

**Travels with the Spirit: A Summer Travelogue Through the Book of Acts
Travel Testimony**

“Seeking Spiritual and Human Connection Through Travel”

Christy Vrtis

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Growing up, my family traveled—a lot. Most school vacations, we would pack our old Subaru hatchback to overflowing and hit the road, exploring National Parks, Mountain Resorts, Canadian water parks, and the very tip of the Florida Keys. Every trip was about the same: see as much as possible—mostly through the car window—as quickly, and cheaply, as we could. Take one day for an “experience” like skiing in the Rockies, or hiking in the Grand Canyon, and then back in the car. Travel, as a kid, was about seeing things that I’d read about or heard about or seen in movies—and reading as many books in the car as I possibly could!

When I went to college, travel was on the top of my agenda, but a different kind of travel. At that point, I craved the romance of travel: the allure of discovering tiny, beautiful corners of the world and meeting fascinating people who were “different” from me, and maybe falling in love with a dreamy Italian man!

At the end of my Sophomore year of college, I went on Concordia Moorhead’s version of J-term. For the month of May, I travelled in Europe and the UK with 10 of my fellow theatre majors and two professors. We immersed ourselves in theatre and explored the culture and history of each new place. This trip was life-changing. Not only did I experience watching and absorbing more than thirty theatrical productions in five different countries and in several different languages, I also experienced the most profound spiritual moments of my life.

On a train from Venice to Paris, a man jumped from the platform and by the time the train stopped, his body lay under my sleeping car. We were not allowed to leave our seats while emergency personnel provided care and, hours later, extracted the man’s body. I sat in my window seat trying desperately to avoid looking at the feet directly below me for hours. I have never prayed more in my life. I was overwhelmed with grief and disbelief and fear and sadness for the man—his life, the loss of his life—and hoped that God was with him and with his loved ones, and that maybe, now, the man’s spirit was at peace.

And then we got to Paris and went to Notre Dame. The moment I walked into the immense, cold, dark cathedral I was overcome with the presence of God and the vast depth of human experience reverberating within those stone walls. The suffering and joy and tears spilt in that place over time mixed with my own, and I stood in awe and wonder and comfort in that space for hours.

I've experienced something similar in each spiritual location I've visited throughout the world, regardless of the type of faith the place or space represents. For me, it is a profound connection to the presence of God in my life, but also the connection to humanity, to real people like me trying to live their lives as best they can, with their joys and sorrows, triumphs and loss.

Travel, for me, comes down to a few key things: exploration, connection, reflection, and, ultimately, seeing the world—and the people and things that inhabit the world—from a new perspective. And the understanding, confirmed and re-confirmed in each place, that there is something bigger that connects us all, whether we call it God or Allah or the “universe”.

In the first year common course at Luther College, where I teach, I often include the works of the Sufi poet Rumi in my sections. Rumi writes about longing for connection to each other and to the “origin,” of trying, always trying, to get back to the sacred or the divine, to get back to God. And the ability of travel, both physical and spiritual, to bring power and love into your life.

One of the poems that I teach is called “The Guest House.” Rumi writes:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
Empty of its furniture,
Still, treat each guest honorably;
He may be clearing you out
For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing,
And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

I feel this longing and desire for connection that Rumi writes about—acutely and often. I call it getting ‘itchy feet, and every time I do, I know it is time to get back on the road.