

Bad Tourist: Misadventures in Love and Travel

Suzanne Roberts

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Replete with harrowing and laugh out loud accounts of misadventures at home and abroad, Suzanne Roberts's *Bad Tourist* collects entertaining stories from around the world.

Forget the glamour of collecting passport stamps and checking off wild to-dos: Roberts's tales, told out of sequence but joined by their persistent musing, focus on the less lauded elements of travelling, moments in which the romance of distant places breaks down and reality reemerges. They also capture a second coming-of-age, as Roberts, post-divorce and looking toward her future, redefines her womanhood and reclaims her desires on her own terms.

Captivating, succinct descriptions evoke locations as disparate as Caribbean islands, Prague, Napa, and Greece, recalling "pink-flamed palms," nighttime swims through bioluminescent waters, cavern air that is "sparse, quiet, humid, still," and how "The lights of Santorini glimmered on the purple Aegean Sea." They capture the orange hue of the sun rising over the Ganges, where all smells of "rosewater, fire, and ash."

But these picture perfect moments bookend a series of "peccadillos—the seemingly harmless things we do in another culture that we would never do in our own," like giving begging children chocolate on the street. With guilt, Roberts allows herself to be hurried onto a train to escape a Machu Picchu mudslide; her porters remain behind. With embarrassment, she accepts her boyfriend's hat as a possible bathroom substitute during a gale that leaves them pinned to Florida sands.

What emerges is a sense that the only "bad" decision in a tale of tourism is to attempt to pretty up what's unsavory or unexpected. Roberts's tales are enthralling because they are honest, holding up mirrors that any truthful traveler will see themselves reflected in. Flirtations do fall apart. Plans do go awry. And a chance meeting that doesn't end with happily ever after might still end its own kind of well: "sitting in the salty, pink sunlight, laughing with my beautiful mother, listening to the far-off notes of a saxophone." Authentic, surprising, and irresistible, *Bad Tourist* is a travel text worth getting lost in.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November / December 2020)

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