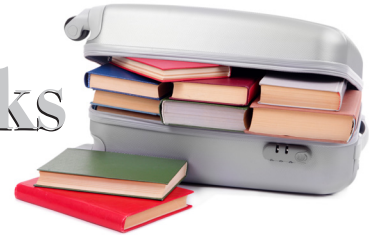




Wanderlust-Worthy Books



*Like anything that pertains to personal favorites, this list of recommended readings is in no way comprehensive. Because of the tight focus on one criterion—**books that evoke a distinctive, almost palpable sense of place**—many a beloved and critically acclaimed work of literature has gone unmentioned. That’s why we invite you to submit suggestions of your own. Help us grow the list to represent more and more countries and cultures. Tell us about your personal favorites, those works of fiction and nonfiction whose settings are as vivid to you as the place you call home.*

In the meantime, please enjoy discovering or revisiting the more than 50 books recommended here. Some are accompanied by commentary, while other titles speak for themselves. Some are deliciously escapist; some present beautiful renderings of heartbreaking realities. All are about places I’ve traveled to, or which a skillful author led me to feel as if I had.

From the wide-ranging to the singularly focused, each book reflects an author’s uncanny ability to transform “there and then” into the “here and now”

—Joyce McGreevy

Author of the post “[A Wanderlust for Words](#)” on OIC Moments



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

EVERYWHERE

- **The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors**, by James E. Mills. Mountaineers Books. 2014. A gripping account of the first all-African American summit attempt on Denali, the highest point in North America. Mills emphasizes the importance of encouraging youths from a variety of backgrounds to take part, not only to broaden their horizons but also to help protect the environment by raising a new generation of outdoor enthusiasts who will work to save it.
- **Bachelor Brothers Bed and Breakfast**, by Bill Richardson, Thomas T. Beeler, 1996. A pair of endearingly eccentric bachelors--in their fifties, and fraternal twins--own and operate a bed & breakfast establishment where people like them, the “gentle and bookish and ever so slightly confused,” can feel at home.
- **A Field Guide to Getting Lost**, by Rebecca Solnit. Penguin. 2006. Essays about the stories we use to navigate our way through the world, and the places we traverse, from wilderness to cities, in finding ourselves, or losing ourselves.
- **The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places in the World**, by Eric Weiner. Hachette. 2008.
- **Life Is a Trip: The Transformative Magic of Travel**, by Judith Fein. Pudie. 2012.
- **No Hurry to Get Home: The Memoir of the New Yorker Writer Whose Unconventional Life and Adventures Spanned the Twentieth Century**, by Emily Hahn. Open Road Media. 2014. (Originally published in 1970 as *Times and Places*.)
- **Tales of a Female Nomad: Living at Large in the World**, by Rita Golden Gelman. Broadway Books. 2002.
- **Without Reservations: The Travels of an Independent Woman**, by Alice Steinbach. Random House. 2002.

ANTARCTICA

- **Antarctic Navigation**, by Elizabeth Arthus. Knopf. 1994. “Elizabeth Arthur’s novel is so convincing that for several chapters I was deluded into thinking that she was telling her own story and that she had actually been to the Pole.”—Beryl Bainbridge.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

AUSTRALIA

- **30 days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account**, by Peter Carey. Bloomsbury. 2016. Australia native Peter Carey returns to Sydney after a seventeen-year absence to tell its extraordinary history.
- **Cloudstreet**, by Tim Winton. Scribner. 1991. Set in Perth, this unvarnished and sweeping family saga remains a huge favorite among Australian readers.
- **In a Sunburned Country**, by Bill Bryson. Broadway Books. 2000. Utterly engaging and keenly observant “mock-heroic” travel writing that my Australian hosts found every bit as riveting as I did.
- **My Brilliant Career**, by Miles Franklin. Various publishers. 1901. Yes, you’ve already seen the movie, but check out Franklin’s ability to capture a vivid sense of place in just one sentence: “Now and again there would be a few days of the raging wind before mentioned, which carried the dry grass off the paddocks and piled it against the fences, darkened the air with dust, and seemed to promise rain, but ever it dispersed whence it came, taking with it the few clouds it had gathered up; and for weeks and weeks at a stretch, from horizon to horizon, was never a speck to mar the cruel dazzling brilliance of the metal sky.”

BULGARIA

- **Street Without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria**, by Kapka Kassabova. Portobello Books. 2008.

CANADA

- **The Colony of Unrequited Dreams**, by Wayne Johnston. Anchor. 2000. The harsh landscape of Newfoundland becomes a character in its own right in this riveting historical novel that is also an intimate human drama.
- **Bury Your Dead**, by Louise Penny. St Martin’s Press. 2011. Whether she’s writing about actual locations in Quebec or the fictional but oh-so-vivid community of Three Pines, Penny excels at drawing readers into world of Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, Start with this one for its eye-opening Canadian history (it inspired my own travels to Quebec) or start at the very beginning with **Still Life** (2005). Either way, you’ll discover why each elegantly crafted new novel in the series is eagerly anticipated.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

CUBA

- **Our Man in Havana: An Entertainer**, by Graham Greene. Penguin. 1958.

FAROE ISLANDS

- **Far Afield**, by Susanna Kaysen. Vintage Books. 1994. From the author of *Girl, Interrupted*, this is intimate novel of an outsider's life in a unique community, rich in details of island life.

FINLAND

- **The Summer Book**, by Tove Jansson. New York Review Books. 1972. In this sometimes brusque, sometimes magical autobiographical novel, an elderly artist and her six-year-old granddaughter while away a summer together on a tiny island in the Gulf of Finland.

FRANCE

- **French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France**, by Richard Goodman. Algonquin. 2002. Richard Goodman saw the ad in the paper: "SOUTHERN FRANCE: Stone house in Village near Nimes/Avignon/Uzes. 4 BR, 2 baths, fireplace, books, desk, bikes. Perfect for writing, painting, exploring & experiencing la France *profonde*. \$450 mo. plus utilities." He didn't know it then, but he was about to get royally schooled in the close-knit world of French farming. A perceptive and charming "field" trip that you won't want to miss.
- **Paris to the Moon: a Family in France**, by Adam Gopnik. Quercus. 2008.
- **A Year in Provence**, by Peter Mayle. Knopf. 1989. The title alone made millions of readers say, "Oui, merci!" A deeply charming invitation to travel vicariously into a world that specializes in earthly pleasures.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

GREAT BRITAIN

- **The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society**, by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows. The Dial Press. 2008.
- **London: The Biography**, by Peter Ackroyd. Anchor. 2003. For the London-obsessed, tumble headlong into Ackroyd's meticulously researched history—a book as sprawling and endlessly fascinating as the city itself.
- **Persuasion**, by Jane Austen. Public domain. 1813. Some books you read in the bath—this book is one to read when you visit Bath, a city of elegant Georgian architecture, one of the world's best preserved Roman bathhouses, and its pride in a certain famous novelist.
- **NW**, by Zadie Smith. Oxford. 2014. Set in Northwest London, Smith's novel captures the multiplicity of places that can exist in a single location, as friends discover that you can live in the same community yet inhabit vastly different worlds.
- **Case Histories and other Jackson Brodie mysteries**, by Kate Atkinson. Doubleday. 2006. From Yorkshire to Cambridge to Edinburg, Atkinson's complex and vulnerable private investigator may feel like a fish out of water wherever he goes. But you'll feel right at home in each of the locations featured in these wry, intelligent novels in which the real mysteries are those of the human heart.

GREECE

- **My Family and Other Animals**, by Gerald Durrell. 1956. Oxford University Press. I was spellbound by this book when I first read it as a teenager and each time I reread it, I feel both as if I've been to Corfu and as if I must catch the next flight to Greece.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

GREENLAND

- **An African in Greenland** by Tété-Michel Kpomassie. New York Review Books Classics. 2001. Tété-Michel Kpomassie was a teenager in Togo when he discovered a book about Greenland—and knew that he must go there. For one thing, it had no snakes, a huge plus factor for a teen who'd had a disturbing encounter with a python. Working his way north over nearly a decade, Kpomassie finally arrived in the country of his dreams. A highly observant account of the author's experiences among the Inuit
- **This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland**, by Gretel Ehrlich. Pantheon. 2002. Most people with a chronic heart condition would probably not recuperate by dogsledding across Greenland year after year. But then again, Ehrlich, whose heart was forever changed, when she was struck by lightning and nearly killed, is not most people. A meditative book, rich in metaphor and observation.

INDIA

- **Midnight's Children**, by Salman Rushdie. Random House. 1981. The first post-Fosterian novel of India that many of us read is still a deeply immersive, highly energized pleasure almost 40 years later.
- **A Fine Balance**, by Rohinton Mistry. Faber and Faber. 2006. A sweeping, tragic novel that you will still be thinking about years after you have read it.

IRAQ

- **Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood: A History in Thirteen Centuries**, by Justin Marozzi. Allen Lane. 2014. The Baghdad most of us know from TV news is but a bleak remnant of a far more vibrant and complex tapestry. Experience, in all its tumult and marvels, the place that many once considered the most splendid cities in all the world.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

IRELAND

- **Ulysses**, by James Joyce. Various publishers. 1922. Like many a classic that one “keeps meaning to read,” this work is far less intimidating and more engaging than newcomers to Joyce may imagine. The first time I read it was as part of a weekly community gathering where each small group was assigned selected chapters to read, delve deeply into, and present to our fellow explorers of the book. This delightfully unorthodox approach marked the first of many journeys into the Joycean universe. Another way to approach the book? Listen to [Re:Joyce](#), Frank Delaney’s marvelous series of 5-minute podcasts about it. Delaney’s sudden death earlier this year broke hearts around the world and cut short his ambition to cover the entire book, but there remains a rich archive of more than 300 episodes to cherish.

ITALY

- **Death at La Fenice**, by Donna Leon. Harper Perennial. 2004. A mystery set within the greater mystery that is Venice.
- **Florence: A Portrait**, by Michael Levey. Harvard University Press. 1997. Reading this in 1997 was an exhilarating experience that whetted my appetite for studying history and mentored me in becoming more attentive to the details of place.
- **Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy**, by Frances Mayes. Bantam Books. 1996.
- **A Valley in Italy: Confessions of a House Addict**, by Lisa St Aubin de Terán. Harper Perennial. 1995. As a reader, I’ve been under this author’s eccentric spell ever since I was a teenager. Beginning in her own teens, St Aubin de Teán has garnered international acclaim for novels and memoirs that vividly conjure up settings that range from the Andes mountains to this Umbrian valley.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

KENYA

- **Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya**, by Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson. When Kadir Nelson is the illustrator it's a sure sign that the text will also be exquisitely transporting. This picture-book biography of 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Muta Maathai is a must for readers of all ages. See a land transformed by one individual's commitment to her environment, as Mama Miti launches a reforestation movement, tree by tree. More than 30 million trees later, her work may inspire a whole new journey of your own.

MONGOLIA

- **The Blue Sky**, by Galsan Tschinag, Milkweed. 2006. This gently paced autobiographical novel takes you into the heart of a Tuvan community set high in the Altai Mountains.

TURKEY

- **Istanbul: Memories and the City**, by Orhan Pamuk. Alfred A. Knopf. Transcending the memoir genre, novelist Pamuk's portrait of his native city is so richly evocative that you can practically taste fresh-baked simit and see the sunlight and shadows on the Bosphorus as you turn its pages.
- **Midnight at The Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul**, by Charles King. W.W. Norton. 2015. If you aren't already a history buff, this book will turn you into one. It's set around a hotel that is still highly popular today and which inspired one frequent guest, Agatha Christie, to write *Murder on the Orient Express*. This unusual history expertly reveals Istanbul's past and illumines a path into its complex present.

UNITED STATES

- **Blue Highways**, by William Least Heat-Moon. Back Bay Books. 1982. Sometimes the loss of job can launch a journey that you wouldn't trade for all the security in the world. That was the case when the author set off in his van on a backroads journey that ranged from Simplicity, Virginia to Remote, Oregon by way of Why, Arizona and Whynot, Mississippi. Having recently reread it alongside Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, I agree wholeheartedly with the New York Times critic who deemed Least Heat-Moon's literary road trip far better.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

UNITED STATES Continued

- **The Book of Yaak**, by Rick Bass. Houghton Mifflin. 1991. In this nonfiction book by an author who is also a highly acclaimed novelist, short story writer, and poet, Bass presents an impassioned fight for the soul of Yaak, Montana, “one of the last great wild places in the United States.”
- **Freshwater Road**, by Denise Nicholas. Agate Bolden. 1996. Anything but escapist, this unsettling and profoundly moving coming of age story is set in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer of 1964. The sense of place is palpable—you will feel as if you are living history as it happens, in all its unpredictability.
- **O Pioneers!** by Willa Cather. Public domain. 1913. Cather’s novels are destinations in their own right: “The land belongs to the future, Carl; that’s the way it seems to me. How many of the names on the county clerk’s plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother’s children. We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it—for a little while.”
- **Tales of the City**, by Armistead Maupin. HarperCollins. 1976. Discover the book that launched a four-decade series of love letters to San Francisco. While many readers are divided on whether it is great literature or simply a highly entertaining read, this hugely successful saga broke new ground in the 1970s, continues to win fans today, and captures a San Francisco that has been all but vanished under its high-tech makeover.
- **The Time Travelers Wife**, by Audrey Niffenegger. Scribner. 2003. This popular novel pays tribute to several wonderful locations in Evanston and Chicago, at least one of which—aptly but sadly—is no more. That’s Bookman’s Alley, one of the last of the truly great secondhand book stores. But The Newberry, a research library that figures prominently in the author’s magical narrative, is still with us, thank goodness. Visit this 130-year old Romanesque cathedral to learning as evoked by Niffenegger, as well as the next time you’re in Chicago
- **Travels with Charley: In Search of America**, by John Steinbeck. Penguin. 1961.
- **Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Coast Trail**, by Cheryl Strayed. Vintage Books. 2012.



Wanderlust-Worthy Books

VIETNAM

- **Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam** by Andrew X. Pham. 2000. Picador. In his late 20s, Pham set off on a bicycle ride, one that would take him to Mexico, the American West Coast, Japan, and finally, to the homeland of his parents. By turns reportorial and surreal, but always engaging, it inquires deeply into the meanings of home and travel, and the experiences of immigration and exploration.

ZIMBABWE

- **The Hairdresser of Harare**, by Tendal Huchu. Ohio University Press. 2015. An astutely observant and often hilarious novelist, Huchu takes readers into a vibrant and multilayered contemporary world that exists far beyond news clips and stereotypes.



Share your own favorites with us at [OIC Moments](#).