

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. In the background, two large, rocky islands or headlands rise from the sea under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bathed in 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.

FUNERAL AMONG BIRCH TREES

Sweden/Finland - 1986

After my journey a year ago to the southernmost and easternmost reaches of the Interrail network, this time I set my course toward the far north. It's my curiosity about unknown places more than my thirst for adventure that drives me now: I expect a smooth, perhaps even boring, journey. I haven't yet realized that unexpected things can always cross your path and turn everything upside down—no matter where you go. Youthful naiveté, once again.

Copenhagen serves as my gateway to the land of the Norsemen. I wander through streets lined with stately buildings and colorful houses, walk along canals and through parks, and see statues of kings, writers, and other famous Danes. I visit the frivolous Tivoli, the free-spirited Christiania, climb the spiral staircase winding around the spire of the Church of Our Saviour, and see the highly overrated Little Mermaid. There's no way I could possibly imagine that, exactly at this spot many years from now, I will be immortalized in photos taken by a group of Japanese tourists in a passionate kiss with the woman who had just turned my life upside down.

A night train takes me to Oslo. A capital city with the atmosphere of a village on nature's doorstep. The highlight is the Kon-Tiki museum. Standing next to the original balsa wood rafts that Thor Heyerdahl used to cross both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, I feel the same enthusiasm as I did at that monument in Lisbon. Intrepid travelers who followed their hearts and journeyed far beyond the horizon inspire me to dream of traveling farther than I can imagine.

On my way to Stockholm, I decide to change my plans by staying on the train and traveling around the Gulf of Bothnia to Helsinki instead of taking the ferry. The next morning, a desolate landscape glides past my window. I see a row of white stones in the emptiness and realize that I've crossed the Arctic Circle for the first time in my life. Finally, I step out at one of Europe's northernmost stations.

In nearly deserted Gällivare, I meet a New Zealander who tells me about her travels through Southeast Asia, Japan, and South Korea. Places that seem endlessly far away to me and that come to life through her stories. She, and other travelers I meet on this journey, make my world a little bit bigger each time. They make me dream about all those places far beyond the horizon that were previously nothing more than exotic names on the world map.

The train to Tornio that I take the next day has to regularly sound its horn to chase away moose with magnificent antlers from the tracks. Once in the Finnish border town, I have to change trains because the tracks in Finland are wider. A remnant from the time when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia. This forced delay will have far-reaching consequences for me.

The little train that's supposed to take me farther east starts moving in fits and starts, exactly on time. Black clouds of smoke from the diesel engine dissipate in the perfectly blue sky. The train is almost empty. Compared to my journey a year ago, traveling here is so easy. Almost

dull. After a little while, I arrive in Kemi; the night train to Helsinki will depart in less than an hour. I have no doubt that it will also depart exactly according to schedule and bring me to the Finnish capital the next day with minute-perfect precision.

When I reach for my wallet, my hand finds an empty right trouser pocket. My blood freezes in my veins. I know it immediately: I've lost it. For form's sake, I still search through my luggage and other pockets, but what I already know turns out to be true. Wallet gone, Swedish and Dutch money gone, and no other way to pay for things along the way.

The question that immediately presents itself—How do I get home? Fortunately, I still have my Interrail pass, but from here it's a day and a half of non-stop train travel to get home. How can I get food and drinks along the way, or pay for other things? I also realize it's Friday evening, which will make it still more complicated to get help.

And how is it even possible that I lost the wallet in the first place? I haven't met anyone in Tornio, haven't bought anything. It must have been lost on the train. Of course! That must be it! So, I walk through the entire train and look under every seat, at every landing, everywhere I've been. It simply must be lying here somewhere. The train is far from full and is only a few cars long.

During my search, a Finnish woman with long, black hair speaks to me.

'It looks like you're searching for something. Can I help you?'

'Yes, that's right. I've lost my wallet, which had all my money in it. I hope to find it in the train. If not, I don't know how I'll get home.'

'Oh, how awful! Come, I'll help you look.' Together we walk through the train, but no matter how thoroughly we search, we don't find the wallet.

'I'm changing to the train to Helsinki myself soon,' she remarks after a while. 'I have friends near Tornio. They'll take care of you. I'll call them so they know you might come knocking.'



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Wanderheart

13 Chapters • Follow Your Heart to Extraordinary Places

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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.

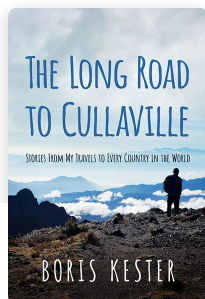
Be the first to know when *Wanderheart* launches in early 2026 — plus receive an exclusive launch week discount!

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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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