

Through Travel and Error: Confessions of an Asylum-Seeking Canadian

Matt Hamilton

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To someone who's never ventured beyond their homeland, the world outside can seem like a very scary and unforgiving place. At least that's how it seemed to Matt Hamilton before he embarked on his two-year journey to parts unknown.

Through Travel & Error chronicles first-time author and traveler Hamilton's sometimes-funny, sometimes-touching experiences backpacking across Europe, the Canary Islands, and finally South Africa, where he finds his niche bartending at a small pub. With no destination, plan, or working knowledge of the world outside his home country of Canada, the author drifts from town to town, his only rule being to move on once he gets bored with his current location.

Along the way he encounters an eclectic collection of characters, including infamous jewel thief Rodney Tucker and paranoid Werner, the German who fends off aliens with triangles (the symmetry confuses them).

Hamilton's a decent writer, and the book's handful of black-and-white photographs give the reader a good idea of the places and people he's describing, but too often the stories center around Hamilton's quest to get drunk or find high-quality marijuana in whatever part of the world he happens to be. That would be fine if anything interesting or unique came of these pursuits, but seldom do they go beyond, "We smoked throughout the morning, afternoon, and evening. We had so much weed that we realized it would be physically impossible to smoke it all."

At times the writing style is distracting, too. The early chapters in particular are littered with curses and offhand profanity that's intended to be colloquial but comes off as abrupt and forced.

However, *Through Travel & Error* is not without its share of genuinely compelling moments. Hamilton has a flair for storytelling when there's a story worth telling, and his description of the Hatton Garden jewel heist and first-hand account of a Malawian bus crash are among the travelogue's highlights.

The author gives a good feel for the locations he describes, includes a few life lessons here and there, and settles some misconceptions Westerners may have of the land away from home, but the truly interesting bits are too spread out for anyone but fans of travel essays and the *bildungsroman* to enjoy. Early in the book, Hamilton assures us there's no end to his anecdotes, but he'd do well to skip the banal debaucheries and focus on the more original and engaging stories—that's the essence of trial and error.

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