



Calling Bullshit On Travel Brand Ambassadors

FORMER TRAVEL WEEKLY HACK AND NOW B&T JOURNO, HANNAH EDENSOR, IS CLEARLY NO FAN OF VERY FAMOUS PEOPLE BEING PAID VERY BIG BUCKS TO BE THE FACE OF OVER-PRICED HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS...

Travel ambassadors are a bit like the dude who plays the tambourine. They're attractive, they're at the front and they make the rest of the band look good, but at the end of the day, they're not really adding to the music. I feel the same about any celebrity, Instagram influencer or YouTube sensation that flogs a brand and bangs on about how much they love, celebrate and resonate with it.

Take Taylor Swift for New York City & Company. Yes, she's gorgeous and her squad is on point, but what does she contribute to the value of the mega NYC brand? She was born in Pennsylvania and up until recently, her music was more Nashville than Manhattan, so where's the connection? Do people now book trips to the Big Apple because they think Tay Tay might be there, munching on some breakfast at Tiffany's or because they truly trust her heartfelt (ahem, well-paid) "affinity" with the brand? I reckon Humans of New York

does a better job to add value and entice me to the Big Apple than Swifty does.

Then there's Jennifer Aniston and Emirates. Sure, maybe she really does fly with the airline and enjoys sprawling out in their unnecessarily oversized lie-flat seats while the rest of us plebs schlep it up in the arse of the plane, but then again, maybe they just paid her a lot of money. Five million bucks to be exact. A quick Google of her partnership with Emirates shows fans weren't exactly thrilled with the ads either, where she wakes from a horrifying dream about a plane with no bar or shower. Complaints have lambasted Emirates for being "disconnected" from the bulk of the population, while another disgruntled ex-fan of the airline told them to "show this to someone who shits money for a living". I can't help but concur.

Often, we don't even know about celebs cosy arrangements with brands, let alone feel an urge to follow them around the world (even though they are 100% not there when you arrive). *Gangnam Style* singer Psy was named as the tourism ambassador for the Korean Tourism Organisation, appearing in an ad that sees him rap (and I use that term lightly) about different things to do in the country, Jackie Chan and Richard Gere turned a quick trip to China into a lucrative ambassadorial stint, and don't even get me started on Pitbull and Florida.

And let's not overlook David Beckham offering up his good looks to Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, the only connection seeming to be the tagline of 'Never Settle' and the fact that, well, Beckham rarely has to settle. "This is a brand that always aspires to be the best in everything it does. That's why I love Marina Bay Sands," he claimed in his awful accent, failing to induce any desire to visit the hotel.

I think travel brands win more hearts and dollars when they use people who actually reside in the country they're meant to be promoting. Someone you're likely to see waiting for a coffee at the local café, one who is curious and charismatic and a real representation of what a destination experience would be. Why? Because the believability factor that these campaigns are telling us a true story of the 'brand' hits home.

Qantas bringing real families together from opposite ends of the world, Airbnb and its 'Never a Stranger' campaign, South African Tourism using locals to encourage us to 'Meet South Africa'. There's an abundance of brilliant ad campaigns for brands that don't waste money and ideas on an attractive and well-known celebrity, and they're the ones I connect most with. I'll hazard a guess and say I'm not the only one.

