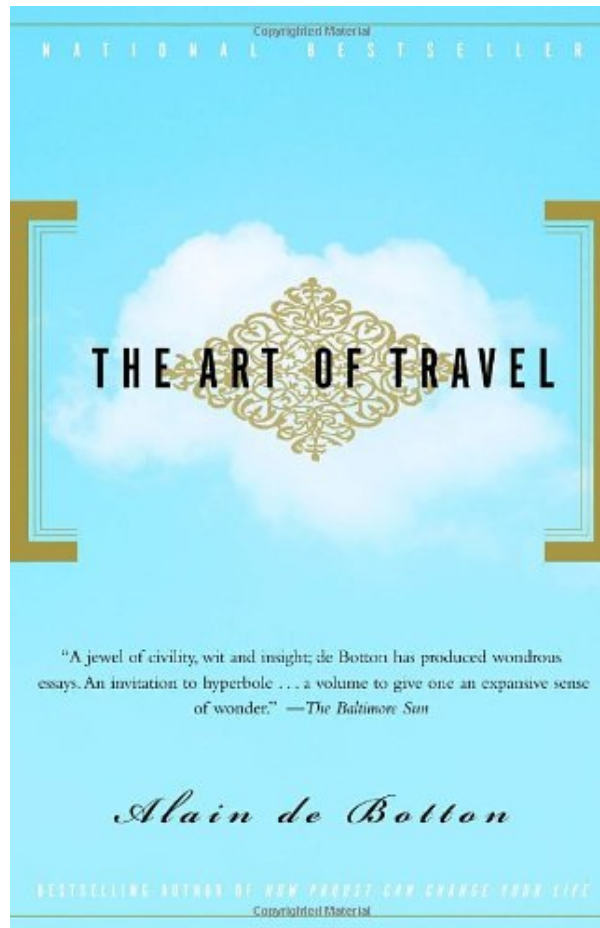
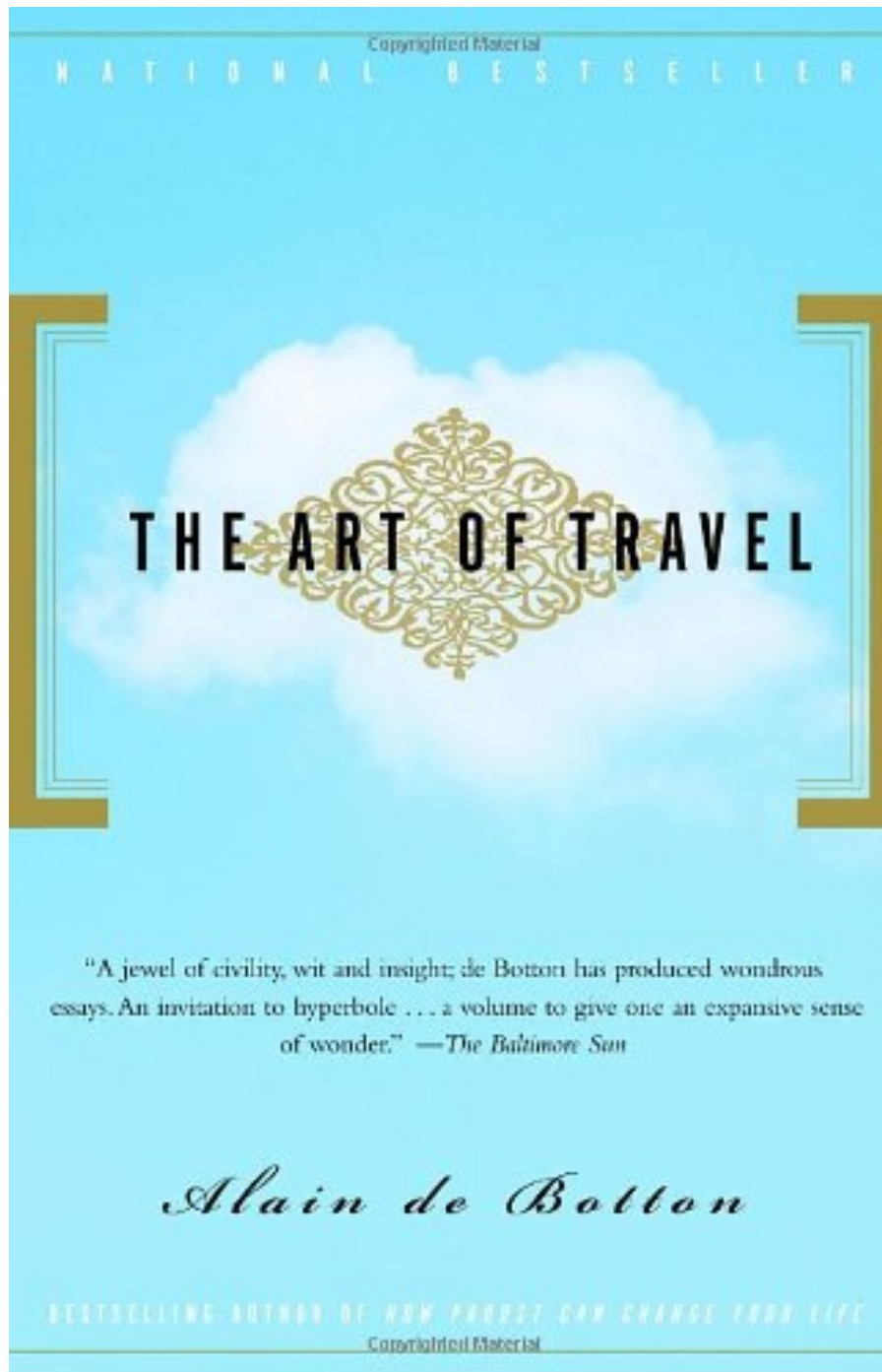


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Even as de Botton takes the reader along on his own peregrinations, he also cites such distinguished fellow-travelers as Baudelaire, Wordsworth, Van Gogh, the biologist Alexander von Humboldt, and the 18th-century eccentric Xavier de Maistre, who catalogued the wonders of his bedroom. *The Art of Travel* is a wise and utterly original book. Don't leave home without it.

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A must for blasé travellers

By MartinP

In the past, when I still regularly attended graduation parties, such parties were always teeming with graduates-to-be harbouring fanciful travel plans. Everybody seemed intent on getting away a.s.a.p., as long as possible, and to a very far away and preferably out of the way place. They wanted to become travellers, a breed not to be confused with commonplace tourists. I've never been able to detect any intrinsic motivations driving this graduate travelling habit, e.g. a deep-seated and longstanding interest in a particular country or culture. It was simply a matter of opportunity, this jumping at the a chance to be thoroughly irresponsible for a while, before entering on the responsibilities of a steady job. And of course, everybody was going and it would be very un-cool to stay at home. After these people returned from their well-organised adventures, it invariably struck me how little they had changed, and how little they had to tell about the places they had been; apart maybe from random scraps on local customs that I could as easily and more completely have found in any travel guide book. Nevertheless most of these people, even years later, would be prone to lapse into dreamy states of blissful reminiscence at the slightest cue, expressing a deep longing to go back there, preferably to stay. It got me wondering why it is that the same things we find boring or commonplace at home are suddenly deeply interesting simply because they occur 5,000 miles away.

I remember one such party where I met an acquaintance who just got her degree in philosophy. I asked her if she was planning on her more or less mandatory world trip as well. But she just gave me a weary smile, tapped the side of her head and said: `Travelling is something you do in here'.

In a nutshell that's the question and the essence of the answer in Alain de Botton's thoughtful book on travel. Why do we bother? What do we expect, and why are we so often disappointed? And then again, why do our

memories of the trip rarely reflect the disappointments? And what is the clue to not being disappointed? How do you go about really experiencing the place where you are and making it part of yourself? On all such questions De Botton has interesting and often entertaining observations to make. He shows us that the exotic is not defined by long-haul flights and palm trees, but can be found literally on your doorstep if you just know how to look. He explains why a travelling Englishman can be depressed on far away and exotic Barbados and euphoric in nearby, but in many ways equally exotic Amsterdam, or even around the corner in Hammersmith where he lives. As a Dutchman I was fascinated by his detailed analysis of a sign in the arrivals hall of Amsterdam Airport, explaining its exotic nature from a British viewpoint, and the reasons you would never ever find a sign like that in the UK, just across the Channel. De Botton is a master at finding such surprising angles to elucidate his subjects. Moreover he has considerable erudition to add, resulting in an engrossing mixture of philosophical insight, personal experience, and references to artists, writers, explorers and scientists of the past. Mostly these historical figures, Flaubert in Egypt, say, or Humboldt in South America or Van Gogh in the Provence, are exemplary 'artists of travel', people who knew how to make the most of their expeditions. By taking their mindset, involving energy, patience and an eye for detail, as a template, De Botton generates some useful suggestions for the modern day traveller who no longer wants to bore himself by 'scoring' obligatory highlights in the guidebook star-rating order, or who refuses to be a slave to his camera any longer. He may even give you some clues as to how to deal with that greatest travelling problem of them all, the fact that wherever you go, you always have to take yourself along.

In all, an elegant, intelligent, thought-provoking, amusing and useful little book, that nobody who takes travelling seriously should miss. Don't take it with you though - it won't last you much longer than an afternoon on the beach...

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A thought provoking read on the process of travel

By Brad Revell

Wow, what a thought provoking book! For someone who has a ferocious appetite to travel (and does both personally and for work) it gave me a fresh perspective on how one should go about traveling and experiencing the world. This is a story of de Botton's experiences intertwined with stories from some of the greats of our history (e.g. Pascal, Nietzsche, Baudelaire etc.). It literally takes you on a journey from the anticipation of travel all the way through to the return to your home and life.

I normally would read this book quite quickly however throughout there were sections that made me stop and reflect on my own travel experiences. At each page turn my values and approaches to travel was challenged and critiqued and I loved it!

Three key takeaways from the book:

1. I'm torn between Pascal's perspective of truly enjoying and taking in a historical artifact (or art) versus being an artist where you take in what you see and then create something unique and creative that enhances the experience for you and for others. I believe that there is room for both depending on the situation. Such as life today where people photograph and video things versus stopping to just enjoy the experience.
2. We want to be happy in our lives and travel seems to provide us with a mechanism to do that. The problem is that we only experience this happiness while traveling because we are outside of the constraints of work and our struggle to survive
3. De Botton advocates travelling alone to be an advantage. He believes that responses to the world are molded by the company that we keep, therefore we align our curiosity to fit in with the expectations of others.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Thoughtful, provoking, entertaining.

By marciamarciamarcia

De Botton's book is another that I came across at the library in which I work. I was so enamored of it that I had to own it (3 cheers for Amazon!) The book is a series of essays ("On Anticipation", "On the Exotic", "On Possessing Beauty", etc.) interspersed with black&white reproductions of paintings and photographs.

Each essay/chapter contains a place/places and a "guide/guides." For example, in #2 ("On Travelling Places"), the "guides" are French poet Charles Baudelaire and American painter Edward Hopper. Using quotes from the former and paintings from the latter, de Botton evokes the romance of airports and train stations and other places of arrival & departure--how they are the stuff of hopes, dreams, inspirations.

He also writes of the joy of the journey itself, where one is transported not only away from the physical familiarity of home, but into a state of suspension, where--for a time--the worries & complaints of everyday living don't exist. I have experienced this sensation as well as the joys of anonymity--an experience which can transform even a cheap motel room into a sanctuary from daily demands.

Highly recommended.

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