

Katherine Williams

## TRAVEL BEAT

## 'Amateur's Guide' travel book a gem



Williams

The business of publishing travel books has absolutely exploded in the last five years. Any once-around the aisles of a big book store offers up hundreds of titles on destinations that most of us will never get to.

Some of the books are very good, and well worth the money; others are simply tired, re-packaged information with out-of-date details that — glossy cover aside — makes only for a very bad buy.

That much said, I was delighted the other day to buy a book that I recommend without reservation: *An Amateur's Guide to the Planet*. Its subtitle is *Twelve Adventure Journeys and Lessons for the Contemporary United States*.

Jeannette Belliveau, the author, is a former Washington Post national-desk editor. She used her vacation time over a decade to visit a dozen of the world's most remote places.

The traveler in her provides narratives for her journeys from Madagascar to China; the journalist in her provides incredibly insightful background on the cultural, economic and social aspects of Greece, the Yucatan, Burma, Brazil and elsewhere.

For each of the chapters (Borneo, Kenya-Tanzania, Japan, Polynesia, Thailand, Java and Bali are the others), Belliveau offers up lessons learned along the way.

In China, she notes that "Bicycling, like walking and sailing, intimately connects the traveler to the country. This proximity to the early spring planting in the countryside would have been unattainable by auto, bus or even train."

For Greece, she comments: "Some critics assail mass tourism (particularly in the Caribbean) as

promoting a neo-plantation economy, with profits heading back to First World investors." A detail about Borneo:

"Travelers should not be deterred by sketchy information; things will work out on arrival. As I saw on a basketball player's T-shirt, Just elevate and then decide."

The researcher within Belliveau wrote the book after consulting with top scholars and correspondents in each of the subject areas, and 600 book and periodical references. The end result is a fantastically packaged 264-page resource that makes for new levels in travel journalism.

As she says in her foreword: "Exotic travel, once the province of explorers, traders, scholars and pilgrims, became a pastime for average people (in the 1980s) . . . Regular people with typical, provincial U.S. schooling may find that travel stimulates lingering questions about the way the world fits together."

Priced at \$19.95, the book is available by asking at the local bookstore, or by calling Beau Monde Press at 800-282-3963.

Part of me bought the book because I have been fortunate to have traveled to some of the places that Belliveau writes about. The other part of me bought it because she and I worked together on the same Maryland weekly newspaper — my

first job in journalism — nearly 20 years ago. I hadn't seen her since. Small world, I guess.

**That time of year:** Revisiting the theme of last week's column, on crowded planes at Thanksgiving, it's true: There is no escaping them.

Infrequent flyers may find flying at Thanksgiving a bit disconcerting.

Flying out of Madison often involves making a connection in,

say, Chicago, Cincinnati or Detroit. And connecting flights involve the bother of boarding all over again.

Boarding takes longer (why is it that some people in row 10 always get on when only passengers through row 15 have been called?). Seat squabbles occur:

Some inflexible people won't budge from their assigned seat, even if it breaks up a family trying to sit together. And others try to carry on luggage that should have been checked — then hold up others as they check one overhead compartment after another, ones which have already been filled and closed.

Personally, I love flying anywhere, no matter the conditions, generally.

I don't even mind packed planes at Thanksgiving, but I do get testy around crying babies in the next seat.

Rather than get upset at all the annoying, stupid things people do on planes, I look at flying during holidays as the perfect opportunity for people-watching — once I'm happily settled in my own seat.

**Pabst for the holidays:** One of Milwaukee's most prestigious homes, the Pabst Mansion, has opened (since Nov. 22) for its annual Family Christmas display. The nationally recognized Christmas exhibit involves more than 30 trees, thousands of yards of garland, all embellished with ornaments and dried florals.

Admission is \$8 for adults, \$4 for ages 6 through 17. The display is open through Jan. 6; call (414) 931-0808.

**ValuJet's values:** Sometimes I can't help thinking that East Coasters enjoy all the good airfares. The now-resurrected ValuJet, in an effort to woo back flyers, recently announced its "permanent" fare structure among its east-coast destinations. Operating out of Atlanta, ValuJet offers 21-

day advanced-purchase roundtrip fares ranging from \$29 to \$69; 14-day fares from \$39 to \$99; 7-day fares from \$49 to \$119; 2-day fares from \$99 to \$129; and walk-up fares from \$119 to \$149.

Also, you can buy \$19 companion fares for all one-way flights, including connections, with a two-week advanced purchase.

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