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# **Exploring a travel diary that promotes wellbeing – synergy between oral and visual narratives of memorable and meaningful experiences**

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## **Abstract**

This study showcases an exploratory study of the creation of a travel diary to facilitate the expression and reminiscences of memorable and meaningful moments using the traveller's digital footprints. Currently, personal technologies are widely used to capture these moments and the travel diary seems to be an ideal place to consolidate footprints from diverse sources. In this study, the researcher interviewed participants, asked them to share their memorable and meaningful travel experiences, and then instructed them to use their photos to create a paper-based visual diary. This study adopted a Labovian approach to compare the oral narratives with the visual diaries. Based on the results, the researcher makes recommendations regarding the future design of travel diary platforms.

**Keywords:** travel diary, memorable and meaningful tourism experience, co-design, prototyping, oral and visual narrative, traveller wellbeing.

## **Citation APA:**

Wan, C. K. B. (2019). Exploring a Travel Diary that Promotes Wellbeing – Synergy Between Oral and Visual Narratives of Memorable and Meaningful Experiences. In J. Pesonen & J. Neidhardt (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2019* (pp. 187–199). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05940-8\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05940-8_15)

## **1 Introduction**

Travel is a highly experiential human activity in which emotion and active engagement contribute significantly to the creation of memorable and meaningful travel experiences (MMEs). These experiences can be considered to be vivid and explicit autobiographical memories that arise from remarkable individual life events characterized by high emotional involvement and frequent rehearsal [1]. Travel journeys allow travellers to put aside their daily routines and immerse themselves in the world of the extraordinary. Travellers often use smartphones and other personal devices to capture these experiences, which yield digital footprints, and then share them via social media platforms [2]. Digital images and videos are the primary digital footprints that travellers deliberately create to capture their MMEs. While these footprints can be shared instantly via social media platforms, they also serve as personal memorabilia for savouring these delightful and remarkable life moments. Apart from sharing their digital footprints through social media, other savouring activities such as diary keeping [3] can enhance people's degrees of happiness and

thereby promote individual wellbeing [4], including personal growth and self-expression, problem solving, stress reduction, and critical thinking.

Despite the abundance of platforms that allow travellers to publish their digital footprints, surprisingly little research has been conducted on how these platforms might help travellers to narrate their MMEs. Although exploring the potential for conceptualising these platforms requires a human-centred (ethnographic) approach [5], in this study, we opted for the creation of paper-based diaries and observed how participants narrated their MMEs using their digital footprints. The results can be used to guide future designs of these digital platforms.

## 2 Literature review

Narratives and storytelling are effective ways for capturing travellers' experiences from an idiosyncratic perspective [6]. Despite the vividness and high emotional involvement of flashbulb memories, these memories are not especially accurate [1]. Therefore, digital footprints can play a role in substantiating their narratives. However, to date, there has been scant research on how these footprints can be used to create narratives that promote reminiscing of MMEs [7].

The term 'digital footprint' refers to the trail of data travellers create either passively or actively over the course of their journeys [8]. Passive digital footprints comprise data that is created without the travellers' knowledge, for example, GPS, record of Internet activities, etc. Active digital footprints, on the other hand, comprise data created deliberately by the travellers over the course of their journeys, for example, photos, videos, and online social interactions. These footprints are considered as one of the major sources of user-generated contents to be used in social online platforms and review sites. Current tourism studies reported in the literature have mostly investigated how this content is used by travellers to share their remarkable moments with their communities [2], identify potential business opportunities [9], and identify traveller behaviours and motivations [10]. Very few studies have explored how this user-generated content might encourage personal reflection and introspection. Nevertheless, a body of literature in positive psychology [11] highlights the fact that savouring one's past can foster individual well-being. Hence, helping people to savour their MMEs could prolong their feelings of happiness long after their journeys have ended [cf. , 12].

Thus, more than a simple recording of these experiences, the travel diary should encourage positive reminiscences of MMEs in various ways: by the active involvement in capturing them (e.g., taking a photo of a remarkable experience); by editing the digital footprints collected (e.g., creating a story of that experience); by sharing the story (e.g., share fleeting moments via social media platforms); and by reviewing the diary over time (e.g., savouring the experience through the digital memorabilia). Arguably, the travel diary has the potential to support these types of savouring activities and thereby promote human flourishing.

Given the potential of using a travel diary to support travellers' abilities to share and reminisce about their MMEs, facilitating the creation of their comprehensive travel diaries is essential for unleashing their potential to do so. Thus, this study explores

how travellers create personal narratives of their MMEs with the digital footprints they generated during their travels. The diary created by the traveller then becomes an item of memorabilia that aggregates the remarkable experiences to be shared and savoured at some later date. In so doing, the oral narrative can be used as a reference for comparison with the visual content.

The goal of this study is to understand the difference between how MMEs are recounted and the ways they are expressed through the creation of a visual diary. The differences between the oral narrative and the visual diary are identified with respect to MMEs by the examination of two aspects of storytelling: 1. the difference between oral and visual narratives of the same experience (i.e., MME) and 2. the creation of a means (i.e., paper prototype) to facilitate MME documentation and expression by travellers through the creation of a visual diary.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Understanding the narrative structure of MMEs

This study employed a co-design approach because the participants created their travel journals using the paper prototype tool created by the research team. Here, co-design refers to collective creativity (i.e., creativity that is shared by two or more people) as it is applied throughout the design process [13]. As such, the paper-based journal is a product of this collective creativity. Within a design process, the paper prototype is regarded as a generative tool that enables participants to create a visual narrative in which the quality of expression goes beyond the verbal [13]. Before creating their journals, participants were invited to talk about their experiences. These oral narrative sessions not only allowed participants to refresh their stories, but also allowed the research team to collect the participants' oral narratives for future analysis.

Narrative analysis has been used in a number of tourism studies to capture tourism experiences through storytelling [14]. The most popular of these are holistic and categorical analysis [15] and structural narrative analysis [16]. Since the goal of this study is to examine the difference between oral and visual narratives of the same experience, this study adopted the Labovian narrative analysis [16], which is a structural narrative model that consists of six storytelling elements:

- **Abstract:** a summary of the story;
- **Orientation:** the context of the story: time, place, behavioural situation and people involved;
- **Complicating action:** sequence of actions regarding what happened. As the core story component, a story may consist of multiple complication sections;
- **Evaluation:** elaboration and explanation of why the narrative is worth telling;
- **Resolution:** the way the story ends;
- **Coda:** narrator returns to the present time of the narration by indicating that the story has ended.

MMEs are a matter of subjective interpretation and the evaluation of what was felt and perceived, which Labov [16] regarded as the most important element in a narrative. In this study, the Labovian approach was used to effectively identify

important narratives in a transcript, reveal the specific structure of individual narratives [17], and facilitate a comparison of the oral narrative and visual diary of a particular event.

### 3.2 Developing the paper prototype

For the paper prototype, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis of current digital diary platforms to generate a list of features that would support participants to create a travel diary. The research team opted for a paper prototype because it allows participants to freely express themselves without any technical constraints or usability issues. Also, it offers a cost-effective way to explore user experience in the design process. The prototype referenced three categories of online diaries and social media platforms. The first consists of digital diaries (Fig. 1, upper left), including the applications Journi (<https://www.journiapp.com/>) and Day one (<https://dayoneapp.com/>). Diary features, such as reminders, counters, and connections with other platforms, encourage users to develop a journaling habit as well as to savour the diaries they have created. These platforms have also developed themes that specifically target tourism. For instance, they have features that allow users to enter flight information and collect stamps from each country they visited. When these applications are installed in personal devices, they aggregate other potentially valuable data for the diary, for example, weather information, distance travelled, itinerary and the like.

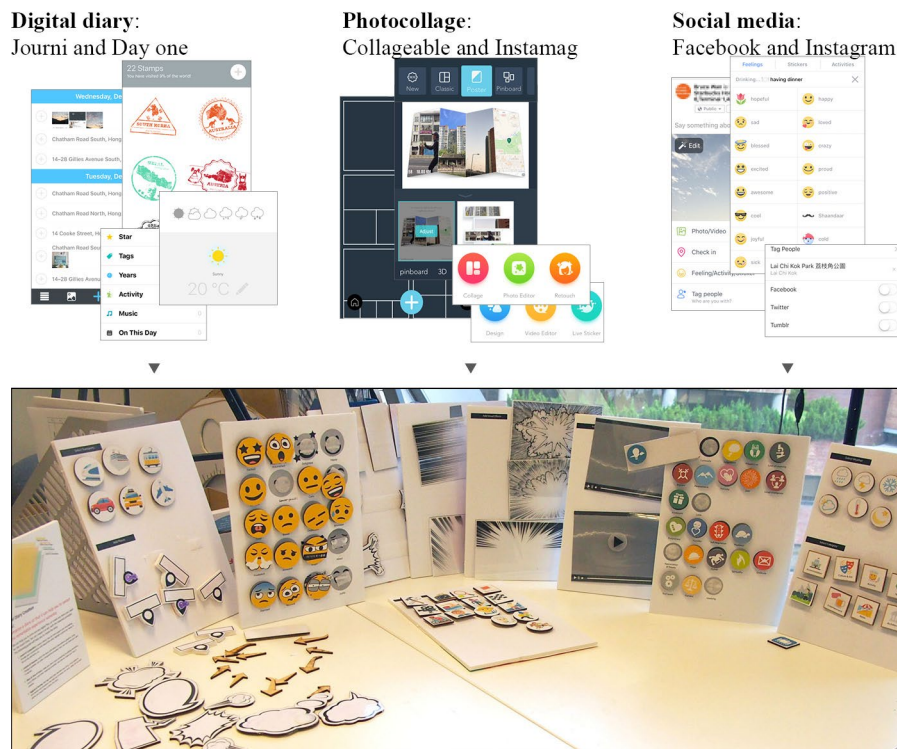


Fig. 1. Paper prototyping tool.

The second category consists of applications that allow users to create narratives using visual content, and photographic images in particular (Fig. 1, upper middle). Applications in this category include Collageable (<http://filterra.net/>) and Instamag (<https://fotoable.com/>). These applications enrich the traveller's visual storytelling by offering features that allow users to co-create with their photos via artistic filters, grids, thematic templates and the like. Here, the term co-creation refers to the "enactment of interactional creation across interactive-system environments (afforded by interactive platforms), entailing agencing engagements and structuring organizations" [18]. Once created, the collage can then be used in a journal or shared on a social media platform. The third category includes social media platforms (Fig. 1, upper right) such as Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/>). While these platforms include features that focus on online social interactions, such as the Like button, emoticons, and comments, they also allow users to express themselves both visually and textually.

A guide was provided to help participants compose their narratives with the stated goal being: "compose a diary that helps you to savour this remarkable experience over time". Also, this guide outlined the steps to be taken to inspire participants to make the best use of the prototype components: 1. layout and composition, 2. content and features, 3. effect and tone of voice, and 4. tagging and sharing. Lastly, a set of stationery was provided to ensure that participants were able to freely express themselves using both text and images. Overall, the final prototyping tool was designed to facilitate diary creation in three ways: 1. aggregating and guiding the structure of the narrative, 2. enriching the visual storytelling and 3. encouraging self-expression. The final diary prototyping tool (Fig. 1, bottom) was composed of the key features derived from these three categories.

### **3.3 Participant recruitment and data collection**

Data collection was conducted in three steps: participant recruitment, collection of MMEs, and the creation of travel diaries. A purposive sampling method was selected since, to be suitable, participants must have had travel experiences that were particularly memorable and meaningful to them. Furthermore, the participants were expected to provide photos, souvenirs, and other digital footprints they had created that relate to their experiences. Participants were recruited through poster announcements around a university campus and social media platforms. A total of 19 individuals (12 female and 7 males) responded to the recruitment request but only 15 ultimately participated in this study. Of the four disqualified participants, two could provide no digital footprints, and two did not attend the journal creation workshop. The final study comprised 15 individuals (11 female and 4 male), with an age range of 18–54 years, all of whom were Chinese. Although bias may exist, the focus of the study was on exploring differences in oral and visual experiential recounts.

The MMEs were collected via phone interviews and content was targeted that focused on anecdotes relating to their experiences during their travel journeys. Interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants and the stories collected from the participants were transcribed. During the diary creation workshop, the participants were asked to validate the correctness of the transcripts. Participants were then invited to create a travel diary that highlighted their MMEs using the digital

footprints they had generated during their journeys in such a way that the diary would support their reminiscences of these moments. The footprints mainly comprised photographs that had been printed prior to the diary creation workshop. Each workshop lasted for 60–90 minutes and the process was video recorded for later review by the research team, if needed (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Some components of the workshop (left) and a workshop participant in action (right).

Members of the research team played two roles: facilitators who assisted and encouraged participants to create their diaries and observers who collected data and conducted post-workshop interviews. The workshops were conducted in three steps: First, participants were invited to confirm the content of the transcript that had been obtained from the phone interviews conducted prior to the workshop. Then, the paper prototyping tool was introduced to the participants and, after a briefing session, a research team member assisted the participants to create their diaries with reference to their oral narratives. Lastly, participants were asked in post-workshop interviews to share how the travel diary might help them to reminisce about their experiences.

## 4 Data analysis

Next, the structure and content of the oral narratives (i.e., interviews) were compared with those of the visual diaries created by the participants (i.e., during the diary creation workshop). Labov's six basic storytelling components served as an effective framework for analysing the oral narratives of the participants. This analysis comprised three parts. In the first, the structures of the oral narratives were compared to those of the visual diaries. Secondly, based on those comparisons, three common patterns were identified in the visual diaries and oral narratives. Lastly, participant feedback regarding the diary creation was summarized. In the following sections, these findings are discussed and representative examples provided.

### 4.1 Comparison of oral narratives and visual diaries

First, the diary created by Tony is showcased (Table 1), because he used the diary contents and elements in different ways to support his visual storytelling. Labovian structural analysis was utilized to identify common patterns in the two diaries and to compare the similarities and differences in the oral and visual narratives. Tony had mixed feelings about an over-enthusiastic tourist guide. In the diary narrative, his

hand-drawn tourist guide occupied the central space, with photos of scenic spots placed on both sides. Excerpts from the interview transcript helped the research team to appreciate the differences between oral narratives and visual diaries. The transcript was coded in Labovian terms to highlight the structure and content of their experiences. The oral narratives included the six core elements that, in Labovian terms, are considered essential to storytelling (i.e., abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, and coda). Compared with other diaries (Fig. 3), which are richer in terms of the components used (e.g., with more visual effects and emoticons), Tony's visual diary was more "descriptive".

#### 4.2 Pattern 1 - Limited passage on introduction and reflection

Next, this study identified three recurring patterns in the oral narratives and visual diaries created by the participants. First, most of the visual diaries contained very limited passages relating to the Labovian elements of abstract, orientation, result and coda. However, these elements were present in most of the oral narratives. For example, the participant Shirley explained why she decided to travel to Japan (Fig. 3, left):

"In August 2016, I travelled to Japan for the first time. I had always wanted to visit Japan but was undecided about which city to go to... After an extensive information search, I chose Kyoto—a historical city that has preserved its authentic Japanese architecture—because traditional craftsmanship may disappear someday..." (excerpt from Shirley's interview)

Furthermore, she admitted that she had had little knowledge of traditional Japanese architecture and her visits to historic shrines and temples during this trip gave her the opportunity to appreciate this art. Notably, she was amazed by the ingenious craftsmanship of the Kiyomizu-dera Temple (as documented in her diary). This trip triggered her interest in discovering and appreciating traditional craftsmanship as a leisure hobby.





### 4.3 Pattern 2 - Storytelling focused on complicating actions and evaluations

The second pattern identified was the intertwined relationship between complicating actions and the evaluation of these actions. Using Lavbov's six narrative components, we found the complicating actions (e.g., highlights and turning points) to be primarily reflected in the photos provided by the participants for the workshop. In the visual diaries, evaluations (e.g., emoticon and dialogs) were superposed onto these photos. In contrast with the oral narrative, which is highly sequential [17], the visual diaries created by the study participants were collages of their remarkable experiences, although many narratives were arranged sequentially. For example, Jackie used all her journal space to describe an incident that occurred during her cultural exchange trip and left no room for the provision of any context of the incident (Fig. 3, middle). Kelly also described her graduation trip to Germany (Fig. 3, right).

"I made friends with a Taiwanese at the hostel where I was staying... we visited the highest peak Zugspitze and have become close friends since. I enjoyed the gorgeous scenery but was challenged by acrophobia. I learned how to overcome my fears thanks to her encouragement! It was a valuable lesson for me." (excerpt from Kelly's interview)

Kelly's visual diary consists of remarkable moments that include her climb up the mountain, her victory over fear, and enjoyable moments with her new friend. She used emoticons, tags and annotations to enrich her narrative. However, compared with her oral narrative, the visual diary lacked the same level of detail regarding her perceived experiences.



### 4.4 Pattern 3 – Creating new elements for storytelling

In creating a visual diary, the participant must provide photos and other memorabilia related to the remarkable events experienced. However, not every participant had these elements at hand, especially when these experiences were fleeting. Dorothy (Fig. 4, left), for instance, decided to draw the travel mates with whom she had had a remarkable experience. Karen highlighted the pulsating heart of the glass frog she found intriguing (Fig. 4, middle). Janet, on the other hand, made use of emoticons to create characters representing the people involved in her story (Fig. 4, right). Her MMEs related to the language barrier she had encountered in the south of Italy, where



she found there to be a significant cultural difference from other English-speaking countries:

“I realized that they (the Italians) speak very little English! One of my memorable experiences was when I was looking for a bus stop to go to the train station. We tried to ask a guard nearby, but this was in vain. Finally, we took a taxi, but the driver spoke very little English...” (excerpt from Janet’s interview)

To illustrate her frustration, she created three characters and highlighted the situation with emoticons and dialog boxes. We found participants to be creative in making use of the resources at their disposal when they perceived a need to create new elements (e.g., characters) for their storytelling.

#### **4.5 Participant feedback**

In the post-workshop interviews, the researcher was interested in answers to two key questions: 1. How do participants deal with the digital footprints they created during their journeys? 2. In what sense can the creation of a diary can help them to savour their experiences?

To answer the first question, most of the participants reported that they usually make little if any extra effort to organise their photos and videos, with the exception of Janet who reported that she thoroughly enjoys the photo collage creation process (with applications like Instamag, mentioned earlier) because this allows her to incorporate contextual information with her images. Other participants, in contrast, mostly use popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram for social sharing. However, participants were more creative and reflective when they considered the potential use of the diaries they had created, likely because the diaries enabled them to create a larger narrative space that included contextual information, sequences of events, and the emotions they experienced. Three outcomes were mentioned by the participants: gratitude and celebration, self-reflection, and future planning.

Participants expressed a deep sense of gratitude and celebration when reviewing their journeys, with the contents of their diaries reflecting the hospitality of their hosts, locals with whom they had interacted, and the friendships they had created. The second aspect, self-reflection, meant that participants were able to share how the MMEs documented in their diaries changed their attitudes, worldview, or self-awareness. More than simply reminiscing, a few participants also reported that the diary would inspire them to plan their future journeys because it helped them to preserve the vividness of their memories.

### **5 Discussion**

This study explored how individuals convey remarkable travel experiences through the creation of visual diaries as compared with oral narratives. The results provide insights for conceptualizing personal technologies that support travellers in capturing and reminiscing about their remarkable moments. A body of literature [11] has highlighted the fact that savouring our past can foster personal well-being. Therefore, this study explores how travellers reconstruct their experiences using the digital footprints they had created. Study participants were invited to share their MMEs and

to create visual travel diaries that illustrated these experiences, using the digital footprints they had created by photo, video, or other means during their journeys. A Labovian approach was used to analyse the oral narratives and compare the structures and contents of the visual diaries. Our results suggest that the visual diary can complement oral narratives, thereby enriching the digital footprints with emoticons, tags, visual effects, dialog boxes and the like to facilitate user self-expression. However, the visual diaries are also relatively fragmented and not easily understood if not accompanied by the oral narrative.

Compared with oral narratives, the participants' visual diaries mostly focused on specific moments in which the attention of the observer is primarily drawn to the photos. However, greater elaboration and detail were provided in the oral narratives. Furthermore, visual narratives seem to be more effective in conveying an overall appreciation (or impression) of the remarkable experiences (i.e., peak experience) encountered by the travellers. The visual diary also allows users to annotate their photos, and thus to transform the images and create visual compositions that enrich the narrative. Moreover, when photos were lacking, some users opted to create their own visual content (e.g., create characters, drawings, and diagrams). However, a few components were missing in these visual diaries, as compared with the oral narratives, i.e., the abstract, orientation, result and coda elements. Whereas the abstract and orientation elements provide information that help people to appreciate the context of the diary, the result and coda elements provide anchors by describing how the experiences had changed the lives of the narrators. Despite the associated positive potential, creating a travel diary is not yet a current practice.

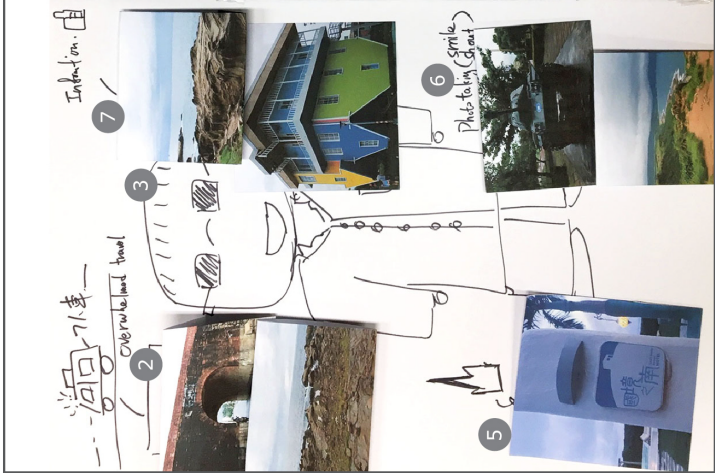
Based on these findings, diary designs must motivate and engage travellers in the creation of their diaries, for example, through gamification by which design strategies leverage people's innate desire for self-expression, self-reflection and celebration. Furthermore, diary designs are recommended that integrate components and guide people to structure their narratives, provide background information and situational context and facilitate reflection on the overall experience.

## **6 Conclusion and limitations**

With the widespread adoption of personal devices, digital footprints have become the main memorabilia that capture the remarkable experiences of travellers in their journeys. A travel diary can encourage people to "connect the dots" of their lives and thereby better appreciate these moments. The findings from this study suggest that personal technologies should be designed to engage, motivate and guide users to structure their narratives with digital footprints so that they can better share and savour their unique journeys.

Since MMEs are idiosyncratic and co-design workshops are very time-consuming, this study was restricted with respect to acquiring a larger sample size. Moreover, the digital footprints in this study included only active digital footprints (i.e., photos, videos and maps). Recommendations for future study include the exploration of design strategies that can trigger traveller engagement and thereby facilitate their construction of more holistic and comprehensive MME narratives.

**Acknowledgements** The author would like to thank all those who participated in this study. The study is supported by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Project no.: 1-ZE6B).

Table 1. Tony's travel diary		The Visual diary	
Comparison of oral narrative and visual diary			
<p>1 The story happened last year (2016) when I was traveling with three other friends to Tainan (in the south of Taiwan).</p> <p>2 Since this was our first visit to Tainan, we decided to hire a car with a guide (driver) who could bring us to visit various places.</p>	<p>1 <b>[Orientation]</b> Tony provided an introduction and background of his trip. However, this part was not elaborated upon in the diary.</p> <p>2 <b>[Orientation]</b> He further described the background as the abstract element of the experience. Without any photo of the driver, he decided to draw a picture of him.</p>		
<p>3 The experience was remarkable because of our cultural differences. We felt overwhelmed by the hospitality of the driver!</p>	<p>3 <b>[Abstract]</b> This abstract provided a snapshot of the experience and explained why the story was worth telling. He decided to put the driver at the center of the diary with the title "overwhelmed travel".</p>		
<p>4 During the journey, he kept introducing us to different scenic spots, whereas we had expected a more relaxed journey.</p> <p>5 The driver seemed to have a strong emotional attachment to mountains. He repeatedly urged us to visit a mountain that was a special landmark of the region. He was very disappointed when he realized that the mountain was covered in fog that day.</p>	<p>4 <b>[Complicating action &amp; Evaluation (external)]</b> The experience began with moments of unexpected frustration. He did not document this aspect in his diary.</p> <p>5 <b>[Complicating action]</b> Tony further elaborated upon the experience he had with the driver. The photo at bottom-left is one of the places the driver took him to have a view of the mountain.</p>		
<p>6 His reaction was funny to me because I had never seen someone behave like that. We were also frustrated when he urged us to take touristic photos...</p>	<p>6 <b>[Evaluation (external)]</b> The driver exhibited other odd behaviors which he found confusing. Again, he did not explicitly mention this in the diary.</p>		
<p>7 Ultimately, we found our driver to be funny! Despite his over-enthusiasm, he made good suggestions by bringing us to a museum on that rainy day. This trip allowed me to reflect on what type of tourist I wanted to be.</p>	<p>7 <b>[Evaluation &amp; resolution]</b> Tony appreciated the driver's good intention despite the odd experiences. His appreciation was expressed with the "thumbs-up" icon. The trip helped him to reflect on his own identity as a tourist, but he did not mention this in the diary.</p>		

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