



How to Talk About Places You've Never Been: On the Importance of Armchair Travel

Pierre Bayard

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Written in the irreverent style that made *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* a critical and commercial success, Pierre Bayard takes readers on a trip around the world, giving us essential guidance on how to talk about all those fantastic places we've never been. Practical, funny, and thought-provoking, *How to Talk About Places You've Never Been* will delight and inform armchair globetrotters and jet-setters, all while never having to leave the comfort of the living room.

Bayard examines the art of the "non-journey," a tradition that a succession of writers and thinkers, unconcerned with moving away from their home turf, have employed in order to encounter the foreign cultures they wish to know and talk about. He describes concrete situations in which the reader might find himself having to speak about places he's never been, and he chronicles some of his own experiences and offers practical advice.

How to Talk About Places You've Never Been is a compelling and delightful book that will expand any travel enthusiast's horizon well beyond the places it's even possible to visit in a single lifetime.

How to Talk About Places You've Never Been: On the Importance of Armchair Travel Details

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Logan Sander says

Any good things about this book were overshadowed by its pretentious, overly sarcastic and not-funny narration. Bayard makes assumption after assumption, making wild claims about people and literature that are quite possibly not even remotely true. He also seems to pick unintuitive examples to support, like the story of a lying murderer, just for the sake of going against the grain or being cheeky. Truly a painful book to read.

Jonathan Tennis says

While I have not yet read his book about books you've never read, I will most likely pick it up after reading this one.

Bayard has a fun way of presenting his argument and backs it up with plenty of literary examples. I thought the book was supposed to all be a joke so I was a little shocked when the author went into such depth in supporting his claims on the benefits of armchair travel. Once I settled in the book was a delight and will recommend it to others.

Kristy says

I found the topic of this book interesting. Having been unable to travel as much as I'd like in recent years, I often armchair travel by reading books. I've been brought around the world in sumptuously descriptive stories, experiencing different cultures and places through my imagination. So I was sorely disappointed by this book's in ability to grab my attention. I felt like Bayard could have summed up his main points for each chapter in just a few simple sentences. Yes, the merits of having an objective, distanced view when writing makes perfect sense. Rather than being tainted by their own experience of a place, an author can fully imagine and depict a world to delight its readers. I only wish Bayard has succinctly summed these points up and been done with it, rather than trying and failing to write an entire thought provoking book. I did appreciate the glimpse into a few interesting armchair traveling authors and journalists (many with social and mental issues), as I had not been aware of these characters before. I also appreciated the slight, almost undetectable humor it was written with. Unfortunately, the humor was off-set by the un-engaging academic tone and it often felt like I was reading an academic article with lengthily written evidentiary support. Because I'm a goal oriented person and this book was short, I did finish it, though I struggled to do so.

Simone says

I don't think this worked as well as Bayard's other book, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read, but it was an interesting jaunt considering it's not very long and didn't take much time to read. His Margaret Mead

example was also difficult for me, having just read Galileo's Middle Finger: Heretics, Activists, and the Search for Justice in Science in which she disproves the attack on Mead that Bayard uses here. His points here, like in his last book, seem vaguely tongue in cheek, but he never succeeds in convincing me I must talk about places I've never been. Talking about books you haven't read is something that often comes in handy - knowing just enough about a cultural object to engage in a kind of shorthand with people about it is useful at dinner parties and whatnot. There seems to be no reason to fake having been somewhere, since people are far less likely to hold that against you? Eh. An interesting experiment.

Madison says

I don't know what I expected

Ann says

Well, Brian Williams is in good company as he is not the only writer/reporter who claims to have been where he was not and Pierre Bayard covers a multitude of writing/reporting deceptions in his book. Maybe I don't really need to go to the Caribbean to write and exclaim all about it, I can just never leave home, save money and fake it!!

Marvin says

Idée au départ intéressante: Pour bien décrire un pays étranger, on n'a pas besoin de se rendre sur place. En fait, on peut faire un meilleur travail en restant chez soi et en lisant les récits de ceux qui s'y sont déjà rendus. On peut ainsi garder une perspective plus globale du lieu à décrire.

Je salue la tentative faite par M. Bayard, mais quand j'ai refermé le livre, je me suis dit que non, finalement, c'est bien mieux de voyager, de découvrir les autres pays par soi-même et de se faire sa propre idée.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

I received a free advance reading copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads. FTC guidelines: check!

How to Talk About Places You've Never Been is a funny little book. At first, I couldn't figure out what tone the author was wanting to convey because he, quite seriously, discusses why and how to describe places that the reader has never been- a topic that I, before I read this, didn't take seriously at all. I finally settled my inner dialogue to "slightly grizzled professor who is smiling while lecturing" and that seemed to fit the bill.

There's a lot to enjoy in here like Marco Polo's hilarious description of unicorns. Polo is presented as an armchair traveler because he left out so many important details about the area he was describing (like the Great Wall) and, quite brazenly, just made other stuff up: *"They have great numbers of elephants and also great numbers of unicorns, which are not smaller than the elephants. Here is what they look like: they have*

the same hide as a buffalo, feet like an elephant, and they have very thick, black horns in the middle of their foreheads." pg 9 Oddly enough, that sounds rather like the Siberian unicorn, doesn't it? Only problem is-they became extinct so long ago, that Polo would have never seen one.

The character Phileas Fogg from *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne, goes around the world and never leaves his cabin to see the sights. Bayard thinks this is an excellent strategy: "*The idea of staying in your cabin for the entire journey highlights the importance of the imagination and reflection in our approach to place. These are activities that Fogg is able to commit himself to completely vis-a-vis the places passed through, with all the more energy because he doesn't waste precious time visiting them.*" pg 29

Chateaubriand went beyond simply trying to describe his travels in Ohio, he put an island into the middle of it in his "memoir" and Bayard applauds his imaginative creation as precise accuracy of physical locations is not what is necessarily important to an armchair traveler: "*As Jean-Claude Berchet recalls, (the island) was first situated in what is now Florida at the time of Travels in America.* Migrating, it then made a foray into the Mississippi at the time of an 1834 manuscript, before, following its movement northward, it found itself here in Ohio, several thousand kilometers away, clearly justifying the epithet of "a floating island." pg 57

Bayard's reasons why the reader may, one day, have to convince someone that they had been somewhere that they actually had not been: "*The first is adultery. ... The second, murder, is fortunately less common, but any one of us might become confronted with the necessity of having to take this route to ensure our peace and quiet one day.*" pg 103 How exciting and dramatic! And here I thought this book was just about sitting in your chair and day dreaming. :)

"It is impossible to hope to speak with any conviction of places you haven't been to without a vivid imagination. The capacity to dream and to make others dream is essential to anyone wanting to describe an unknown place and hoping to capture the imagination of their readers and listeners." pg 123 Dream on, readers, dream on!

If you enjoyed *How to Talk About Places You've Never Been*, you may want to pick up *The Art of Travel* by Alain de Botton or *The Art of Non-Conformity: Set Your Own Rules, Live the Life You Want, and Change the World* by Chris Guillebeau but, keep in mind, these books recommend that you actually go to the places, not just dream it.

Michele says

On the surface, this book is an intellectual dissection of the armchair traveler---that person who has poured over every atlas, every World Book, Foreign Affairs magazine article or a Thomas Friedman column in The New York Times, and can tell you about all the statistical, cultural, and geographical nuances of every continent and several countries, without having ever stepped foot on the land. Bayard respects this person. He respects the hunger and curiosity. Bayard understands, further, that travel is physical as well as intellectual.

His small book is a defense of the intellectual and imaginative and literary quality of travel.

Meghan says

During the epilogue of the book, Bayard says, "This book has amply demonstrated that getting to know cultures that are different from our own doesn't in any way require physical movement - far from it." I recognize that this book is meant to be humorous, and there were times that I felt certain he was speaking sarcastically, but I could never really tell what point he was attempting to make.

I enjoy travel firsthand, and I also enjoy traveling through the experiences of others. I was hoping this book would talk about loving to learn about and discuss places never traveled, rather than ways you could fool others into believing you experienced adventures you never have.

There were certain quotes within the book that resonated with me, though to be fair they are mostly taken out of the context within which they were written:

"If we think in terms of physical circulation, the logical question would be after how many kilometers - or, in terms of time, after how much time spent somewhere - could a traveler be considered to know a place, without forgetting that some people can spend their entire lives in the same place without really being able to say they know it."

"Choosing to describe a particular image from the vast array of possibilities offered by a space cannot be done without linking that space to a discourse that gives it meaning and integrates it into the greater unity of a reflection or vision."

"Physical presence is only one of the possible modes of presence and not necessarily the most profound."

"What Fogg [Around the World in 80 Days] is refusing here is the fact that however great the attraction of the sights proposed to him, they would mean following a preestablished route compiled by the general opinion of his predecessors, a route along which he would be as much at risk of missing the place by becoming absorbed in the community of opinions as of getting lost in infinite detail."

Overall, not the book for me.

David says

Bought on impulse, fittingly, in an airport. I expected it to be funnier than it was. Some of the stories were interesting though, and the theories around psychology, experiences, and writing. You really have to work for it.

Timothy Schatz says

I just finished the book because I wanted to read something short and not serious. I found the book to present its thesis well, that is that we do not have to be in a location to know it, but it tends to drag on during some examples. The best are offered at the bringing of the book which leaves the second half rather dry. The most interesting aspect of the book is its challenge to author authenticity which has a glimpse of a critique of a fact perspective on the world: not one of particular depth, simply that the impact of something doesn't always

come from the facts themselves, but the belief in the truth of them.

Leah says

One book that I read recently and wanted to give a great review is *How to Talk about Places You've Never Been* by Pierre Bayard. Pierre is a French writer who also wrote *How to Talk about Books that You've Never Read* (another book that I will probably add to my to-read list). I went into this book thinking that it'd be great and I wasn't disappointed. However, it was very different from what I thought it would be.

I was expecting just a straight-forward list of tips on how to participate in conversations with others about places that you've never been. However, what I found was an entertaining, and often sarcastic, telling of many writers and authors who have managed to pull their readers into places that they've never really been themselves. He told stories of people like Marco Polo, Edouard Glissant, Chateaubriand and many others who convinced their writers of their travels when really they were simply "armchair travelers" (Bayard's nickname for them)

I think my favorite quote from this book is that "the most important thing for a writer is to make his readers travel." Because so often when we are reading books, we want to be able to travel to a far away place and become immersed in another world.

Anyway, I highly recommend *How to Talk about Places You've Never Been* to anyone looking for a well-written non-fiction book.

Mark says

I was a fan of Pierre Bayard's previous book, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, largely because he provided such interesting literary examples. This time around, Bayard's act feels worn out. Despite a few interesting examples - the fraudulent Marco Polo, Margaret Mead relying on unreliable informants in Samoa, and odd defenses of Rosie Ruiz (who cheated in the Boston Marathon) and Jayson Blair - the obscurity of the literary theory on display was tiresome. Part of the fun of the previous book was that I constantly wondered whether or not the book was an extended joke ; now I'm convinced that the author is equally unsure.

Ms. Reader says

I received this book from Goodreads First Reads in exchange for an honest review....

It's a decent and solid read, yet failed to keep me interested. I had a really hard time following with where the author was trying to take it's readers. It felt out of balance, and bounced all over the place. I've heard good things about the author and he does seem to have a lot of talent, yet this book felt bland to me.
