

WANDERHEART

A heart-shaped cutout in the center of the cover reveals a landscape. In the foreground, a shepherd wearing a red robe stands with a flock of sheep on a sandy, brownish ground. The background shows a wide, flat expanse leading to two large, rocky, reddish-brown islands or hills under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

NEW STORIES
from
MY TRAVELS
to
EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

BORIS KESTER

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New Travel Stories from
My Travels to Every Country in the World

TRAVELADVENTURES.ORG

“Tell me, and tell me the truth. Where have you been, and through which countries have you traveled? Tell us about the peoples themselves, and about their cities—who were hostile, cruel and uncivilized, and who were hospitable and humane?”

– Homer, *Odyssey*

“Why must we listen to our hearts?” asked the boy.
“Because that’s where you’ll find your treasure.”

– Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

“Wherever you go, go with all your heart.”

– Confucius

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INTRODUCTION

At twenty-three, I quit a promising IT job. My colleagues asked about my new position and especially the accompanying salary. But my resignation stemmed from a deeper realization: the rigid pattern of office life would never truly make me happy. I yearned for freedom and wanted to explore the world.

I started traveling—always more and always farther—went to university, and then started working for an airline. Each journey and every adventure fueled my desire for more. Eventually, that insatiable hunger led me to visit every country in the world.

Along the way, I discovered what traveling is really about. It's about people who surprise and move you with their unexpected hospitality. About prejudices that disappear when you take the time to look deeper. About finding humanity, even—or perhaps especially—in places where you least expect it. About pushing your own boundaries. About learning to trust your intuition, especially when it leads you to places others would avoid.

Too often, I see people arranging their lives according to society's expectations, the presumed norms of their environment, or self-imposed limitations. We set aside our passions and dreams, make decisions out of fear or convenience, and thus hold ourselves back from much beauty before we've really begun. We listen too little to our hearts. Why? Out of

fear of failing to achieve what we truly desire? Out of fear of letting our dreams become reality?

After my decision to step away from my promising career, I learned to listen more keenly to my intuition. As a result, I naturally started taking more risks. Each time, my confidence that things would turn out well grew, and I dared to go one step further. My heart proved to be an excellent guide. Not just for traveling, but for life in general. It strengthened my determination, it urged me to see things in perspective, and it taught me not to be afraid. Travel is like life in miniature.

In *Wanderheart*, I invite you to live all kinds of adventures together with me. From my very first trip to Morocco as an impetuous youngster still trying to find my way, to a moving glimpse into the reality of the devastating war in Ukraine. Come with me as I knock on the door of a stranger in Japan who will immerse me in unexpected hospitality. Travel with me through impoverished Haiti, feel my wonder as I climb the Mountains of the Moon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and experience with me one of the most precarious moments of my wanderings in Iraq, in addition to many other adventures. Interwoven throughout these episodes is the story of my search for a lost love to bring her my first book, *The Long Road to Cullaville*.

I hope *Wanderheart* inspires you to follow your own heart, even when the path is uncertain. Because life can be just as surprising as you dare to make it.

Leiden, May 2025

PROLOGUE

I should arrive in a few kilometers. The realization hits me with increasing intensity: this might be the most exciting of all my adventures. Waves of unbridled eagerness and gnawing doubt surge through my body like a wild cocktail. Yet deeper inside, I also feel a calming certainty. The conviction that I cannot do anything other than what I'm about to do, simply because it comes straight from my heart.

I'm on my way to bring Nana a copy of my book, *The Long Road to Cullaville*. She plays a defining role in the first chapter—without her, the book probably would never have existed. After the dramatic end of our turbulent relationship more than thirteen years ago, we never saw or spoke to each other again.

Nana doesn't know I'm coming—just as I don't know if she'll be home. I have no idea how she'll react when she sees me—that is, *if* I can even find her, because I only vaguely know where she lives.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: BEYOND THE FENCE

Haiti - 2007

The travel advisories are unequivocal: stay away from the western part of Hispaniola. A failed state, torn apart by violence and corruption. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. These warnings echo through my mind as Nana and I pack our bags. Is it really as dangerous as everyone claims? We've traveled to quite a few countries that people had warned us about, from Yemen to Honduras, but this feels different. The stories are grimmer, the warnings more urgent. And yet, or perhaps because of this, it draws us in.

As dark clouds gather above the distant mountains, we leave the Dominican Republic behind, with its lounging tourists at their all-inclusive resorts. Ahead of us awaits Haiti, a country barely understood by the rest of the world and, perhaps precisely because of this, subject to many prejudices. As the bus comes to a halt at the Malpasse border crossing, my heart rate quickens. Nana says, with a slight tremor in her voice, 'Here we go!'

In Pétienville, a suburb of Port-au-Prince, we're immediately surrounded by a group of Haitians. Their dark eyes examine us searchingly. The taciturn taxi driver observes us suspiciously through

his rearview mirror as he steers his rattling vehicle through the twilight toward the center. As we step out, the last rays of sunlight slip away along the dilapidated facades. Our footsteps echo between the buildings, conversations fall silent as we pass. Shadows lengthen and creep behind us across the street. We are the only light spots in a city that grows increasingly darker, two wandering souls anxiously searching for safe harbor.

One of the greatest challenges a traveler faces is to leave prejudices at home and form their own impression of an unfamiliar country and its inhabitants. Due to Haiti's poor reputation, that challenge to look beyond headlines and travel advisories feels even greater here than elsewhere.

The next morning, we cautiously take our first steps in the capital. A gray veil hangs over the city. Chaos overwhelms us from all sides. We carefully navigate through the waste covering the streets, avoiding pits and holes. Our eyes scan not only the road ahead but also the faces around us. Every sound, every movement demands vigilance. How close can people get to us? Which glances are curious and which hostile? We make sure to stay close to each other.

Then a brightly colored *tap-tap* breaks open the dull street scene. Shortly after, we see another, and then more. They are moving works of art: pickup trucks and buses that explode with color, each panel a canvas. They flash past like tropical birds among dust and debris.

When we finally see one standing still, we feast our eyes. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" and "Nice girl" are written in uneven letters on the sides and back. Underneath the words, a painting of a beautiful woman. Below her, a shark with a mouth full of teeth and an aggressive appearance. Below that, between two pink doves, hangs a sign on the bumper reading "Merci Jésus." On the side: "Living Christ" with a

painted Jesus on the cross. Below that, hearts everywhere with “Amour” painted inside them.

Shortly after, we see another bus with an entirely different theme. Painted on the back is a man with a bare torso, kissing a woman’s neck. She gracefully throws her head back, causing her long hair to fall down. Her dark red dress is cut low. The couple is surrounded by hearts. On the side lies a woman on a sofa, dressed in nothing but underwear, her breasts falling somewhat to the left. Next to her, a Rasta singer with a guitar in his hand—that must be Bob Marley.

Port-au-Prince turns out to be a rolling art gallery. The most common tap-tap themes are religious and erotic; a curious combination, a glimpse into the Haitian soul. We realize that Haitians are a creative people, even though their daily lives revolve mainly around survival.

As we walk further through the city, we begin to see beyond just the chaos and decay. We cross Avenue Lamartinière and pass along Avenue Durand and Rue Capois. Revolutionaries, freedom fighters, and the national poet of the country. History emerges everywhere, tightly woven into the fabric of the city. All streets seem to lead us to one place: the Champ de Mars, the beating heart of Port-au-Prince where Haiti’s soul truly reveals itself. Here unfolds a mosaic of squares and boulevards, where history isn’t written in books but cast in bronze and stone. The Avenue de la Liberté runs straight through it like the common thread of freedom. We almost stumble over the symbolism.

We stand before a narrow, black column, in which Article 3 of the 1801 Constitution is engraved. “In this country, slavery cannot exist. Bondage is forever abolished here. All people are born, live, and die free.” The words still hold the same universal value as when they were written, but at the same time cast a bitter shadow over the country’s tragic history.



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Wanderheart

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In *Wanderheart*, Boris Kester takes you from the hospitality of a Japanese stranger to the unique history of Haiti, and from the treasures of Iraq to the battlefields of Ukraine. Woven through these adventures is the compelling story of his quest to find a lost love. Boris Kester takes you from the hospitality of a Japanese stranger to the battlefields of Ukraine. Woven through these adventures is his quest to find a lost love. With his keen eye for detail, Kester writes about unexpected encounters you only experience when you dare to stray from the beaten path. Every page breathes pure travel passion and invites you to push your own boundaries.

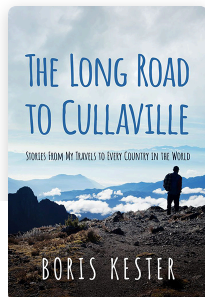
Be the first to know when *Wanderheart* launches in early 2026 — plus receive an exclusive launch week discount!

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Also by Boris Kester



The Long Road to Cullaville

Within its sixteen stories, *The Long Road to Cullaville* takes you to Yemen, Congo, Nauru and Afghanistan, amongst other places. Thanks to his rich descriptions, the author shows you what it's like to travel in unusual countries.

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