs):** Yes indeed. Once a couple of tourists got guillotined and there was a terrible scandal that threatened the very existence of time tourism!

Now all clients are obliged to take out insurance and sign an undertaking not to sue the company in case of accident or death.

**E. W.:** Do you ever have people who refuse to come back?

**G. H.:** At first, yes, we did have a spate of „escape“ attempts, mostly by „emotional tourists“, but not only them. One theatre-lover booked a stay in Stratford in 1587 to find out why Shakespeare left for London... and became so fascinated by the Bard that he refused to come back! It was a special case, so we let him stay.

But now escape is no longer possible. An implanted chip gives the tourist twenty-four hours to report to the spaceport for the trip home. If they don't, they're automatically deactivated.

**E. W.:** I get the point! You mentioned „emotional tourists“?

**G. H.:** Yes, we used to get bereaved people asking for trips to visit the lost loved-ones and it caused total havoc! Apart from the escapes, there were depressions, suicides, general emotional disruption.

We had to introduce a clause that no one could visit a time and place where they risked meeting someone they knew. Since then there's been no more trouble!

**E. W.:** Just one last thing, Ms Herbert, before listeners' questions: what made you visit Luxembourg in July 2003?

**G. H. (chuckles):** Well, Mr Weaver, something very special's going to happen. But unfortunately, I'm not at liberty to say what it is ...