

**ST ANDREW'S JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION**



**GENERAL PAPER
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Paper 2

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1 hour 30 minutes

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Reclaiming Travel *By Ian Stavans and Joshua Ellison*

- 1 What compels us to leave home, to travel to other places? The great travel writer Bruce Chatwin described nomadism as an “inveterate impulse,” deeply rooted in our species. The relentless movement of the modern world attests to this: our dwindling economic prospects have not turned us into a sedentary species. The World Tourism Organization, an agency of the United Nations, reported nearly a billion tourist arrivals in 2011. Some 200 million people are now living outside their country of birth. Our once-epic journeys have been downsized to cruise ships and guided tours. 5
- 2 This type of massive movement — the rearrangement, temporary or permanent, of multitudes — is as fundamental to modern life as the Internet, global trade or any other sociopolitical developments. Certainly, many of our most pressing challenges as a society are directly linked to our mobility: urbanization, scarcity and, of course, immigration. 10
- 3 In the Bible, the human journey begins with an expulsion. God’s chosen people are also those condemned to wander. Not only wander, but wonder: Why are we in exile? Where is home? “Gilgamesh,” the Icelandic sagas and “The Odyssey” are all about the nomadic life. Yet these characters do not see travel as how society now does. They embark on journeys of mythic significance — the literature of travel in the past did not recognise travel for leisure or self-improvement. Today, our approach to travel is defined not by lofty ideals but, rather, according to our own mostly prosaic trips granted that there are still some who undertake grand quests. Likewise, there are still many people whose journeys are precarious and momentous on an epic scale. 15
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- 4 For the most ‘fortunate’ among us, our travels are now routine, devoted mainly to entertainment and personal enrichment. We have turned travel into something ordinary, and deprived it of a higher significance. We have made it a business: the business of being on the move. Whatever impels us to travel, it is no longer the oracle, the pilgrimage or the gods. It is the compulsion to be elsewhere, anywhere but here. 25
- 5 Hence, the business world has since capitalized on this human compulsion to travel and adulterated it into the global industry of tourism. Instead of presenting travel as a quest for meaning in our existence, tourism as we know it in the late 20 century and now 21st century, has successfully transformed travel into self-serving escapism. Though we are often told that long-distance travel precipitates a ‘cultural exchange’ and that it breaks down barriers between our lives and those of the people we visit, the truth of the matter is modern tourism merely offers tourists an ethnocentric and cultural-centric comfort zone without the inconvenience of fully immersing into the culture of the country that we are visiting. Tourists remain firmly behind coach windows, hotel walls and camera lenses that divide them from the countries they travel through. 30
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- 6 The act of traveling is an impossibly broad category: it can encompass both the death march and the cruise ship. The gains of travel are dependent on how an individual makes use of the experience. It can be precious or worthless, productive or destructive. It can be self-satisfying or ennobling towards others. The returns can be only as good as what we give of ourselves in the process. So what is the distinction between meaningful, fruitful travel and mere tourism? It is a quest rather than self-serving escapism. 40

7 George Steiner wrote that “human beings need to learn to be each other’s guests on this small planet.” We usually focus on the ethical imperative of hospitality which is the obligation to be a generous host. When we travel, though, we are relying on others for hospitality. There is great vulnerability in this. It also requires considerable strength. To be a good guest — like being a good host — one needs to be secure in one’s own identity: where you stand, who you are. This means we tend to assume that travel is a lonely pursuit when it actually calls us to be social beings.

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