

Sightseeing: Describing The Most Amazing Thing You Ever Saw

“Don't go near Toby's office, he just came back from vacation and he's got his photos with him.”
“Oh no, not vacation photos!” (As a reminder, if you learned British English, you might use the word 'holiday' where I say 'vacation.' They mean the same thing.)

It's funny: many of us think it's boring to listen to someone else talk about their vacation. But, when we go on vacation it's a different story altogether. We bring our photos and postcards to work and to our family and we're ready to start talking about just how amazing everything was.

'**Amazing**' is a word that you hear a lot when people talk about vacations: it should mean something that you can't take your eyes off of or something that you can't understand. But, we use it now as a word that means 'very good' or 'very cool' or 'I couldn't believe my eyes!' “The whole trip was just amazing.” “Everything about Berlin was amazing.” Or “there is a fortress near Dresden that is simply amazing.”

The amazing thing about people who talk about their vacations is that there are so many 'big' words that people use to say something was 'good' or 'big.' I think it's because I say my apartment (70m²) is 'big.' When I see the Colosseum in Rome, I want a word that means that it's much bigger than just seventy square meters!

This week, we're going to talk about some of these words. But first, let's try an exercise without any preparation:

Pre-Writing

At the end of the week, I'll ask you to write about the most amazing thing you ever saw while traveling. For now, though, don't think of *your* vacation, think of another person's. Imagine that someone came to your hometown on vacation. What would they love about your hometown? What's amazing? Is there anything they wouldn't like? (Remember, for things that they don't like, you might want to use last week's complaint vocabulary.)

Take a minute or two and write down what you think someone else would say about your hometown. I'm from a very small town in the U.S. named Towanda. If someone came to Towanda on vacation, here's what I think they would write:

I wish you guys could be here. You'd love this place. It's small and relaxed, but there are a few really nice places to eat and everyone is very friendly. When I tell them I'm from Germany, they always ask why I'd come here! I tell them the river is beautiful and there is some great hiking in the parks near here. There are some amazing views!

What do you think? Is that anything like what you'd write if you came to a small town on vacation? How did your writing turn out? Please share it in the comments!

To get you ready for talking about vacations, we're going to learn some words that all mean something close to 'amazing.' These are all very positive words, but they have slightly different meanings.

Vocabulary

Breathtaking: Imagine you see something and it's so beautiful—or so terrible—that you forget to breathe for just one moment. It's breathtaking. (It 'takes your breath.')

You'll hear people describe a view as breathtaking, or an old building as breathtaking. If you ever watch a stunt man jump fifteen cars on his motorcycle, you'll know what breathtaking is.

Incredible: Have you ever seen something and—even though you were looking at it—had a hard time believing it was possible? Maybe it's the stunt man with the **breathtaking** stunt from the last example, or it's a giant church that you know was built by hand. If it's hard to believe, it's incredible. Some buildings are incredible, or maybe some food is incredibly good. Of course, incredible isn't always good: your hotel room can be so dirty that it's incredible.

Stunning: Have you ever talked to someone who stopped talking in the middle of a sentence because he was concentrated on a woman walking by? When something is so beautiful—or so expensive, or anything else—that you stop thinking for a moment, it's stunning. Sometimes art is stunning: you see it and for the first few moments, you can't even speak it's so good. Or a surprise can be stunning: you're so surprised you don't know what to say. Anything it takes your brain a while to process is stunning.

Gorgeous: We use the word 'beautiful' a lot. What do you say when something—or someone—is *more* than beautiful? It's gorgeous. I hear that Tuscany in Italy is gorgeous: it's one of the places I want to visit. I think that villages in the Alps are gorgeous and, of course, my wife is gorgeous, too! Any time that the word 'beautiful' just doesn't seem to be enough to say what you mean, you can use the word gorgeous.