

WANDERHEART

A heart-shaped cutout in the center of the cover reveals a landscape. Inside the heart, a shepherd in a red robe stands with a flock of sheep on a sandy plain. In the background, two large, rocky islands or headlands rise from the sea under a blue sky. The rest of the cover is a blurred, warm-toned landscape.

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.

MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

Democratic Republic of the Congo - 2015

When I arrived in Brazzaville, Congo, my plan was to cross the river to Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, often referred to as DRC. These are the two closest capital cities in the world: you only need to cross the Congo River. From the boulevard, I could practically hear the market women on the other side advertising their mangoes.

The official at the embassy made short work of my plans. It was a taste of the bureaucracy that would await me later in the eastern part of the country.

‘Where do you live?’

‘In the Netherlands.’

‘Then you cannot apply for a visa here. We only process applications from people who reside in Congo. You must submit the application in your own country.’

This is quite common. Now, many embassies aren’t located in my home country, but in Brussels. Technically not my own country. This helps with quite a few embassies. I brought this up to the official, to which he responded that I needed to apply for my visa in Brussels.

‘Is there really no other way to resolve this? I really want to visit your country. I’ve been traveling for some time, and it’s rather cumbersome to travel to Brussels for a visa, fly back, and then cross the river.’

‘I believe I’ve been clear. Bonne journée, monsieur.’

His look left nothing to the imagination: there was no room for negotiation. And no, I wasn’t going to slip a fifty-dollar bill between my passport pages to tempt him to give me a visa anyway.

As I walked away from the embassy, alongside disappointment I also felt determination. The “no” had only strengthened my desire to travel to the DRC. Later, I would discover that this rejection had worked in my favor.



Two years later, I hear that if you buy a ticket for an excursion in Virunga National Park in the eastern part of the country, you can pick up your visa at the border. The great advantage is that I can go to perhaps the most beautiful part of the country. Of the options in Virunga, I’m particularly interested in the Nyiragongo volcano and the Rwenzori Mountains. I order the tickets on a slick website and receive an equally slick confirmation in no time.

A few weeks later, I step out of the minibus that brought me from Kigali to the border. But will I really be able to cross the border with just a printout of the booked excursions? Who knows if that slick website was fake? I’ve already experienced so much hassle at borders. Moreover, the DRC’s bureaucracy already has a poor reputation, with the uncompromising “no” at the embassy in Brazzaville a few years ago adding to it. So I brace myself for what’s to come.

There isn't even a queue.

'May I see your documents?'

'Here you are: my passport, and my payment confirmation for two excursions in Virunga.'

He doesn't even blink. He takes the documents, walks away, disappears from sight, and returns in no time.

'Here's your passport. Enjoy your stay!' The man smiles broadly. Overwhelmed, I walk away with a fresh stamp from my 177th country.

Goma, just across the border, has a turbulent history. The active Mount Nyiragongo has often plagued the city, the Rwandan Civil War brought a flood of refugees, and now Goma is teeming with NGOs and UN workers. A melting pot of nationalities. I quickly discover that the city is expensive, and I end up in a grimy little hotel.

It soon becomes apparent that the inhabitants make good use of the lava that Mount Nyiragongo has spewed over the city over time. From the solidified entrails of the monster, they've made walls, flowerpots, and curb markers. The volcano holds the city in its grip like a cat holds its mouse. When it feels like it, it mercilessly spews its all-consuming glow towards the city, causing destruction and displacement. While I look at the beast with awe, the residents seem to have erased its presence from their consciousness. They live their lives, and whenever the next eruption comes, they'll see how to deal with it.

The next day, a young man brings me on his motorcycle to the foot of the mighty giant. There, my companions are waiting: two Norwegian women, a Canadian, a guide, and porters. We immediately begin the steep climb, some already struggling with fitness and altitude. We end up at the summit at 3,470 meters when night is about to fall, put our belongings in wooden huts, and walk to the nearby crater rim. When I look over the edge, my breath stops.



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Wanderheart

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"The adventures had me heart racing. From Iran to Cuba, I was on the edge of my seat." — Reader praise for Boris Kester's travel writing

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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.

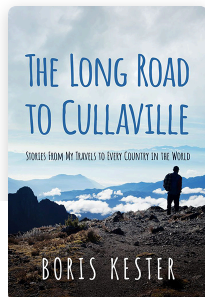
Be the first to know when *Wanderheart* launches in early 2026 — plus receive an exclusive launch week discount!

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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.

His stories are compelling and entertaining, breathtaking and moving. Meanwhile, he makes you think about the risks of travel and the pre-eminent influence of fate. The book caters to both experienced globetrotters and armchair travelers, inspiring wanderlust and curiosity in all.

Winner of the 2023 NomadMania Best Travel Book Award

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