



The Other Worlds: Offbeat Adventures of a Curious Traveler

Tom Mattson

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Tom Mattson's The Other Worlds demonstrates the central, enduring tenet of travel: we're all connected.

Traveler and blogger Tom Mattson has seen a thing or two. *The Other Worlds* is a colorful tour through the far-flung places he's visited over decades of globe-trotting. Part travelogue and part cultural survey, its vignettes accommodate stories of human connection and illuminate historical tidbits, emphasizing the world's diversity.

Arranged loosely by continent, Mattson's tales hop across decades and locations at a whirlwind pace. Some locales prompt dives into times past: conversations with Cuban locals lead to recollections of the Castro revolutionary days, while a visit to the Canadian Rockies engenders sober musings on the traditional practice of running buffalo off of cliffs. Other off-the-grid locations become places of refuge and reflection, including Guatemala's Lake Atitlán, where Mattson often returns to hang out with local fishermen, find his own private natural sauna spots, and live *la vida tranquila*.

Often letting chance guide his decisions, Mattson proves to be the definition of a free-spirited traveler, seeing every detour as an opportunity. As a result, he visits some truly out-there places, all of which are described with love. One less-traveled road leads him to a convent in Bolivia just recently opened to the public; another impromptu trek finds him joining up with geologists to journey to some of South America's most remote natural wonders, including forbidding glaciers, dried-out deserts, and giant salt lakes.

Some of these exploits are covered in fleeting fragments, including Mattson's experiences as a train jumper and hitchhiker and an account of ending up in a Tijuana jail cell with his buddies. More impressive anecdotes convey a sense of place and have a personal component. A stay in the mining country of Cerro Rico in the Andes mountains, where workers aren't expected to live past forty-five, finds Mattson befriending a young miner who strives to earn a life outside of his dire conditions. A chance encounter with a young Chinese boy results in an unexpected visit to a secluded village, a evening spent sleeping alongside a farmhouse pig, and the start of a friendship that persists through email.

Throughout, the book is entertaining because of its conversational, good-natured style. A second-person narration involves the audience in Mattson's adventures. The text mixes relevant historical facts with conveyances of the simple joys of experiencing a different place, and Mattson is a lively, edifying raconteur. Although his whiplash back-and-forth jumps across distance and time can be disorienting—pages are wont to traverse whole decades in a single bound—charming maps within each chapter help to ground Mattson's whereabouts.

Finally landing back in the States with an affectionate tribute to his home state of Minnesota and his own family history, Tom Mattson's *The Other Worlds* demonstrates the central, enduring tenet of travel: despite the vast geographic and cultural distances that separate us, we're all interconnected, and the act of getting to know a place and its people is a small miracle to be treasured.

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