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Travel

Something to Declare: Good Lesbian Travel Writing
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Travel has always been a rich mine of introspection and discovery that goes far beyond simply viewing new landscapes or sampling unfamiliar food, and editor Gillian Kendall (author of *Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet)* is adept at selecting authors who know how to journey on multiple levels.

Since the writers here are lesbian, most have an additional layer of perspective that stems from their sexuality. As Kendall writes in her introduction, "[L]esbians go nowhere without considerable emotional baggage." For some, a sojourn might be an opportunity to understand a romantic entanglement back home. Or it might be a chance to meet "sisters" in unexpected places. Reading these tales is like "meeting new friends at a good, late-night party, where lesbians have gathered to laugh, eat, flirt, show off, sympathize, and—mostly—tell stories," Kendall adds. It's quite a party. Not strictly autobiographical or completely nonfiction, the stories are blends of memory and travelogue, rich with detail and quirky events.

Lesléa Newman, for example, begins her tale about working at a kibbutz in Israel with a woman named Susan who sees life as a foreign film, "with distorted sound and a grainy picture shown at an art house with creaky seats in need of repair." Going to the Jewish homeland, she thinks, is just the next scene with someone else directing. Not surprisingly, her trip changes that perspective completely.

Other travel essays in the collection are similarly rife with interior meandering as well as external exploration. For most of the writers, the two intersect in a way that creates more meaning for themselves as women, as lesbians, and simply as people trying to find their way in the world.

Also notable is the breadth of landscapes. Although the collection has only nineteen essays, it's packed full of international destinations, including Senegal, Chile, Vietnam, Japan, and Mexico.

There are also several United States destinations, but when Rebecca Chekouras' thoughts on Palm Springs are compared with Kate Lynn Hibbard's musings on Las Vegas, the cities seem like their own countries, or even alien vistas.

In the end, though, it's not the places visited that are compelling, but the travelers themselves, as they navigate both crowded city streets and forlorn, unpeopled countryside with the same sense of adventure and desire to learn—not just about their chosen destinations, but also about themselves.

Elizabeth Millard