

LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE: NOSTALGIC AND EXPENSIVE

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While most of today's 24/7 world seems to be speeding up, a growing number of the affluent among us are taking a road less traveled and slowing down.

One of the latest trends is to incorporate something labeled "slow" into their lives, from food and fashion, to design and travel - even sex. What does this mean? For one thing, the affluent are looking backwards to a nostalgic past – whether real or rosily imagined – for inspiration. You may call it the lifestyle equivalent of "comfort food." Those who are detouring along this rarified path fully expect to pay a premium to apply a touch of the brakes in everything they do.

Home-Grown, Handed-Down and Locavores

Some cultural anthropologists trace the beginnings of this burgeoning lifestyle slowdown to Rome's historic *Piazza di Spagna*. It was back in 1986 that the so-called "slow food" movement was born. Disdaining the spread of American chain restaurants and fast food, as they crossed the Atlantic and began to invade the Old World, adherents of the new credo focused once again on the fresh, the local and the artisanal. In so many ways, it was a back-to-the-future moment.

The idea was to take a U-turn back to the days of farmers' markets, handed-down recipes and, above all, leisurely dining with family and friends. Two decades later, products created in artisanal mode are coveted once more. Celebrity chefs turn to long communal tables in their newest outposts (Bar Boulud) and hotels and restaurants highlight the provider and provenance of products in their fanciest menus. Old-fashioned nose-to-tail dining on all parts of the beast is back in vogue, based on yesteryear's satisfying nostrum: waste not, want not.

This lifestyle reverse even permeates our everyday vocabulary. One use of speech derived from the slow food movement was recently awarded "Word of the Year" by the *New Oxford American Dictionary*. Are you a *locavore*? It means someone who cooks with and dines on locally produced foods.

Finding the Right Speed, Not the Fastest

The idea of a slow food movement bears implications beyond simple consumption. It encompasses an entirely new direction in how the affluent choose to live their lives. As writer Carl Honore describes in his best seller, *In Praise of Slow*, the global slow movement challenges the modern *cult of speed*. It's about how to live better in a fast-paced world by striking a balance. You find not the fastest speed, but the *right* speed.

The philosophy is already spawning the notion of Slow Cities, from the UK and Norway, to Brazil. Combustion engine vehicles are strictly limited, walking is encouraged, and mission statements talk about the "serenity" of everyday life and "reflective" living. In Japan, one city's mayor issued a "Take-It-Easy Declaration", encouraging residents to leave work early, take a walk with the family and talk to neighbors. Residents are gravitating towards Slow Homes where bigger isn't always better, quality prevails, design is individual, and care is taken to use healthy building materials, preferably recycled (such as fashionable, old woods). Residents may even engage in Slow Sex, choosing to emphasize spirituality and quality over quantity.

Out With Rock Stars, In With Farmers

In this new slower world, farmers become society's heroes. Owning farmland is a new status symbol. With *slow* in mind, a growing trend among second-home buyers is to invest in less urban escapes, such as green-pastured horse farms, ranches, vineyards or olive groves. Even in dense urban areas, such as Manhattan, city dwellers are turning their backyards into mini fruit orchards. In slow food vernacular, they are "co-producers" rather than "consumers." By becoming part of the process, they control the speed, escape homogeneity and enjoy a form of creative self-expression.

Enjoying the Journey

In its most glamorous heyday, travel was slow – of necessity, but also sometimes by design. It possessed sophistication, merely because only the affluent could afford it. Now, the trend is to recapture a bit of this nostalgic haze by savoring the journey once again, not just the destination. Slow leisure is the aim. Instead of pursuing yesterday's extreme adventures, today's slow travelers seek to spend their time contemplating, relaxing and reveling in doing very little or nothing. Witness the rebirth of popularity of transatlantic cruises, luxury trains, and the newest unconventional offering – The Manned Cloud airship. Under development by French designers Massaud

Studio, the 700 foot long airship will offer 40 passengers accommodation similar to that of a luxury cruise ship plus a library, gym and even terraces. With a top speed of 105 mph, it's about simply enjoying the view.

Old Foods Are New Again

For those seeking to experience slow foods abroad, culinary tourism, one of the hippest travel trends in 2008, will go well beyond cooking classes. Epicurean adventures will extend to agricultural villages where food is grown, to food lovers markets and to obscure food festivals in the four corners of the world. For example, the annual saffron harvest attracts crowds to Consuegra, Spain. Travelers forage with the pigs at the White Truffle Fair in Alba, Italy. In Cyprus, travelers learn the secrets of making the local Halloumi cheese or how to cure olives - a blending of two larger trends: gastronomy and enrichment travel.

Fashioned From the Fields

No longer a utopian or fringe movement, Slow Fashion is emerging from the uppermost echelons of fashion designers' elite. During New York's Fashion Week, renowned fashion critic Suzy Menkes observed, "We're getting beyond the idea of 'Look at me, look at me.' Fashion today is becoming more about calmness than flash." Classic silhouettes are making a comeback, some with a sustainable or green twist. This year's Academy Awards red carpet saw the appearance of a sustainable gown from designer Linda Loudermilk - a bespoke dress fashioned from hemp silk with organic cotton and "vintage findings" as accents. A trend for jewelry lovers: classic pearls are the new choice over diamonds; sustainable, understated and with shades of nostalgia. For those who want what *The New York Times* calls "Punk Meets Park Avenue" look, pearls are combined with contemporary chains, beads and estate brooches.