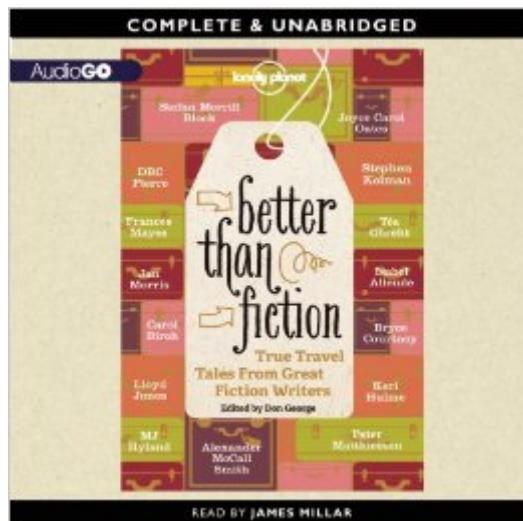


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Better Than Fiction: True Travel Tales From Great Fiction Writers



Synopsis

A collection of original travel stories told by some of the world's best novelists, including: Isabel Allende, Peter Matthiessen, Alexander McCall Smith, Joyce Carol Oates, Tea Obreht, D.B.C. Pierre, and more.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This was a very entertaining and well-selected collection of short stories from the more able writers of our day. Since I am a lifelong writer and traveler, I was intrigued by the initial intent of the book. Also being a fan of Alexander McCall Smith's excellent prose, I thought that his desire to publish a special selection of travel stories would be worth the read. I was not disappointed. Mostly, I loved the various and unusual perspectives that the writers wove into their tales. It gave me an insight into what their longer works may be like. From the author introductions, previous to each story, I gleaned a long list of possible, future reading titles. So now I can explore those writers' works that were heretofore unknown to me. Travel writing can be rather dull, in that B follows C action; and then comes C place, and then "I did this", which is D; and so on, as tourist observations might describe. But the skill of the writers, in this particular anthology, was masterful and very entertaining. For me, meaningful travel, not being a tourist, should take one along a path and not toward an intended destination. These travel stories did that for me. The images of the travel are well-embodied in these tales of the road. This was a very worthwhile book.

Travel. What does it mean? Is it going to the National Parks in the rear of my parent's station

wagon? Well. yeah... What about sunny Hawaii? Yes again.. What about a job in Antarctica? Yes again! In reality the concept of travel encompasses so much more than just 'vacation' that we look forward to two weeks out of every year. Each of the over thirty stories that make up this book explore destination as varied as an ice bound camp in Alaska to Tahiti. You travel along with the travel guides (instead of writers) who bring you along as a passenger on their jaunts. The stories are incredibly different as befits the idea of travel. You might not love every place you visit. You need a sense of adventure to travel. You don't just want the same old thing. But it's still fun to go. Experience the unexpected. I'm glad I did!

This collection of true tales are a great example of the power of story. Just the right length to share an experience and draw some meaning from it. Entertaining and inspiring. It gave me two new authors to read (Gemmell and Kelman) and stories from some favorites (Lloyd and Courtenay to name just two). Also motivates me to write about my own experiences.

I particularly liked being introduced to the novel delights of *Huaxi Watermill* by Arnold Zable. The scenes transported me to an exotic location which I may never be able to visit in the flesh and the style was almost conversational. This is true of many of the travel stories and part of the attraction for me was the narration in the first person, so that I felt I was living alongside the authors in their retelling of real travel experiences they found remarkable. However, I was sometimes confused on finding that some contributors were unsure whether they were relating travel memorabilia or spinning fiction. Yes, it was wonderful to have all the different styles of writing but I wonder whether the editor's brief had been strong enough to ensure that there is a clear distinction between a travelogue, a series of diary entries or travel masquerading as fiction. Even so, I wouldn't want to detract for a minute from the very real charm of many of the threads of experience drawn often so lovingly by writers who conveyed a sense of nostalgia and atmosphere.

In my opinion, this is not the best collection of travel essays, or even a particularly good collection. Most of them emphasize unpleasant places or bad experiences. Many of the authors are from Australia and New Zealand.

Contains stories from many different authors, new and old, who cherished the inspiration that travel can bring. Really well written stories and a smoothly compiled anthology. Great gift for writers with a wanderlust!

I usually don't like writing smack about another author but these stories were boring. Since the writers are all fiction writers you'd expect some interesting writing. Not so. I tried so many times picking it up and reading another story. I spent about \$14 plus shipping so I really hated tossing it. There are too many great authors out there, choose one of them!

I generally enjoy travel writing and have, at times, found they have inspired me to visit places which I would not otherwise have thought about. I remember reading an excellent book Investment Biker: Around the World with Jim Rogers, many years ago. He wrote about Samarkand in Uzbekistan very positively and as a result we visited this fantastic destination. These stories are quite short and average about 10 pages or so each. This is something of a double edged sword as the writer does not have time to develop their description of the place they are writing about in much detail. The tendency therefore seems to be that they describe a specific and unusual event that they witnessed or revisit a place that, perhaps they had enjoyed travelling to many years before. However, clearly with such short offerings there is not much scope for the author to get bogged down too much. I found most of these short tales interesting, but I cannot say that I was particularly inspired to visit anywhere new as a result. However, where I had personally previously visited the country I did find it enjoyable to read about places which I already knew, Berlin being an example. There seemed to be an American bias with a number of stories of coming of age type travels of young Americans. Lonely Planet have expanded the scope of their offerings of late over and above the classic travel guides on which they have built their reputation. Recent publications have included large, coffee table type books to relatively modest offerings like this particular one and to my mind these ventures have been of varying success. However, I did enjoy reading many of these stories, appropriately enough, whilst I was on a long plane flight.

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