



My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile

Isabel Allende

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Isabel Allende's first memory of Chile is of a house she never knew. The "large old house" on the Calle Cueto, where her mother was born and which her grandfather evoked so frequently that Isabel felt as if she had lived there, became the protagonist of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*. It appears again at the beginning of Allende's playful, seductively compelling memoir *My Invented Country*, and leads us into this gifted writer's world.

Here are the almost mythic figures of a Chilean family -- grandparents and great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends -- with whom readers of Allende's fiction will feel immediately at home. And here, too, is an unforgettable portrait of a charming, idiosyncratic Chilean people with a violent history and an indomitable spirit. Although she claims to have been an outsider in her native land -- "I never fit in anywhere, not into my family, my social class, or the religion fate bestowed on me" -- Isabel Allende carries with her even today the mark of the politics, myth, and magic of her homeland. In *My Invented County*, she explores the role of memory and nostalgia in shaping her life, her books, and that most intimate connection to her place of origin.

Two life-altering events inflect the peripatetic narration of this book: The military coup and violent death of her uncle, Salvador Allende Gossens, on September 11, 1973, sent her into exile and transformed her into a writer. The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, on her newly adopted homeland, the United States, brought forth from Allende an overdue acknowledgment that she had indeed left home. *My Invented Country*, whose structure mimics the workings of memory itself, ranges back and forth across that distance accrued between the author's past and present lives. It speaks compellingly to immigrants, and to all of us, who try to retain a coherent inner life in a world full of contradictions.

My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile Details

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From Reader Review My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile for online ebook

Jim says

Invented Country, yes. But Nostalgic Journey Through Chile? Not really. My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile is more than anything else an autobiography of a life fragmented by years of exile due to the violence of the Pinochet regime. In addition, the (probably) murdered left-leaning ex-president, Salvador Allende Gossens, was a favorite relative of hers. Isabel Allende's Chile is primarily in her heart.

Her first book, **House of the Spirits**, was written while she was living in Venezuela, about which she writes:

If someone had asked what it was about, I would have said that it was an attempt to recapture my lost country, to reunite my scattered family, to revive the dead and preserve their memories, which were beginning to be blown away in the whirlwind of exile.

Curiously, this is a very exact description also of **My Invented Country**.

I had hoped to read some background about Chile for a projected trip later this year. Reading it, I found out a whole lot about the author, but only a few scattered tidbits about the country as a whole.

Jacinta says

When I looked up Chilean books I should read, the list was basically her and Pablo Neruda, so I picked up a copy last week when I found it in English. I enjoyed it and will probably re-read, but it was a bit of a strange book. It's a memoir, but she's already written a full memoir and this is more a memoir of her thoughts and feelings about Chile than her life story, although that is the background structure of the book. Some of what she says about Chile seems almost like secondhand knowledge, and since she's lived in California now for some 20 years, perhaps it is. A couple of the stranger facts that were mentioned I looked up out of interest, and they were not-quite-right (eg: she mentions that no alcohol can be sold the day before Election Day, but apparently it's actually the day of) - perhaps these were translation errors? There were a few jarring references that made it clear the book was actually published in 2003 (mention of Pinochet still being alive, for instance). Somehow I got an overall feeling of only a superficial familiarity with Chile of today, or as a specific place, but under or through that was an impression of very deep familiarity with Chilean culture and history - and this impression felt like it matched perfectly with her self-description as having been gone from Chile for so long, and for so much of her childhood before her eventual exile, that she had created a country out of her own reading and unreliable memories. In the end, I wished I'd read this before I arrived in Santiago, and I expect I'll read it again mostly for the thoughts about travel and where 'home' is once you've ever moved to somewhere new.

Mahdi Lotfi says

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John says

I've never been tempted by Allende's fiction, and I can't say I am now, but this is one well-written, engaging memoir! To break things down, I'd say it's about 65% memoir/20% history/15% travel narrative. Other reviewers have said the book is meandering, which is true, but she tells the story in a way that makes sense to *her*; autobiographies need not be strictly chronological narratives. If you're wondering why no fifth star, well, she does dwell on the negative at times, both in Chile and the USA - unfortunately for her, she makes an offhand comment that that America won't elect a non-white president a few years before just that happens. I'm left wondering also whether she's an accurate source for explain the *current* Chilean mindset, when she hadn't lived in the country (just visited) for the 30 years prior to writing this story?

Audio narration by Christine McMurdo-Wallis was spot on: five stars there!

Definitely recommended

l. says

I don't like her.

I don't like how she described a fat actress as a woman of whale proportions who had to be imported.
I don't like how when she's writing about racism she actually invokes noble savage and other racist tropes.
I don't like how she essentializes random qualities.

I just don't like her at all.

??? ??? says

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NoConforto Dos Livros says

(em breve no blog) :)

Brina says

For those who have read my reviews, then they know that I have mentioned that Isabel Allende is my favorite writer. Her most recent book, *In the Midst of Winter*, left a bad taste in my mouth because it was largely devoid of her magical realism that I love. Craving a book with magical realism but not knowing which author to turn to, I decided upon her only memoir which I had not yet read, *My Invented Country*. A journey that takes readers from Chile to California and back, Allende paints a picture of a proud country that revels in traditions, one that she is honored to be a part of.

Having previously read Allende's other memoirs, *Paula* and *A Sum of Our Days*, I was familiar with many of the stories of her youth. From her life as a diplomat's daughter living overseas to relishing the moments spent at her grandfather's side in the large house on the corner in Santiago, Allende's childhood was a chock full of stories, not without its share of controversy. In telling the story of her life, there is going to be overlap. Whereas in *Paula* as Allende tells a detailed story of family history to her daughter lying in a coma, *My Invented Country* briefly touches on the family while embellishing the country of Chile for all that it is

famous for. We are regaled in the nation's history from its civil war with Peru and Bolivia in the 1880s up until the Pinochet years. In between, Allende calls Santiago the London of South America all the while giving instances of the idiosyncrasies that Chileans are famous for. The history and Chilean culture make appearances in her novels so these were not new to me; however, it was interesting to find out about the background research that goes into every novel that Allende writes. This makes me appreciate her all the more as an author.

As I read through Allende's memoirs, I find out more and more about her personal life. Readers discover that her first job was as a columnist in a new woman's magazine and as a television report on a comedy news show. This was in the 1970s and Allende was the token woman; her experiences lead her to the feminist leanings that she has had for her entire life. Once her family fled Chile for Venezuela during the 1973 coup d'etat which overthrew her uncle's presidency, she started to write novels. The basis for *The House of the Spirits* was a year long letter that Allende wrote to her grandfather back in Santiago as he lay dying. One year and over four hundred pages later, she completed the novel. It was in Venezuela that she got ideas and penned *Eva Luna*, *Of Love and Shadows*, and *The Stories of Eva Luna*. Each novel got ideas from her life and family history and written from the heart.

At age forty five, Allende immigrated to California, having married an American and receiving residency papers. For the last thirty years she has called both San Francisco and Chile home, traveling the world to promote and find ideas for her books. As an immigrant, Allende was almost immediately captivated by the early history of California, planting the seeds for her novels *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*, which make up a trilogy that ends with *House of the Spirits*. Allende sees many similarities between the terrain of San Francisco and Chile, making it easy for her to adapt to life in the United States, making her immigration almost seamless. She points out that had she met her husband in Indonesia that she would have moved there, believing in divine providence and that everything takes place at its proper appointed time. Yet, he is a proud Californian just as she is a proud Chilean, and she joined the millions of twentieth century immigrants who now call the United States home.

While I did not learn much new information by reading *My Invented Country*, I did glean how Allende is constantly finding new material for her novels. Writing with a nostalgia for the country of her youth while still being able to move between two countries, Allende has adapted to life in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This memoir did not completely alleviate the sour taste I got in my mouth from reading her last novel; however, it did allow me to be privy to her soothing words that make me feel that she is an old friend or older family member. I am still craving a novel full of magical realism, but for now, *My Invented Country* more than suffices.

4+ stars

Sarah saied says

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Sara Jesus says

Isabel Allende nasceu no Chile, em Santiago e seu pai foi o importante Salvador Allende que chegou a ser governador. Neste livro que constitui um conjunto de memórias e relatos da realidade chilena, a escritora partilha as suas inspirações e revela os lugares assim como as pessoas responsáveis pelas suas histórias.

A avó de Isabel foi que a iniciou no realismo mágico; acreditava existir imensas realidades em que o instinto, a imaginação, os sonhos, as emoções e a intuição correspondem aos sentidos importantes para entendermos a vida.

A escritora afirma que ninguém conhece o Chile sem ler Pablo Nerudo. A sua infância foi marcada por viagens e despedidas. A família de Allende foi obrigada a ir para o exílio devido a um golpe militar. Ela sente-se culpada por ter abandonado o Chile. Foi quando atravessou a cordilheira dos Andes que Isabel Allende começou o processo de inventar o Chile.

O Chile da escritora é poético e pobre. E os seus romances representam o Chile e a Califórnia, as suas duas pátrias.

Deixo-vos uma das minhas citações preferidas:

"Ter nascido mulher parecia-me má sorte, era mais fácil ser homem. Isto levou-me a ser feminista muito antes de ter ouvido a palavra"

Factos interessantes sobre o Chile:

- os chilenos gostam de leis;
- no Chile se fala por diminutivos;
- as pessoas tem sentido de humor;
- o divórcio apenas foi permitido em 2004, porque ninguém se atrevia a desafiar a igreja;
- os chilenos falam em falsete;
- metade dos chilenos se guia por horóscopos, para advinhas ou vagos prognósticos;
- foi num ilha no Chile que Daniel Defoe se inspirou para escrever "Robinson Crusoe" baseada numa pessoa que ficou de facto perdido numa ilha.

Yazeed AlMogren says

Mara says

Isabel Allende's writing flows like a story that your grandmother would tell you about a time long before you were born, but that still has an intricate connection to your world and flickers into existence only to be half seen or intuitively perceived as a lingering presence. These are the stories about a past that does not belong to you, but that seems so familiar because of the wonderful voice of the author who, inadvertently perhaps, but nevertheless compellingly, makes you a part of her history through the act of telling.

This is the nostalgic recollection of Chile, Allende's country of origin. The writing lets itself go, lingering on some aspects of day to day life only to drift away toward memories of eccentric uncles and mysterious distant relatives. It is a powerful tale of nostalgia that dilutes and distorts, but paradoxically perhaps, is the main mechanism that makes remembrance possible.

A world traveler to say the least, daughter of diplomats and exiled after the military coup in 1973, Allende talks about her mother land with a mixture of sadness, ironic criticism and heartfelt longing. She tells all, admitting that many of her novels, much like this work, have displeased her all too bashful relatives, but accepts that what she depicts is, to some degree, an invention. Personal memories become intertwined with what others have told her, a keen journalistic eye that notices even the slightest details is thwarted by a subjectivity that is openly acknowledged. What makes this book special, a mixture between a travel log, a novel and an autobiography, is the voice that tells the story. Allende has humour and a talent for narration that has attracted a wide audience and that has made each of her books wonderfully immersive reads.

It is stated, somewhere in the first chapters, that in order to understand Chile and Chilean life as a whole, one must read Pablo Neruda's poems. It got me thinking about countries and their writers, be they poets, novelists or otherwise. Perhaps countries need their writers just as much as writers need their countries – be it a matter of outright rejection or patriotic devotion, each author is defined by the space in which he has lived. Through his work, he or she implicitly tells its story. This may be a plain and generally obvious point to make, but I believe it is something that comes through Allende's pages. She tells the story of her country and, thus, also describes herself in a manner that is authentic and believable. She acts as a guide or as an inviting host and I was definitely driven to cross her threshold.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

This is Isabel Allende's funny and sorrowful tribute to her native country. She starts off with amusing stories: a cat-killing refrigerator; her grandfather's insistence that he saw the devil on a bus; her father who disguised himself as a Peruvian Indian woman with bright petticoats and a wig with long braids. Later in the book she moves on to the horror and repression suffered by the Chilean people following the CIA-assisted military coup in 1973.

The book is not so much a memoir as it is an exploration of the nostalgia that has informed Allende's life and writing. She left Chile in 1975 to escape Pinochet's dictatorship. Her longing for that country of her memory and invention is palpable on every page.

I've read several of her novels and always imagined her as a serious person. Here in her non-fiction writing I was surprised and delighted by her sense of humor. It's very wry and sometimes has barbs, but I found myself laughing out loud many times. She shares bizarre stories about her loony family members and explains the origins of the Chilean national character traits.

The book is loosely organized, but Allende has the charms to make it work. There's a little history, a little geography, some politics, a lot of Chilean culture, and a whole lot of heart.

If you've read her novels, this book will give you some insight into how she comes by some of her wild creations. Her first book, *The House of the Spirits*, began as a letter to her beloved grandfather who was dying. She describes the resulting novel as "an attempt to recapture my lost country, to reunite my scattered family, to revive the dead and preserve their memories, which were beginning to be blown away in the whirlwind of exile."

Laila says

I don't know how interested I would be in this book had I not lived in Chile for several months. However, since I have, I found it endearing and hilarious, especially when I read a few gems that I thought my sister might appreciate.

"...on my last trip I found to my amazement that coffee had finally made its entrance into culture and now anyone willing to pay can find espressos and cappuccinos worthy of Italy."

Isabel, really? This book was published about 8 years ago but still in 2009, when I ordered a cappuccino, it arrived with not a cap of frothed milk, but whipped cream. I'm sorry, you are full of it.

Also this.

"...for peace of mind of potential tourists, impeccable public bathrooms and bottled water are readily available everywhere."

Impeccable? Lady please, after a few months in Chile, I thought it was hitting the jackpot if there was actually a door, a toilet seat or toilet paper. Not all three, just one of the three was enough to make me feel lucky. And that bottled water is available everywhere, well, I would like her to qualify the word "everywhere" as well as ask her to tell me where to find this water while driving from Ovalle to Vicuna because I have never been so dehydrated in my life.

Finally, she quotes someone as saying "The country lives in organized disorder," which I wholeheartedly agree with. All that said, I enjoyed her nostalgic journey through Chile quite a bit.

Negin says

I never noticed how much I love memoirs until my daughter pointed it out to me. We joke about that endlessly, since I'm often quite unaware of the genre of a book when I choose it and start reading it. Well, a

memoir and never mind one written by Allende, I simply knew that it had to be good! This book is full of nostalgia and memories of her life in Chile. She writes beautifully and from the heart. For me, reading Isabel Allende books are a pleasure. This one was a re-read and I loved it yet again.

Missy J says

My 5th Isabel Allende book! A couple of years ago I read Allende's autobiographical work "Paula", which is a sad recount of her daughter's long coma and death, and what Allende went through during that time. "My Invented Country" gives a broader overview of the author's life from childhood to the turn of the century. This book was published in 2003 and I googled some recent stuff on her and things have changed inevitably (Willy and her are no longer together since 2015).

There's no doubt that Isabel Allende has a very charming personality. I sort of have a love-hate relationship with her books. They are easy reads, but at times I find myself annoyed by the characters and the many love scenes. Anyway, I enjoyed this non-fiction work a lot and I think it's probably my favorite Allende book. She really comes across as a thoughtful and determined woman. I love her reflections on where she comes from and how she has changed due to moving around the world a lot. I could totally relate to a lot of what she said, which was very consoling for me.

"Being a foreigner, as I have been almost forever, means that I have to make a much greater effort than the natives, which has kept me on my toes and forced me to become flexible and adapt to different surroundings. This condition has some advantages for someone who earns her living by observing; nothing seems natural to me, almost everything surprises me. I ask absurd questions, but sometimes I ask them of the right people and thus get ideas for my novels."

Allende introduces the reader to Chile, her home country and where both of her parents are from. Sometimes Allende feels very Chilean, but sometimes she feels like a foreigner when she returns back to Chile (she has lived in the US since the 80s). When she describes Chileans, she uses a lot of generalizations, which are subjective of course, but after a while made me roll my eyes. No doubt that the book is very entertaining and I learned a lot about Allende's background and her views on life.

"...In contrast, those of us who have moved on many times develop tough skin out of necessity. Since we lack roots or corroboration of who we are, we must put our trust in memory to give continuity to our lives ... but memory is always cloudy, we can't trust it. Things that happened in the past have fuzzy outlines, they're pale; it's as if my life has been nothing but a series of illusions, of fleeting images, of events I don't understand, or only half understand. I have absolutely no sense of certainty."

Highly recommend this to any Allende reader.

Ninoska Goris says

La escritura es tipo casual. En donde no hay una línea de tiempo, sino que puede saltar de un tema a otro.

Bueno para nuevos lectores de Isabel Allende, porque los que hemos leído varios libros de ella, sobre todo

La casa de los espíritus, probablemente conozcamos la mayoría de lo aquí escrito.

TheBookManiac says

Surprisingly International

You don't have to be Chilean to enjoy this beautiful memoir, but you will gain an appreciation for Chile and its people after reading "My Invented Country".

This is the story about how Isabel Allende, one of the most charismatic Latin American authors of our time, came to become the person she is today. Her very personal narrative will take you to a different country and a different era that will (almost) make you feel Chilean.

We follow her steps from the very beginning and learn about where she was born, how she was raised, how she saw the world, how she tried her pen at journalism, how she made enemies, how her country sank, how she immigrated to California, how she became a wife, and how she became a writer.

All of her recollections are very much her own and nowhere does she claim that what she says is to be considered fact; quite the opposite. She admits that memory can play tricks on us and that all she can do is call it as she remembers it, and she does so with all the bells and whistles that come as a result of her feelings and experiences.

Any tale, as uninteresting as it may be, when told by a good story-teller becomes a good tale. I'm not Chilean and I never even thought of Chile as anything other than a country with a good soccer team, but after reading Allende's memoir, I feel an affinity with Chilean people that just makes me smile every time I meet someone from Chile. As far off as I may be from the truth, at least now I feel I know what they're about and that makes "me" feel great.

My Invented Country by Isabel Allende is a well-crafted memoir full of humanity, humor and southern flavor. It has awakened my interest in other Latin American countries and it has helped me understand why Latinos can be so similar and yet so opposite at the same time.

Oana Kovacs says

Wonderful book!

No idea why I've waited so long to read it (oh, yes, it's in Spanish my copy!), but I love it.
MY FIRST book in Spanish! :)

Hoda Marmar says

Maybe 4.5 stars, but not less!

I enjoyed it a lot. She writes beautifully, and she is very honest and really funny! Such a smart lady. This was my first Allende read, but it won't be the last. I'm very excited to read her other two biographies, and all of her novels, especially 'The house of the spirits'.

I was struck by the amazing similarities between Chilean and Lebanese cultures, wow, who knew?! And I've learned that she spent some time in Beirut before the civil war broke out. I wished she talked more about that period, I wanted to see the city through her eyes.

Great read, I was transported to Chile, I started wishing I'd go there and visit the places she grew up in. I also loved the historical and political input, I have learned many things that I ignored about her country.
