



The Best American Travel Writing 2003

Ian Frazier (Editor) , Jason Wilson (Series Editor)

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Since its inception in 1915, the Best American series has become the premier annual showcase for the country's finest short fiction and nonfiction. For each volume, a series editor reads pieces from hundred of periodicals, then selects between fifty and a hundred outstanding works. That selection is pared down to the twenty or so very best pieces by a guest editor who is widely recognized as a leading writer in his or her field. This unique system has helped make the Best American series the most respected -- and most popular -- of its kind.

More and more readers are discovering the pleasures of armchair travel through the hugely successful Best American Travel Writing, now in its fourth adventurous year. Journey through the 2003 volume from Route 66 to the Arctic; go deep into Poland's Tatra Mountains and through the wildest jungle in Congo. Selections this year are from equally far-flung sources, including Outside, Food & Wine, National Geographic Adventure, Potpourri, and The New Yorker.

Rebecca Barry Peter Canby Christopher Hitchens Kira Salak Andrew Solomon William T. Vollmann

The Best American Travel Writing 2003 Details

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Carol says

It was more of a social commentary than a travel book. Not really what I expected. After reading these stories, I felt depressed. If you wish to learn about all the terrible things humans do to the environment and each other throughout the world, I highly recommend this book. Definitely not light reading.

Bridgette Lehrer says

For the first ever with this series, it was terrible. I did not like any of the passages. Usually the editor selects at least a few interesting articles, but I did not read any all the way through. This one can be missed.

Darusha Wehm says

A fantastic and eclectic mix of travel tales from partying in Paris with P. Diddy to kayaking to Timbuktu in the wilds of Africa, these stories touch the core of why we travel. A great read for travelers and those who dream of travel alike.

Bethany Woodson says

Well first I want to say that there was a couple of stories from this book I really liked, unfortunately they are largely overshadowed by some other not so interesting stories and some pretty crappy editing.

I don't understand why the editor just put the stories in alphabetical order by the authors name rather than ANY OTHER ORDER but yikes. Geographical would have been better or by general subject matter, literally anything resembling a narrative would have been better.

One story compared to the Hindu Kush mountains to a vagina, several read more like some sort of campaign speech, one was about P. Diddy at fashion week (and while interesting) was about 1% about travel and probably belongs in E! Magazine. One story was about credit cards and Wilmington, Delaware...I assume I've made my point. Bleh.

A says

The Despair of Art Deco by Geoff Dyer started out this anthology, and I did like Lost in the Arctic by Lawrence Millman, as well. But it went down hill from there... although I also liked The Happiest Man in Cuba by Rebecca Barry. I can't really recommend this group of stories.

Travel writing should be interesting. Most of this seemed on the boring side, and there was enough self-centeredness in the writing that didn't help.

Cheryl says

A nice collection of all kinds of travel bits from a solo kayak expedition up a river in Africa to trip on Route 66 to a trip to visit the issuers of America's credit cards in Delaware. Given that the collection is now more than a dozen years old, I found it interesting how much of it seemed topical. I was particularly interested in the discussion of the effects of pollution in many areas and other ecological issues, including California's accidental desert lake the Salton Sea and the disappearance of the Aral Sea under the Soviets and the succeeding governments in the region.

Dan Tasse says

Really good! I love travel stories. And the people who write these are not writing "I took a vacation to the caribbean"; they've gone to the ends of the earth and the hearts of jungles for all sorts of reasons. Got this at a thrift store; what a good buy.

Beth says

Absorbing this in bits and chunks when I can't sleep, and am enjoying the great variety of writing styles and locations (from dingy homestays in modern Cuba, to traveling on the Concorde with Sean Puffy Combs, to visiting a Polish historic site and determining Pope John Paul II to be a daredevil skier by the condition of his skis on display)

Mitchell says

Each year (I usually wait for a used version on amazon) I pick up a copy of The Best American Travel Writing series. And each year there is a different editor, which for this purpose means a different person choosing the stories. And that is what makes all the difference. Being a little behind, I just finished reading 2003 Best American Travel Writing ed. by Iam Frazier.

I have to say that the 2002 version was edited by Frances Mayes most famous for Under The Tuscan Sun and both of these years have left a lot to be desired. They are too topical, too much like the editors clipped the stories for their own benefit. Too much like their own writings.

If anything, travel stories should expose the reader to diversity. After all, isn't that one of the reasons we read them ... since we can't be traveling everywhere ourselves, we use the stories, the genre, to provide us with a way of traveling without incurring the expense or taking time off from our jobs.

An editor should have the audience in mind, not just pick what are his or her favorites. And in the case of this series, at least for 2002 and 2003, they did not do their jobs as editors.

With all that said, there are still some very good stories in the 2003 book and I will probably continue to read the series (and actually I think I've already read the 2004 book and the 2005 one is on my shelf).

Erin says

I love these collections of travel writing! This volume is a particularly good one. My favorites included "What Happened to Uncle Schmiel?" by Daniel Mendelsohn (which actually made me cry) and "Eternal Winter" by Tom Bissell about the disappearance of the Aral Sea. Each story gave a unique insight into a particular place and I found the collection inspiring.

Sissy says

I found this book in a free pile and was excited because I thought the summery cover was beckoning me to exotic summery type places.

It was not beckoning me to islands and palms but bizarre marginally travel related tales, the best of which was about a free tour of a Japanese nuclear plant. I also enjoyed the one about JP2 skiing but again it odd just like the entire collection.

Someone please explain to me how the Puff Daddy selection was travel writing?

Tonya says

I would say out of the twenty stories only two were actually about travel. Most seemed to be making points about environmental, political and social issues - which is perfectly fine, but don't call it a book about travel. Most of the writing was great, the articles well written and some even interesting, but I was hoping for stories about cities that were positive, something fun. These were down-right depressing.

Oh well...

Heather says

The vast majority of these essays were focused more on political/environmental types of issues that are obviously close to the editors hearts, but it wasn't what I was expecting from a travel writing anthology. While most of the selections were well-written, I think I might have enjoyed each one more had I read it standing alone and not as part of an anthology. Put together, the repetition of general topics made them seem redundant and somewhat dull.

Sarah says

I can usually count on the "Best American" series for interesting essays and have been pleased with other of

the travel writing anthologies but this one fell short for me. I listened to the audio edition of the compilation and found the major drawback to be the readers. Some of the writers read their own pieces, most in a kind of timid monotone. None of the readers drew me into the writing and the worst was Ian Frazier himself. For such an accomplished writer he's a surprisingly terrible reader. His combination of over annunciation and tepid presentation came off like a very stiff and dorky drivers' ed instructor reading the manual aloud to a group of dead-bored teenagers. I fear that the essays he read might have been better than I'm giving them credit for, but I just couldn't get past his reading style.

Heidi says

I only read Rebecca Barry's "The Happiest Man in Cuba" because I love Love LOVED her memoir Recipes for a Beautiful Life. Wonderful essay!

Great read before falling asleep to the sound of a train going through my small town.
