What Do Travel and Philosophy Have in Common?
Excerpts from Pico Iver, “Why We Travel”

“for me the first great joy of traveling is simply the luxury of leaving all my beliefs and
certainties at home, and seeing everything I thought I knew in a different light, and from
a crooked angle. …the sovereign freedom of traveling comes from the fact that it whirls
you around and turns you upside down, and stands everything you took for granted on its
head.”

“...many of us travel not in search of answers, but of better questions. I, like many people,
tend to ask questions of the places I visit, and relish most the ones that ask the most
searching questions back of me.”

“…Camus…said that ‘what gives value to travel is fear’—disruption, in other words, (or
emancipation) from circumstance, and all the habits behind which we hide.”

“We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next, to find ourselves. We travel to
open our hearts and eyes and learn more about the world than our newspapers will
accommodate.”

“I travel in large part in search of hardship—both my own, which I want to feel, and
others’, which I need to see. Travel … guides us toward a better balance of wisdom and
compassion—of seeing the world clearly, and yet feeling it truly. For seeing without feeling
can obviously be uncaring; while feeling without seeing can be blind.”

“Abroad, we are wonderfully free of caste and job and standing. . . And precisely because
we are clarified in this way, and freed of inessential labels, we have the opportunity to
come into contact with more essential parts of ourselves (which may begin to explain why
we may feel most alive when far from home).”

“the great promise of it is that, traveling, we are ... able to return at moments to a younger
and a more open kind of self. Traveling is a way to reverse time, to a small extent, and
make a day last a year—or at least 45 hours—and traveling is an easy way of surrounding
ourselves, as in childhood, with what we cannot understand. . . . travel, for many of us, is a
quest for not just the unknown, but the unknowing; I, at least, travel in search of an
innocent eye that can return me to a more innocent self.”

“For if every true love affair can feel like a journey to a foreign country, where you can’t
quite speak the language, and you don’t know where you’re going, and you’re pulled ever
deeper into the inviting darkness, every trip to a foreign country can be a love affair,
where you’re left puzzling over who you are and whom you’ve fallen in love with. All the
great travel books are love stories, by some reckoning—from the Odyssey and the Aeneid
to the Divine Comedy and the New Testament—and all good trips are, like love, about being
carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder.”

“So travel, at heart, is just a quick way to keeping our minds mobile and awake. As
Santayana... wrote, 'There is wisdom in turning as often as possible from the familiar to
the unfamiliar; it keeps the mind nimble; it kills prejudice, and it fosters humor.'