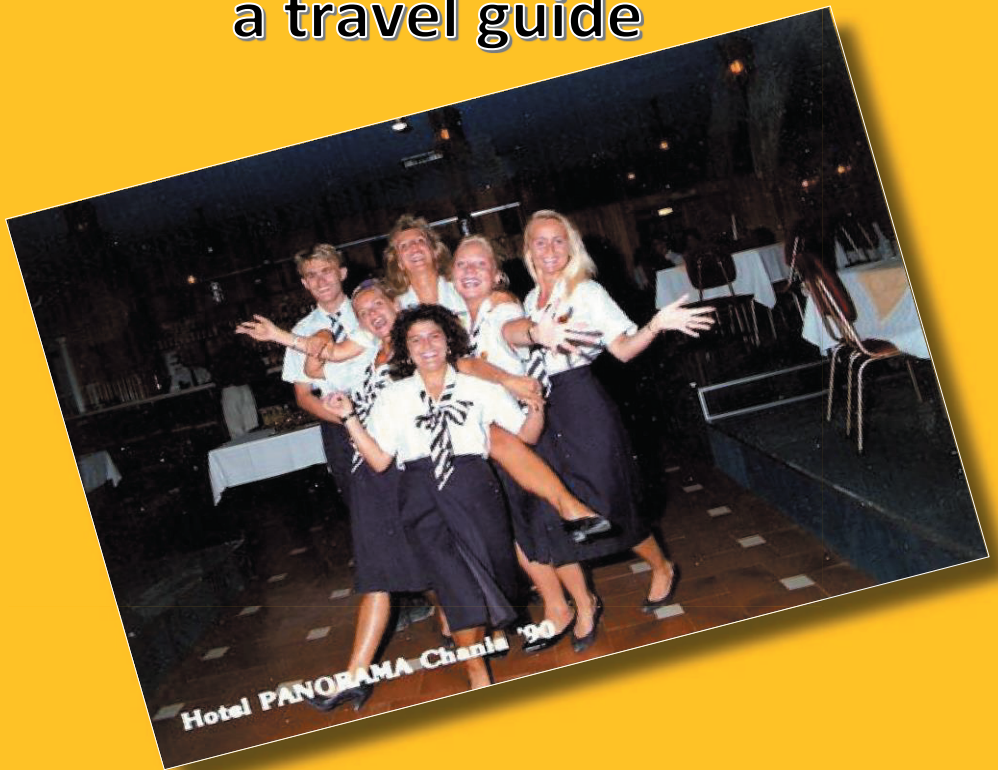


Jukka-Petri Nieminen

# The world through the eyes of a travel guide



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of

a travel guide



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**For reader**

**03.07.2007 /**

**01.03.2020**

This is a true story of my years as a travel guide. I don't remember all the events by date.

Names of persons in this book has been changed. However, all the events and blunders are full fact.

In 1949 the first charter flight was made by Finnair (at the time Aero Oy) to Nice. A couple of years later, Brothers Karhumäki (later Kar-Air) was followed. The actual boom began in the 1960s. Aurinkomatkat was founded in 1963. The Finns were introduced to the secrets of charter travels by Kalevi Keihänen. **Keihäs** (spear) - or **Seiväs** (haystack) matkat (as they were called with humour) was founded in 1965. At that time, Denmark already had two large travel agencies, Spies and Tjäreborg. Tjäreborg first landed in Finland in 1966 and a year later Spies.

In the beginning the first travellers were very dependent on guides. Language skills were almost non-existent. Finnish restaurants established in Spain and lived in their golden age. On the tour busses, Finnish songs often rumbled under the leading by the guide. Little by little, the "people of Härmä (knife-fighters from North)" learned to cope more on their own and their language skills increased. In the 1990s, the guide was still an important element of support and safety for pax.

Today, the life of guide is not as wild as it was in the 1990s. However, the work is still about the same. The number of guides at the destinations has been decreased and services have been reduced.



Holidays on your own was impossible to even consider in the 1990s. Or that the guide would meet at the airport but wouldn't follow on the bus. Or the destination would be completely without guide. Guides yes but no Finnish speaking ones. Instead of Finnish guide the post would be handled by a Scandinavian guide or a local travel agency. Communication would require at least some sort of English language skills. Not to mention cruises. A couple of weeks on a ship that doesn't have a single Finnish-speaking staff. Mobile phones have also changed the way guides work. There are now destinations "on your own" where the guide can be reached by phone from a neighbouring town or even another island.

I dedicate this book to my parents with the greatest love. They have always encouraged and supported me with the choices I've made.

I would also like to thank everyone who contributed to the completion of this booklet and all who have supported me in the process.

## **The agony of creation**

This epic originated from a joke I often told to my clients “bee good or you’ll hear from me”. Little by little the idea started to ripen. “Damn it, I’ll do it!” I once some years ago started to write, but I wasn’t into it. At that time I “only” had an electrical typewriter. I was burning more correction tape as got some text on the paper. That’s another reason to give up.

Let this scribble to be the greatest tribute to the computer time and to honour all great authors. They have done hard work using both physical and mental power to type enormous books. If something had to be changed, add or left away on paragraph, the only option was to write the whole page again. They must have had enormous nerves and a strong will to write.

It took me a dozen years. At the end of June 2007, I spent a sleepless night. I guess it was a full moon. All sorts of thoughts cruised in my mind. Suddenly the text started to come just like that. Due to my laziness, I didn’t get up to tap, even though the Sandman had clearly already forgotten me.

On July 3, 2007, I started to work. For half a day I spent researching stamps on my old passports. With the help of these, I could make the timeline for each season. I also developed a card file for each season. Boldly said! It was pieces of paper one for every season, where I wrote happenings I could remember. Sometimes I added some, sometimes deleted one.

Then the actual writing began. This book begins in much the same way as the first one I destroyed earlier. One has an incredible computer - memory. While writing, I remember new events and stories one after the other, those I have stored between these covers.

The work progressed really fast, even though I did it alongside my daily work. Was it the agony of creation then? No. It was really fun! The first version was born too quickly. My friend Matti-Juhani Koponen (ret. literary critic) gave a crushing verdict. Once as a child, sometime in the 1980s, I wrote a novel. I sent it to a publisher in Tampere. The publisher "Uncle Jammu" had clearly read my piece, judging by the smell of pipe tobacco in my book and letter I've received. Jammu said my epic didn't fit into their publishing program. However, he encouraged me to continue writing and among other things to join the "Pencil Circle" at Work People's College. The kind words were encouraging, but I was depressed. Shit! I'm not a writer. Now I experienced the same. Shit!

I let the book to rest for almost a year. Until once again. On March 12, 2008 I decided. Hell! If there has been power in me to have been a guide, I'll certainly have it to write my memories on the paper. Weather someone wants it or not.

## **Where it all started, i.e. Spies-College 08.01-03.02.1990**

“Good morning ladies and gentleman and welcome on board Finnair flight to Palma De Mallorca” was the flight attendant’s greeting. It was a frosty morning in January. The air was sunny. I sat in my seat and looked out the window as the plane took off into the sky. Helsinki and Helsinki-Vantaa Airport were left behind.

I had been discharged from the army yesterday after an eleven month period of duty. I had been dreaming of career as steward for years. Once, I got a Spies travel brochure on my hands. There was an ad about about the Spies College.

“Do you want to be a guide, an air guide, or flight attendant?” Two girls and two boys in the ad were smiling in the southern sun by the pool. Steward yes! One of the boys had a Spies tie tied for too long on purpose, so the rest he had penetrated inside his pants. Looked really cool. My idol. In fact, I used the same look throughout my Spies career. The ad continued “The two-month course had two parts: first month about guide profession and the second month would be the airline Conair’s and flight attendant part. The course could lead to the profession of guide, air guide and stewardess or steward. However, it later became clear that the ad was misleading. Namely, Finns were neither accepted as air guides nor as stewards. I had no intention to become a guide.

I had applied to participate the College and had been elected. With the help of the General Staff of Finnish Army, I managed to arrange myself an exemption permit to obtain a passport a few days before my official dischargement and here I was now on my way to the sun in Palma. I had butterflies in my stomach. Although I was already twenty and used to being away from home, the idea of two months in a foreign environment was an exciting idea.

After lunch the toilet queue started to form in the aisle of the plane. I heard a girl telling someone in the queue that she was on her way to the guide school. Now I “knew” at least one future classmate. I knew there would be quite many of us and all over the Nordic countries. The total amount surprised me later.

When the plane landed after four hours, a warm cow breath flooded through the door into the cabin. There was about the same amount of + degrees in Palma as there was - degrees in Finland. After the customs, we were greeted by our purple uniformed guides. I was directed to a bus that would cycle through Terreno to Magaluff, where our course would be held.

When guests at the Gomilla Park Hotel left, there were twelve course participants left on the bus in addition to me. And all the others were girls. At first everyone was a little bit shy. But gradually we started to introduce ourselves. One of the girls was an impossible chatter. She told story after another nonstop. Her name was Taina and she told us to have quitted her job on a boat and was determent to become a travel guide. It must have been this humour full Taina, who also came up with the phrase J - P and the other girls.

On the way to Magaluff our guide Sari told us what was to be expected. In the afternoon we would already have program. We would be altogether about two hundred students. The languages during lessons would be Swedish and mainly Danish. Oh Boy! Even if I had studied so called long Swedish (the first foreign language) in school, the idea of Danish as a main language wasn't attempting.

We would be accommodated in double rooms. I wondered who would be my room mate? Sari also said that we Finns were the last ones to arrive. The lessons would take place in the two neighbouring hotels. The morning lessons as a whole group and afternoon in smaller groups.

When the bus finally curved up in front of the Hotel Guadalupe Sol, we took our bags and went to the reception. Jösses (softer impression for Jesus) what a shabby hotel. Sari gave us the keys and reminded of the afternoon's program. I got a room alone, well better that way. Some of the students had paid an extra fee for their room alone. The course cost about 2,000 grandmothers Marks, including lessons, accommodation and all meals. When comparing holidays of similar length in Mallorca with all meals, the difference which was left for lessons was only a couple hundred Marks. Not Bad.

In the afternoon we walked to the Barbados hotel next door. Well, if there was no praise in the lodgement, then this hotel was just a dumb. The hotel was otherwise empty, only our course would fill it in the mornings. We got our own folders containing the course material, as well as the Guide-Manual "Our Bible". A book that would follow you throughout your career. The main instructions for working as a guide were written between these covers. How to make excursions, what to do in the hotel service. Summa sumarum what had to do and were not allowed to do. Each student received a Spanish textbook and a name badge with number on it. The number, which you always had to tell the course secretary Hanne every morning. She kept record of who was involved in the classes and who was not. My number was 123, i.e. en to tre, my first Danish words I learned. The first lesson began in the huge theatre hall or auditorium. Good grief! I didn't understand a lot when the course leader Eva introduced the future evens to us, fluently in Danish. We also heard that the internal language of Spies would be Danish. Well, I guess you have to start learning it. Fortunately, I have head for learning languages quite easily. The course would be pretty intense and we would have exams too. Only those who have satisfactorily completed the course and according to the need would be hired as guides.

Eva also talked about salary. The guide would be covered by a basic salary and a kost tillaeg (living supplement). It varied depending on the price level of the destination. In Spain and Greece it would be less, while in England and America it would be higher. The basic salary for a beginner guide was about 2,000 Danish crowns and kost tillaeg another 2,000. With this salary one wouldn't get rich, but given notice that the salary was tax-free and housing free, not bad. The salary would be just your spending money. Spies paid a fair salary compared to many other travel agencies those days. The worst pay check at the time was at Fritidsresor, so I've heard.

At dinner, we Finns moaned a bit. We started to feel like we were just filling in the left over seats and there's no way we would be hired as guides. And it was unfair to us, that Danish was the teaching language. We didn't understand anything. Some of the girls were having terrible difficulties even with Swedish. Slowly, slowly I started to be familiar with Danish language.

The first actual lesson dealt the history of Spies. Eva waffled something about the solvogn (free translation sun carriage) i.e. Spies logo. Solvong was a Viking-era amulet of fortune. It was found in archaeological excavations to my recollection from Iceland. With some trick, Simon Spies got the exclusive right to use the solvong as his company logo. The following explains how well I understood Danish in the beginning. In the first exam, there was a question what there is on the Spies logo. Well, there's the sun, but was the animal horse or a dog? I looked at the logo on the wall of the auditorium for a long time. From the short tail, I deduced that it was a dog. Finland Zero Points. (Commonly known from the Eurovision Song Contest). It was a horse.

Eva went on to tell about the beginnings of Spies Rejser (Spies Travels). Simon had founded the company in 1956. Brochures or better ads for the first trip to Mallorca, Simon distributed door to door by bicycle. The trip was made by bus and boat. That's where it all started. The popularity of traveling increased, so did Spies travel.

More destinations came and flying entered the picture. The need for own airline also gave birth to Conair. Flying Enterprise had gone bankrupt and in 1965 Spies bought the bankruptcy estate. This is how the airline Conair was born.

In the 1960s, Simon attracted attention by moving around the world wearing a long fur coat and surrounded by young women. Kalevi Keihänen did the same in Finland. There is an eternal debate which one created this image first Simon or Kalevi. The truth is probably that Simon imitated Kalevi.

1983 Simon married 21-year-old Janni Brodersen. Simon was a very well-liked leader. He was polite and considerate to his employees. There was always eyes for beautiful women, so it's no wonder that Simon spotted the young and beautiful messenger girl Janni. According to Eva, the marriage was more a friendship agreement than marriage. HHMM! The truth, of course is, that if Simon had died without an heir, the Danish state would have grabbed the entire tourism empire. Simon Spies died on April 16, 1984.

The next morning, after breakfast, we gathered again in the same auditorium. Now, even a few Swedes began to complain out loud that they couldn't understand Danish. Blamey. Well, it must be really difficult language then. In the afternoon there would be the first Spanish lesson at the Hotel Martinique Sol. Likewise across the street. Brand new hotel, but completely empty. Only we "Spies" would fill it after lunch and siesta. Big hotels completely empty? Why? Mallorca is more of a "summer" destination and the season was still in its infancy. In addition, Magaluf is located far away from the center of Palma. Spies had apparently made a good deal with the hotels when organizing a guide school during a quieter time.

We were divided into smaller groups according to whether we were beginners or already knew some Spanish. To determine the level of knowledge, a Spanish test was given in front of our nose.



With the help of French, I managed to translate a piece of text with the result that I got into a group of people who knew some Spanish already. Jösses! After all, I didn't know Spanish at all. Spanish is a pretty easy language to learn and I grabbed it quite easily. I must admit that I only learned "guide Spanish". Should I discuss about Spanish foreign policy in Spanish, I'd miss my mother.

In the evening we were taken to a large disco. We were given a few drink vouchers. I ordered Bacardi Coke and Jesus it was strong. One could say it was a glass of Bacardi with a dash of Coke to give colour. But as a brave Finn, I had a few of them during the evening.

I felt pretty dam awful in the morning. During the break, I march to the coffee automat in the lobby. Damn it! I pressed the sugar button by accident. Uh, let it be. I took my disposable mug and went back to my seat. I sipped my coffee and got my mouth full of some powder like. I spat the coffee back into the mug and looked at what the hell there was in the mug. Dead ants! And then we, me and my mug, were taken to the toilet. I don't recommend trying ant-flavoured coffee especially in a heavy hangover morning.

So the first month was Spies part and learning the skills of a travel guide. We practiced using the microphone, first aid and performing in general. Of a sentence or better phrase of our Swedish teacher Göran became a legend. The microphone should be held with the thumb attached to the jaw. "That way it would be so safe so safe" ("Så är det så Trygg så Trygg"). It would stay on it's place in the swinging bus and passengers could hear all the narration without breaks or interference.

Everyone in turn HAD to step on stage to introduce themselves and answer Göran's questions. The thought almost panicked us. The first to venture onto the stage was one of the oldest pupils, a Swedish woman in her forties. In her own words, she was so terrified, that she could faint. It really wasn't easy to go in front of about 230 students holding a microphone for the first time in life.

**This is the true story of my years as a travel guide.**

**The work took the guide today to Crete, tomorrow to Morocco or the Dominican Republic.**

**The knowledgeable and smiling guide performed his duties 24 /7.**

**What was the daily life of a travel guide like in the 1990s?**

**What was required of us and what were young chick's aids and instructions given to go to conquer the world.**

**In my book, I tell the truth about the daily joys and sorrows of guide life during 1990s.**

**Despite everything, I wouldn't change a day.**

