

Embracing Bewilderment: A Reluctant Entrepreneur's Journey: An Unconventional European Summer Twisting into a Mind-Bending Excursion Through Southeast Asia

Cory Mortensen

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The third book in a series, Embracing Bewilderment is a globe-trotting adventure memoir with hints at a personal search for purpose.

Cory Mortensen's travel memoir *Embracing Bewilderment* chronicles his freewheeling round-the-world trip in the early 2000s. It culminated in an unexpected career transition, shifting Mortensen from backpacker to international entrepreneur.

During his months of traveling across the Americas, Mortensen had a chance meeting on a ferry that sparked romantic possibilities. After returning to the United States to sell his house, he set off for Europe, planning for more adventures and a reunion with his love interest in London. But love, like travel, didn't always follow his plans.

The book's enthusiasm for exploration is contagious. Its compelling anecdotes highlight the enlightening and mundane aspects of travel alike. In approachable and often humorous prose, it provides snapshots of Iceland, Scotland, England, mainland Europe, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia. There are details as of the Full Moon Party on Koh Phangan Island, taking place every month: "Thirty to forty thousand people from all over the world come and party and have been doing so since the 1970s, when hippies were traveling along the Hippie Trail." And there are details about local folklore too:

Scotland had its fair share of creatures. ... haunting the mysterious Northumbrian countryside ... home to the bogle and wirrikow. Creatures known for their constant tricking of the local villagers.

Travel conditions and experiences in the post-9/11 world, including paper tickets and foldout maps but also political and social realities such as the early days of the euro, the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, and the troubling economics of Chinese manufacturing and developing tourism in Southeast Asia, are featured. Mortensen captures a world on the cusp of technological transformation, complemented by nostalgic photographs.

The bulk of the book is a good-natured romp through hostels, trains, bars, and misadventures. However, in the process of detailing these travels, the book sometimes veers into minutiae, re-creating multitudes of trail and road signs and grocery lists. It includes some unnecessary footnotes, too, as with explanations of well-known colloquialisms (for example, a note that "Kiwi" refers to a New Zealander). A remark referencing a search for Mortensen's "Tonto"—here, used to mean sidekick—represents a lapse in cultural sensitivity. Further, the book's references to the "hero" of the story are awkward in tone. And the book's conclusion deviates from its general adventuresome spirit, tied up with Mortensen's decision to transition to a career in international entrepreneurship, with underdeveloped hints that personal purpose and success may be found by remaining open to any opportunities that are presented.

A loving ode to past travel experiences, *Embracing Bewilderment* is a passionate memoir about discernment via globe-

trotting—and ultimately, feeling called toward entrepreneurship.

CLAIRE O'BRIEN (March 29, 2024)

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