

Contemporary Travel Writing Symposium

Writing Travel in the Twenty-First Century: Mobility and Authenticity in a Time of Crisis

University of Surrey
27-28 September 2026

Travel is no longer what it used to be. Slow travel, flight shame, sustainable travel, eco- and antitourism, staycation and microadventures are but some of many recent terms testifying to a growing awareness that mobility has become inextricably intertwined with planetary concerns, regardless of whether it is a commute to work, long-distance globetrotting, or an escalating population of refugees and asylum seekers. In a post COVID-19 world where some tech billionaires build their own private rockets to go to Mars (SpaceX), while others develop alternate realities (Meta) that will supposedly render physical mobility obsolete, the form, meaning and destination of travel shifts as never before.

This PGR/ECR symposium calls for papers that investigate recent transitions in the way travel is written, documented, and imagined. How have digital and other new media transformed, challenged or perhaps entirely replaced the travel 'writing' offered by the traditional print form? In the planetary emergency, the cost of mobility is inseparable from the manner in which the mobile individual relates to the planet, and its future. Traditional print formats of 'writing travel' - travel books, essays, articles, letters and postcards - have undergone radical change as a range of digital media and forms (microblogging, texting, podcasts, video essays) and platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Travelblog, TikTok) have fundamentally altered the manner in which travel is narrated, distributed and consumed. Similarly, while many colonial, gendered and racialized travel writing tropes of earlier eras have been challenged and, in some cases, eradicated from contemporary travel writing practices, others linger on ('authentic' travel, adventure, exoticism, tourism). Repackaged to seemingly fit current norms of equality and sustainability, these persisting tropes promise a cosmopolitanism and freedom of movement that addresses the wrongdoings of imperialist, colonial or other oppressive regimes. Yet they often still rely on, profit from, and sometimes extend the very power structures they were meant to redress. Finally, this symposium welcomes papers that investigate the manner in which the cost of individual mobility is now inseparable from the impact on the planet at large, both now and in the future. Given the undeniable environmental impact most forms of travel have, is there a place for travel writing in a truly sustainable society? Is so-called 'eco-travel writing' genuinely possible or is it just an exercise in rebranding and greenwashing a deeply compromised genre? And if it is possible, what are the forms, style, itineraries, agendas and practices that contribute most effectively to environmentally aware travel writing?

Presentations could therefore address (but need not be limited to):

- Slow travel
- Microadventures
- Flight shame
- Ecotourism
- Anti-tourism
- Post-tourism
- The new communities of travel writers/readers enabled by new media
- Revenge travel
- Mindful travel
- Travel and the digital
- Extreme travel
- Space tourism
- Travel narratives of crisis
- Refugee and migrant travel writing
- Postcolonial and decolonial travel
- Neo-imperial travel
- Footsteps travel

We therefore invite from PGRs and ECRs abstracts of c. 250 words for 15 minute papers addressing these or similar themes: these should be sent to either Rune Graulund at the Southern Denmark University (graulund@sdu.dk), or Carl Thompson at the University of Surrey (c.thompson@surrey.ac.uk) by June 15 2026.

General queries about the symposium can also be directed to either Rune or Carl.

There will be no charge for the symposium and we also hope to be able to cover the accommodation costs and UK travel of all participants, thanks to funding from the Independent Research Fund Denmark. However, the budget is limited. To ensure we can maximise access and participation, therefore, we would be grateful if participants whose institutions or studentships offer expense allowances draw on these resources to cover some or all of their costs.