

WHEN THE BEST MINDS WANDER

WANDERLUST: Real Life Tales of Adventure and Romance

Edited by Don George. Forward by Pico Iyer.

Reviewed by Richard Taylor, for *The Citizen's Weekly Books*, Feb. 4, 2001

A long time ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson advised that, "Travelling is a fool's paradise." In the information age, nothing has changed. Real adventure and authenticity are hard to come by, so sometimes you have to go on a quest. Most of the 40 published gems in *Wanderlust* originally appeared on the travel site of Salon.com: www.salon.com/travel/.

What you get here is a whole world of travel in a sumptuous little book you can read on the bus, and even take to bed. Big name writers like Jan Morris, Peter Mayle, Carlos Fuentes and Isabel Allende mingle with lesser-known travellers who write.

Their accounts range from the delightful, sensual evocation of place to the scary life-and-death of real adventure. The lighter pieces balance the darker ones, on the whole, though inadvertently the juxtaposition can be absurd. Dawn McKeen's "Inside Colombia" explores a beautiful country whose ugly drug trade and civil war have killed more than 35,000 people in the last decade, while Peter Mayle's "Dangers of Provence" rambles jauntily on about impatient French drivers and a host's terrible discomfort about house guests who linger too long.

After years of travelling and partying in the Far East, Karl Taro Greenfeld is on a writing assignment to do a piece on the smug, Ecstasy-swallowing culture of young travellers who wander the "circuit" from Tokyo, Bangkok and Nepal, carving out a decadent, hedonistic lifestyle. Being a drunk, drug-addicted member of the e-generation himself, he infiltrates these self-centred, jaded international ravers to write "Fear, Drugs and Soccer in Asia." Disillusioned with aimless wandering, he falls back on his first love. Having played pick-up games of soccer all over the world, he realizes that the game reveals character and intellect, and provides a brief glimpse into your soul.

Wendy Belcher rightly asserts in *Out of Africa* that travel writers are romantics. All of these writers are dreamers who go looking for stories,

not knowing how they are going to end. Their biggest fear is that the locals will think they are tourists. (Tourists leave home to escape the world, while travellers leave home to experience the world.) So they go incognito. Even a partial list of evocative titles may be enough to send most readers on a soulful journey of discovery: "On the Amazon," "Naxos Nights," "Sleeping With Elephants," "Where the Hula God Lives," "How to Buy a Turkish Rug," "Hog Heaven: At the Memphis World Barbecue." The Best travel pieces reveal the magic of a new place and our endless fascination with other cultures, but they also tell us a lot about ourselves. Jan Morris's succinct, thoughtful piece, "The Meaning of Gdansk" concludes with a line that might be a great epigraph to travel with: "Truth rides above hallucination, and always wins in the end."

*Richard Taylor, who teaches literature at Carleton University, will publish "Robert Louis Stevenson's Dream of Islands" in the travel anthology *Literary Trips II*.*