

# 11 Toy tourism

## From Travel Bugs to characters with wanderlust

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*Figure 11.1* Kewty-pie's customized Blythe dolls are all set for travel with their owner.

Source: Photo by Kewty-pie/Simlian (2016). Reproduced with permission.

### Introduction

Tourists become involved in or engage with material cultures because they find them useful (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006: 278–286). This chapter investigates the significance of playing with toys, or object play, in the context of tourism. Reflecting on the mutual relationship between tourism and play, Heynders and Van Nuenen (2014) noted the role of the tourist as player and the nature of tourism as a form of play. The chapter considers how character

toys are employed as useful objects in imaginative and leisurely tourist practices, focusing in particular on the toy play of mature players. We examine the phenomenon of travelling toys – toys that travel in the name of *toy tourism*, either as a part of amateur practices as their owners' companions (see Figure 11.1), single-handedly within hosting programmes or professionally organized toy travel agency services (Heljakka, 2013: 289), or within the game of geocaching.

Character toys (i.e. dolls, action figures, and soft toys) are often portable. For example, the toy company Kenner made their Star Wars figures pocket sized so that they could be carried around and played with wherever the player went (Geraghty, 1996: 213). Even the toy industry encourages toys to travel; for example, there are toys with backstories involving personality traits such as wanderlust (Heljakka, 2013). Moreover, toys are now supplied with accessories associated with human touristic practice, such as miniature cameras.

To examine how contemporary character toys activate the imagination and enable mobile toy play in adulthood, the present chapter explores emerging types of toy tourism through studies of players travelling with their toys, toys travelling by themselves (e.g. Travel Bugs in the context of geocaching), and toys travelling via organized toy travel agencies. Based on a thematic analysis of qualitative interviews and a survey with a toy playing audience – toy fans and geocachers – our aim was to illuminate the motivation behind travelling with toys or sending toys on travels and to contextualize toy tourism practices as a form of contemporary play within human travel and imagination.

In previous studies, the exploration of the various forms of toy mobility focused on non-corporeal elements of toy-related travel experiences, as in Robinson's (2014) research on experimental tourism involving vicarious (experienced through another) travelling with toys as mascots. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (online), a mascot is "a person or a thing that is supposed to bring good luck, especially linked to a particular organisation or an event". The contribution of this study is in highlighting the play-oriented practices of toy tourism that extend beyond the aspects of moving the toys from one location to another. The goal is to analyse the motivations of the toy players to engage with travelling toys, with a particular focus on creativity and contest as well as the relationships developed with the toy characters. Our assumption is that the relationships (human to toy/human to toy to human) established and strengthened through toy tourism anthropomorphize the toys, which acquire the status of trustees and travel companions beyond mere playthings or portable luck charms.

### **Photoplaying toy tourism with character toys**

Toy play, as a type of object play, is traditionally associated with children's utilization of toys and other materials in their play scenarios. Adult toy

players are most often perceived as collectors, but interaction with toys that have a face (i.e. character toys) is not confined to the activity of hunting, gathering, and organizing toys – in other words, building a collection.

Toy play is an activity enabled not only by the toys themselves but also by technologies that extend the playing; mobile technologies and digital platforms (e.g. social media activities) play a fundamental role in both the narrative dimension and goal-oriented elements of adult toy play in terms of documentation, sharing, and reciprocal communication between toys, their owners, and other players. New technologies and social media assist and support in cultivation of the toys' stories and add visibility to adult toy play. Specifically, our studies of toy tourism contest the idea of adult play as reactive (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Adult engagement and relationships with traveling toys include active interaction, creativity, and collective fantasizing. Key aspects of this shared toy play are in imagining, visualizing, and narrating the toys' journeys.

One critical domain of the tourist's imagination is the image – a mental visualization of some kind (Lean et al., 2014: 14). In the case of toys, the imagined is materialized visually, and practices of perceiving and photographing character toys intertwine with patterns of play. Mature audiences actively perform and document toy play in physical environments and then share the visual manifestations of their creative play (e.g. *photoplay*, toy photography, or toy-related videos) in digital playscapes such as Flickr, Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook. Photoplay is a new form of adult play (Heljakka, 2012, 2017; Heljakka et al., 2017) that Godwin (2015) referred to as “photostories” and categorized as “fannish fiction”. As Robinson (2014) reported, carrying a camera as well as the toy legitimizes the activity of adult toy play.

A significant part of the photoplay of adult toy players illustrates traveling with toys and the travel of toys – toy mobility, which is discussed here in relation to play with Travel Bugs and other characters with wanderlust that feature in toy tourism. In the context of tourism, the pictorial image is the most common type of contemporary souvenir (Gordon, 1986: 140). As mixtures of fantasies that feature actual touristic sites, toy-related and visual travel narratives draw inspiration from both popular media texts and other players' photoplay. In that sense, socially shared photoplay involving travelling toys can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of the souvenir – a combination of the nostalgic picture postcard and the social media hashtags that accompany it, as both a greeting and an invitation to play, addressed to a potentially infinite audience.

An early example of a photoplayer is the American fashion model Dare Wright (1914–2001), who became a toy photographer and children's author and was among the first photographers to use toys in a narrative, serial, and perhaps “avatarial” manner. Her first book, *The Lonely Doll*, was published in 1957 and developed into a series of “toy stories” featuring the doll Edith and two teddy bears called Mr. Bear and Jr. Bear (Heljakka, 2012, 2016). The mimetic potential of character toy mobility

in Dare Wright's early photoplay or in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's enigmatic 2001 film *Amélie*, like the images later posted by professional toy travel agencies, are obvious precursors to the photoplay of adult toy fans. In this way, the use value of character toys involved in toy tourism also depends on their photogenicity – oculo-centric preferences communicated in toy play. According to Robinson (2014: 162): “the very nature of taking a toy travelling is reliant on imaginative processes, and . . . the vicarious sharing and consumption of images is a vital component of the overall experience”. For example, toy players say that photographing the toys is just as important as the toys themselves. For some, the toys would not be travelled with if it were not possible to photograph them. Moreover, toy tourism involving photoplay is always performative, as it often happens in public places that are considered culturally or geographically relevant. For example, for some toy players, it is crucially important to photograph famous landmarks, such as the Colosseum in Rome, with toys.

## Methodology

Based on a qualitative approach, the research material includes interview data and survey responses in which toy fans and geocachers shared their experiences with other players of toy tourism on online platforms. The data were collected in seven in-depth interviews conducted face to face and via e-mail with participants from Finland, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, as well as from an international online survey ( $N = 45$ ) in 2017, including participants from Europe and North America. This material was then subjected to content analysis. Our goal was to understand the motivations of these players and to explore how toy tourism plays out. The interview and survey questions addressed imaginative, creative, and social toy play practices and the physical aspects of toy mobility – the journeys and personal histories of the Travel Bugs and other travelling toys, the relationships between the toys and their owners, and the practice of hosting toys sent on travels by their owners. The multimethod approach also included participatory observation and autoethnographic play – that is, we as researchers actively participated in toy tourism and geocaching practices, either travelling with the toys or sending them travelling.

The first part of our study looks at toy owners who either travel with their own toys or play with other people's toys through host programmes, cultivating the personalities of these toy companions during their trips. We begin by presenting examples of toy play related to the journeys of character toys, which travel in the context of both amateur and professional forms of toy tourism. We then move on to discuss the practices of players travelling with Travel Bugs in the context of geocaching. The second part of the study describes the motivations of the paediatric players and the ludic gamers, whose practices are, on the one hand, guided by similar interests and, on the other hand, who play toy tourism for different motivations.

## Paedic and ludic toy tourism: toys and “bugs” as travel companions

Playing with toys is often associated with more creative freedom than the playing of games. Engagement with character toys, like the playthings discussed in this chapter, is traditionally guided by the imaginative capacities of the player – their ability to narrate personalities, backstories, and dynamics between different toys and the worlds they inhabit. Games, in contrast, most often come with mechanics – predetermined rules for engagement, goals, and winning conditions to motivate the players.

Play theorist Roger Caillois (1958/1961) introduced a classification of games with four main rubrics – *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx* – depending on how the roles of competition, chance, or simulation present themselves in the games under scrutiny. For example, one may play football or chess (*agôn*); engage in games of chance, like roulette or a lottery (*alea*); take on the role of a character in play, such as a pirate (*mimicry*); or play in ways that bring the player into a state of dizziness and disorder (*ilinx*). Within each of the different forms of playing, games can also be placed on a continuum between two opposite poles. At one extreme, free improvisation is dominant. It manifests as a kind of uncontrolled fantasy referred to as *paidia*. At the opposite extreme is *ludus*, which requires a greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. We are interested in what ways playing with travelling toys reflects Caillois’ theoretical concepts of *paidia* and *ludus*, leaning on either creative or competitive forms of play. To scrutinize the various dimensions of toy tourism, our goal in the following is to analyse the emerging types of toy play patterns that range from fantasy-guided and free-form *paidia* to *ludus*, which resembles play patterns familiar from the context of gameplay.

In the first form of amateur toy tourism, toys travel with their owners in the name of free-form play. The number of toys travelling with their owner may vary depending on whether their owner is travelling for business or pleasure, as Kewty-pie (56 years) explained: “When I travel on work assignments, I bring a couple of my dolls or toys to keep me company. However, when I travel on holiday, I will bring a cabin bag full of dolls and toys with me”. Interviewee Les (42 years) said “I always take Murphy and Yewlee on ‘proper’ holidays” and described her bunny’s wanderlust as follows: “I took my Monchichi bunny to San Francisco to visit my brother because bunny always wanted to go there. He had a fab time”. In some cases, the toy may become the ultimate “decision maker” about the desired travel destination: “Some places I go only because I think the toy would enjoy it or if I think the toy could create a fun story about it” (Nancy, 35 years). “Adventurous” toys travel to places near and far, often with shared storytelling in mind. In this regard, Nancy talked about her soft toy, Yuuso: “He is very friendly and loves to share travel stories. I have had Yuuso with me on top of 6,000 m mountains, as well as on 14-hour multi-pitch climbs. He has even been in the cockpit of a passenger plane – in the pilot’s seat!”

In another form of amateur toy tourism, toys are sent out to travel with other players through non-professional hosting programmes. Our examples of this collaborative form of toy play include toys such as a customized Sylvanian Families “cheetah” named Damara DeWildt (Xara, 2016) and the Playmobil figures Hans and Paul the backpackers (n.d.). Both Damara and Hans and Paul have travelled around the world with the help of players who are not their owners. As interviewee Les explained, this play activity is driven *by players for players*: “I know of Toyvoyagers, a website where you can register a toy and post them to host and/or host toys yourself. I had two toys who travelled by post, and I had a great time hosting other people’s toys”.

Human players who host travelling toys belonging to other players take the responsibility of organizing valuable experiences for the toys and documenting them. Les described how her own toys have been taken to intriguing locations and how she has used her hometown to produce meaningful photoplay with the toys she has hosted: “My Yeti travelled to Rome and other places, and one of my gorillas went on a Girl Guides camp in Germany. I live in a famous historic town, so it was easy to send interesting photos of the toys I hosted”.

Besides relaying the creativity of other players in terms of employment of famous locations and production of clever photoplay in the name of paedic play, some owners of travelling toys have ludic – or game-like – goals, such as reaching a specific number of locations, for example, Damara, “a brave cheetah lady” who wanted to see the world (see Figure 11.2; Xara, 2010). According to the travel plan, Damara was to visit more than ten locations, but the trip remained unfinished at the start of 2016. Damara’s trip has taken her from her starting point in South Africa to the United States, Australia, England, and Finland (Xara, 2016). Further, as illustrated by Xara (2016: 17), toy tourism may include parallel projects besides capturing the character toys on camera, to be carried out while exploring the world: “The goal of Damara’s trip is to make friends with other Sylvanians and also to collect information on herbs and remedies, because in Lady Lollipop’s [the toy owner’s] story, Damara works as the healer of her home village, Rooibosch Hill [in South Africa]”. During her trip, Damara has tried geocaching, seen kangaroos, shopped at local shops, and seen many local sights.

In addition to amateur practitioners and hosts of toy tourism, there are companies that offer professional toy tourism services. Among these toy travel agencies, which first emerged in the early 2010s, the Barcelona Toy Travel agency and a Prague-based agency are no longer operating. However, Unagi Travel – Japan Travel Agency for Stuffed Animals (n.d.) – still offers tours and promises to “document the trip with photos”. One interviewee was aware of the service but was doubtful that the toys would be kept safe: “I’ve read about [toy travel agencies] in a magazine. But I would never dare to send my toys there in case something happened to them. There would need to be some good insurances for sure” (HanneleK, 52 years).



*Figure 11.2* Damara DeWildt, a Sylvanian Families “cheetah”, has visited Helsinki, Finland, hosted and photoplayed by Xara (2016).

Source: Reproduced with permission.

In parallel to toy tourism in the non-gaming context, toys known as Travel Bugs travel for ludic play within a location-based game in the context of geocaching. Geocaching is a form of digital treasure hunting in which players utilize global positioning system devices or specialized geocaching applications on smartphones to search for geocaches in various environments. Geocaching provides a more competitive platform for what is considered here as the ludic form of toy tourism. Geocaching is currently practised in 185 countries, with more than 10 million registered users on the Geocaching.com online service. Geocaching encourages mobile play in the context of these contemporary “treasure hunts” based on hints about the geocaches, such as coordinates, stories, and even poetical texts.

The geocache is often some form of a box containing a logbook in which each player must write their nickname and the date when they found the geocache. Players get points when they find a new geocache.

Geocaching includes a “game within a game” based on making Travel Bugs mobile. Each Travel Bug, often a character toy of some kind, has its own unique tracking number attached (see Figure 11.3), which is used

as proof that the player found the item. It also serves as a way of locating the Travel Bug's personal website, where each Bug has its own "diary" recording its movements. The aim is to pick up, drop off, and follow the trackable toys' journeys, and the information on each Travel Bug's website mirrors its real-world adventures. Geocachers who play with Travel Bugs and joined our study employed familiar terminology borrowed from the tourism industry. For example, we were told about a "hotel" provided by Finnish geocachers especially for Travel Bugs, and the Mae West Resort in the United States enables players to acquaint themselves with Travel Bug-related play patterns.

According to one of our interviewees, the "toyish" dimension of the goal-driven play in geocaching adds practical yet playful<sup>1</sup> and even trans-generational interest to the location-based game (meaning that individuals representing different generations play together): "[Travel Bugs] can be used to measure the trip that has been taken, and they may play a role in solving a mystery. They make geocaching more interesting and attract children to play geocaching" (C, female, 41–50 years).

The Travel Bugs' stories are developed through both written and visual storytelling: "If there is one particularly nice and sympathetic Travel Bug with me, I aim at writing long stories in the log book at each cache and take a lot of pictures" (Z, female, 31–40 years). The journeys taken with Travel Bugs are then shared online: "Sometimes, I take pictures and write about places I have been with the Travel Bug – at least in the Travel Bug's own log" (X, female, 31–40 years). In this way, it is possible to see how what initiated as ludic forms of play intertwine with paedic play. Moreover, the Travel Bugs as character toys are given similar values as the travelling toys outside of the geocaching game. For example, many Travel Bugs are described as trusted travel companions with magical powers: "A part of the Travel Bugs always travel with me in the backpack. [When I had difficulty finding a cache] I got a Voodoo doll as a TB to bring me luck" (A, female, 41–50 years).

### **Motivations: storytelling, parasocial relationships, and contest**

Next, we examine the motivational factors behind toy tourism that emerge through paedic and ludic forms of play. Robinson (2014) identified three relevant trends: anthropomorphizing the toys, making them visit famous landmarks, and displaying the photographer's capability and creativity (emphasizing the artistic aesthetic rather than the environment). Robinson characterized these representational trends in toy photography in terms of seeing the world through the toys' eyes.<sup>2</sup>

Our data suggest that both regular toys and Travel Bugs serve narrative purposes as their owners and other players develop their stories through socially shared photoplay and written narratives. Anthropomorphization,



visits to famous landmarks, and creativity of the photoplayer are all considered important facets of storytelling and motivators of players. Moreover, the interviewees accentuated the role of the toys as the main protagonists, the ambiance of certain travel destinations, and the sociality of play when meeting new “toyfriends” (both human and non-human) at airports.

As storytellers, the travelling toys first function as player extensions; for Kewty-pie, the toys act as stand-ins, taking her place in front of the camera:

I do not like to take pictures of myself, and my dolls and toys take my place in my travel pictures. They are like my picture journal of what I did during my travels. . . . I bring them out with me on my morning walks and stop to take pictures when I see a spot that looks great. Instead of taking a picture of myself in that suitable spot, I take pictures of my dolls in my place.

Interviewee Nancy had a similar agenda, which extended to the toy having its own social media presence: “The toy had a blog and has his own Facebook profile. . . . I always take pictures of my toy rather than myself”.

Second, players wish to photoplay their travelling toys in meaningful locations. “I don’t care so much about ‘tourist traps’ myself, but the dolls need to be taken to them”, Pinkkisfun (42 years) claimed. Motivations for Travel Bug photoplay may not be as demanding. For example, a female interviewee (A, 41–50 years) explained the social and communicative aspects of this game:

I always take my own Geo-Buddy – a plush key chain – with me when I travel abroad. At Earth caches, I take a photo of my Geo-Buddy and attach it in the cache and upload it to its own website. I also photograph the most important sights with Geo-Buddy. Once, at the security checkpoint at Heathrow airport, the clerk noticed my Geo-Buddy, which was hanging from my bag. S/he took a photograph of it with his/her mobile phone and logged it online.

Again, female Interviewee A. (41–50 years) said she practised toy photography in urban locations and at touristic sites and photoplayed Travel Bugs during different seasons to enhance the toys’ stories, “I photograph fine sights with my own Travel Bug. In Finland, I sometimes photograph Travel Bugs that come from abroad in snowy scenery. I have also photographed at airports, souvenir shops, metro stations (showing the name of the station), in the Czech Republic with a local plush toy etc”.

Players are also motivated by the relationships with their toyfriends; the relationship between a toy-playing adult and a character toy forms an

intimate bond that tells the tale of the plaything's imagined personality. Parasocial relationships formed with toys resemble the mental investment in the invisible friends of childhood, which now materialize in the form of friendships between adults and character toys with imagined personalities: "My toy is very important to me, kind of like an imaginary friend" (Nancy).

While toys are often considered "buddies", they may be more than that. Their owners point to the toys' capacity to represent their own personalities as well as being extensions of their owners' identities. On the one hand, as Sandy (43 years) put it, "The toys are their own personalities. They are characters separate from me that have their own thing"; Interviewee HanneleK stated, "The chimpanzee, is completely its own [personality]".

At times, the personalities of the travelling "toyfriends" may become complex and even demanding, as Pinkkisfun noted when describing her relationship with her doll Molly: "I may not bring Molly along, just because she is so obvious, because there would be a lot of places to photograph her in, and they would be time-consuming and challenging. On the other hand, a doll that does not have a personality is dull and uninspiring".

On the other hand, for everyday players, besides being aesthetically pleasing objects, character toys may also function as "mini-me's" or even as *avatarial* (in most cases, fantastic and idealized) extensions of oneself. Pinkkisfun reflected, "The toys are maybe more like extensions of myself who encourage me to do things that I otherwise would feel embarrassed about doing".

Nancy emphasized the role of humour in this play with identities: "This (plush toy) persona makes it possible to observe the world and share the notes in a more honest and funny way, so you could call it an alter ego of myself". Toy personalities provide opportunities to explore the player's own aspirations as well, as in the case of Interviewee Heidi (40 years): "Roberta [a Barbie doll, see Figure 11.4] is sort of my ideal me: an Italian *donna*. I can dress her differently than myself and change the body if needed!"

Finally, players are motivated by contest, the competitive aspect of toy tourism, where toys, like Travel Bugs, are given goals in terms of places to visit or the length of the journey. For instance, a female interviewee (A, 41–50 years) said: "In Budapest, I set off two Bugs to travel, which my children named and chose, and we followed their journeys over one year to see which one would cover more kilometres – that is, who wins the competition. The Travel Bugs are still travelling". Another participant reported owning a Travel Bug that has travelled along with the player "a total of 148.680 miles". Sometimes, as the survey responses in our study illustrate, multiple Travel Bugs are released simultaneously to race against each other. It is in this ludic type of playing toy tourism that Travel Bugs mimic gameplay the most.



Figure 11.3 A Travel Bug called Dr. Geocacher. Its mission is to travel around the world spreading the word about Pirita Ihamäki's 2015 doctoral thesis: *User Experience of Geocaching and Its Application in Tourism and Education*.

Source: Photo by second author.



*Figure 11.4* Heidi's Barbie doll has travelled to Rome to see the Colosseum.  
Source: Photo by Heidi Veräjämäntä (2016). Reproduced with permission.

## Conclusion

Character toys have for a long time been regarded as “paratexts” (Gray, 2010). However, toy personalities with their own backstories (both industry driven and player generated) have begun to claim the status of entities with their own agency and wanderlust. This marks a shift in thinking about

travelling toys from mascots (Robinson, 2014) to personalized objects, as avatarial extensions of players that are mobilized through various play practices.

Toy tourism encompasses all of the interdependent mobilities described by Urry (2007): corporeal travel, the physical movement of things, virtual travel, communicative travel, and imaginative travel. This chapter has explored travelling toys and toy tourism through object play (the physical movement of things) in the context of human leisure and tourism (corporeal travel) and through the activity of photoplay and storytelling (imaginative travel). Sometimes, toys travel to comfort their owners and to keep them company; in other cases, toys travel with their owners to meet up with other toyfriends. Sometimes, toys travel instead with hosts, who function as tour guides. Toys also travel with professional toy travel agencies (if their owners dare to send them out). We identified emerging types of toy tourism through organized toy travel agencies or host programmes (communicative travel) as well as toys travelling “by themselves” – for example, Travel Bugs in the context of geocaching (physical movement of things/virtual travel).

First, our studies of travelling toys reveal the dual nature of toy tourism as a play practice: toys become mobile through the practices of both toy players and gamers. Based on our findings, we suggest that 21st-century toy tourism can be categorized in terms of Caillois’ (1958/1961) distinction between paedic and ludic forms of play. Drawing on Caillois’ theory, it is possible to understand how the toy tourism of amateur toy hosts and practitioners – or rather, everyday players (Heljakka, 2013) – relies on creative and imaginative practices that develop the personalities of the toy characters in the name of open-ended paedic play. In contrast, the practices of geocachers lean more towards a ludic domain of play – that is, goal oriented and competitive in nature.

Second, the findings presented in the chapter highlight the common practice of toy tourism with character toys shared by paedic and ludic players. While the travelling toys seem to become mobilized by their players with different motivations, such as storytelling, parasocial relationships, or contest, in mind, their players are similarly interested in documenting and sharing their toys’ journeys. The travel stories of toy characters result from the players’ collective imaginings around the toys’ personalities and ambitions cultivated during their journeys. According to our studies, the portability of character toys may lead to creative photoplay within the public sphere of touristic sites. Functioning as vehicles for creative tourism practices, toys visit popular touristic sites and become “immortalised” there through photoplay, for reasons that relate either to interpersonal storytelling or to intrapersonal sharing of their stories. By becoming anthropomorphized through creatively cultivated and socially shared photoplay and besides acting as protagonists that partake in paedic or ludic play, toys function as stand-ins, extensions, or avatars of their owners. Furthermore, toys also travel to practise their own tourist gaze (Urry, 1990), represented by photoplay as seen through the (camera) lens of the toy through photoplay.

In taking toys to touristic locations and iconic sites (see Chapters 13, 14, and 15 in this volume for the significance of visiting famous places), the player playfully enhances their own experience of the place, which will live on through photoplay and storytelling as documented and potentially shared play. As toy players superimpose layers of fantastic narratives on touristic landscapes and landmarks, toy tourism turns touristic sites and ordinary spaces into creative playgrounds where fiction, fantasy, and factual geospace intersect. In many cases, travelling with toys adds to the possibilities of being creative; as interviewee Les put it, “I think that my imagination with toys is more of a creative expression. Like a writer or an artist, it is escapism but also allows me to engage with the world around me in a different way. The toys add spice and purpose to an outing”. Just like the fan pilgrim’s reading of a city, the toy tourist’s playful engagement with a place “can transform even ugly places into sites of wonder and worship” (Brooker, 2007: 434), allowing the player to escape from normal routines, structures, and priorities in an expression of playful liberation. In this way, toy tourism of the 21st century is both oculocentric as well as a mobile and legitimate play activity for adults.

As illustrated in the chapter at hand, motivations to send toys travelling range across solitary and social forms of toy tourism, encompassing personal (identity) play between toy owner and toy companion and social (game) play between a network of players. While the intrapersonal imagination (owner to toy) supports the paedie aspects of play through cultivation of parasocial or avatarial storytelling, interpersonal imaginings orientate players towards socially shared storytelling about the toys’ travel adventures and the ludic dimensions of toy tourism, such as collective and game-like playing, to advance the specific goals of a travelling toy such as a Travel Bug. In this way, contest intertwines with creative play – ludic toy tourism with Travel Bugs also includes imaginative or paedie aspects; the players who joined our survey reported conducting both photoplay and written stories for the Bugs.

In sum, toy tourism is a play activity largely supported by the players’ imagination, creativity, and shared storytelling that develops from free-form play practices of players travelling with their toys to amateur toy hosting programmes and from more structured and goal-driven play with Travel Bugs in the context of geocaching and professional toy tourism services.

In addition to accentuating patterns of movement among human tourists, character toys, and Travel Bugs with wanderlust, toy tourism makes adult interaction with toys more visible. For that reason, playing toy tourism in any of its various paedie or ludic forms and as presented in our suggested new typology of toy tourism (see Figure 11.5) is not just about turning inward to the intimacy of one’s own imagination and story worlds or to mobile object relations with toys but, as interviewee Les further explained, towards the actual world, other players, and “living with your eyes open”.

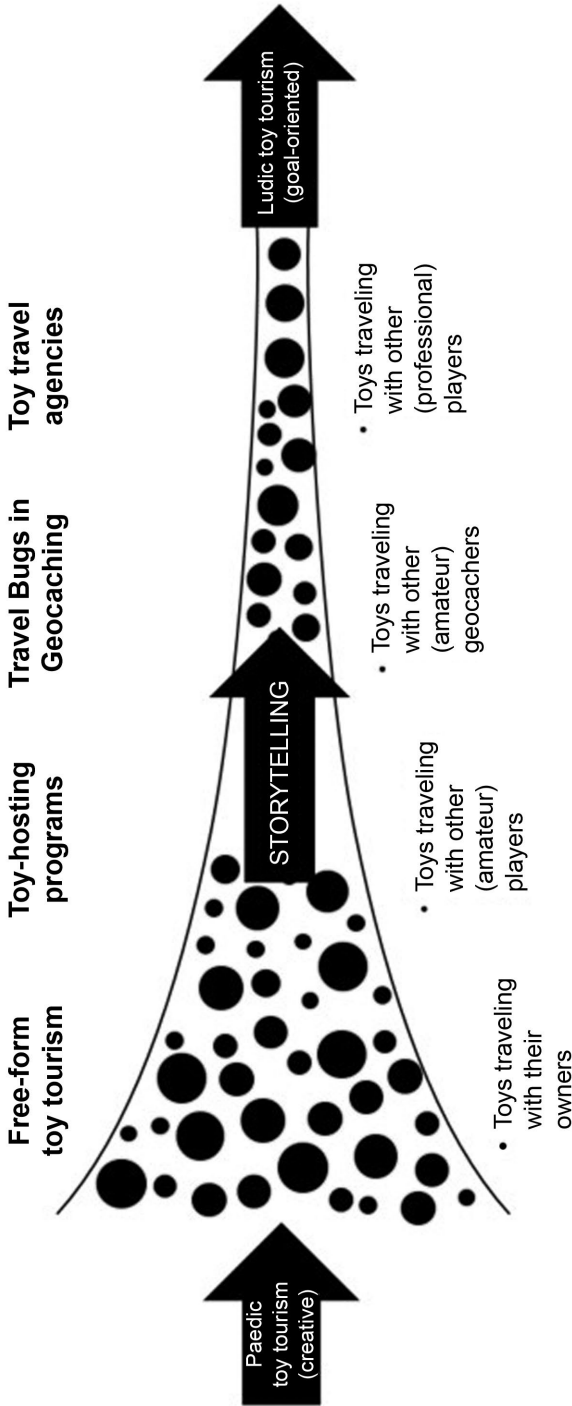


Figure 11.5 A typology of toy tourism: From paedic to ludic play practices.

Source: Design by authors.

## Notes

- 1 In previous research, “playfulness” has been associated with individuals characterized, for example, by spontaneity and exuberance (see Sutton-Smith, 2017: 152).
- 2 For example, many toy characters from the Barbie and LEGO series now come equipped with miniature toy cameras.

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