

Fresh Wind and Strange Fire: One Man's Adventures in Primal Mexico

Lyn Fuchs

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An American in Mexico takes the risks necessary to truly immerse himself into Mexican life and culture.

To say Lyn Fuchs is an American writing about visiting Mexico would be an oversimplification. Fuchs, professor and writer-in-residence at the University of Papaloapan, has moved beyond the backpack and into uncharted territory as he explores less-traveled lands as a foreigner-turned-local. The result is that *Fresh Wind & Strange Fire: One Man's Adventures in Primal Mexico* is not so much a travel memoir as it is a portrait of the kind of life readers would experience if put in the author's well-worn shoes.

Following the success of *Sacred Ground & Holy Water: One Man's Adventures in the Wild* (2011), Fuchs offers readers an intimate and candid view of nontourist Mexico. From the beginning, the author invites readers to vicariously experience the mythical and mystical otherworld of Mexico, where he assures "no danger of being arrested as an accomplice." Fuchs says this as he explains the process of obtaining a fake passport from a seedy photocopy shop. Immediately, the author confirms he is willing to take risks for the sake of adventure.

The book provides little explanation for the author's quest. There is no introductory chapter establishing why he is compelled to take this journey away from the safety and comfort of his university campus. Rather, Fuchs jumps right into the chaotic unfamiliar. He wants readers to feel the uncertainty and unease of being a vagabond American committed to the road less traveled. "What cross-cultural travel often does is reveal that most of what we consider black-and-white absolutes are grays," he writes. "The less people travel, the surer they are about what everyone else should do. I'm sure of one thing: everybody should travel."

Spiritual and personal insights become common as Fuchs immerses himself into Mexican life. He compares what he knows of this country to what he regards as privileged American thinking. "In Mexico," he writes, "one finds that not all respond to hardship or injustice with trauma and drama, as if the laws of the universe have been violated." His travel experiences slant his whole world philosophy and, indeed, his personal identity. When Fuchs encounters fellow Americans during his travels, he experiences an unexpected unease. He writes that "after wandering the world so long, I feel a bit sheepish for not quite fitting in with my own people."

Throughout his journey, Fuchs shares present-day and historical considerations of employment, mass transit, culture, politics, immigration, and unrest. The author enhances his personal narrative with research and investigation, whether on the open road or back terrain. When he visits spiritual sanctuaries or establishments like Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology, he provides a guided tour for the curious reader, yet offers insightful endnotes to prompt further reading.

Fresh Wind & Strange Fire: One Man's Adventures in Primal Mexico will appeal to readers and armchair travelers who crave more than an in-and-out experience. Fuchs delivers with his exploration of the dualities of non-tourist Mexico: a largely unknown land that is both intimidating and immensely inviting.

LORI A. MAY (August 7, 2013)

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