

## UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

**English 6174**

**Intensive/Advanced Nonfiction Travel Writing**  
Summer 2020

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“Serendipity was my tour guide, assisted by caprice”

— Pico Iyer

“A journey is a fragment of Hell.”

— Bruce Chatwin

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A workshop in travel writing and related literary nonfiction genres, structured around peer-led critiques of student-written articles and essays.

### **COURSE GOALS**

1. Learn and develop techniques associated with writing travel nonfiction, and by extension, literary nonfiction.
2. Interrogate concepts of place, setting, and the benefits and pitfalls of relativizing and essentializing a destination
3. Learn and practice the journalistic skills critical to good travel writing, and general nonfiction research.
4. Understand the distinctions between different types of travel media, such as the descriptive personal essay versus the expository article versus the prescriptive guide.
5. Understand how principles of travel writing can be applied to literary nonfiction writing.
6. Graduate level participants will demonstrate how travel writing techniques can be utilized in other genres of literary nonfiction such as memoir, historical essays, etc. This outcome will be linked to the in-class presentation (see below).

### **REQUIREMENTS TO ACHIEVE COURSE GOALS**

1. Participants will draft three works of travel writing.
2. At least one piece must incorporate research and journalism practices.
3. Participants will provide peers with mindful critiques and line edited drafts, and give and receive constructive oral criticism in workshop discussions.
4. Participants will discuss assigned readings in workshop.
5. Participants will make presentations on self-selected writing samples of literary travel/place-related nonfiction writing.
6. Along with requirements 1-4, graduate student presentations should utilize a piece of literary nonfiction that is not dedicated travel writing. Graduate level presentations will instead demonstrate how their selected nonfiction piece utilizes elements of travel writing craft.

### **PARTICIPANT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Participants will become more skillful creative writers.

2. Participants will hone a travel writer's skills: observation, retention, incorporation, and execution.
3. Participants will become more resourceful reporters and literary journalists.
4. Participants will become better constructive critics of their own writing and the writing of their peers.
5. Graduate students will understand how travel writing craft can be utilized across literary nonfiction genres.

## READINGS

1. A broad selection of nonfiction travel essays, articles, and guidebook content, including
  - a. *The Burman: His Life & Notions* (excerpts), by Shway Yoe/George Scott [ISBN-10: 0393002128]
  - b. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, by David Foster Wallace
  - c. *The Songlines* (excerpts), by Bruce Chatwin [ISBN-10: 0140094296]
  - d. *The Age of Kali* (excerpts), by William Dalrymple [ISBN-10: 0006547753]
  - e. *Lonely Planet guidebooks*, (excerpts)
  - f. *Power Walking*, by Aminatta Forna
  - g. *The Teenage Whaler's Tale*, by Julia O'Malley
2. Published work assigned by faculty and participants.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Assignments:** Three works of nonfiction travel writing, approximately 15-30 pages or more. One of these essays must be written as a long-form journalism piece, and should incorporate, at the least, research about a previously unknown subject, and ideally, interviews and quotes from outside of the author's voice. Other pieces may be written as first person essays, but if students desire, all three of their submissions may incorporate reportage and journalism practices. Because we are on a limited schedule, participants should have two pieces prepared by the beginning of the summer session.

**Flash travel piece(s):** Following excursions, students may be asked to produce a flash piece of travel writing (1000 words maximum), to be shared with the class. These pieces will primarily serve to sharpen students' command of descriptive language.

**Flash guidebook writing:** Prior to excursions, students may be assigned a flash piece of travel guidebook writing (1000 words maximum). Students will be expected to provide reviews, with practicality details (opening hours, contact information, etc) for destinations associated with program excursions.

**Workshop protocol:** An ideal workshop is an environment where participants can anticipate growth as a writer and be assured of a safe and respectable atmosphere for constructive critique. Oral and written criticism of a peer's work must aim for both honesty and civility. When addressing each other's work, we will critique elements of craft and content, not the character of the author. Bear in mind that it is equally valuable for a writer to know what is working in a piece, alongside knowledge of what may need some attention. Ultimately, our purpose is to become better writers, not compete with each other.

**Critiques:** Written critiques are one of the fundamental cornerstones of workshop. All participants will bring two typed critiques for each piece of submitted writing, barring flash/guidebook work. These typed critiques must be a minimum double-spaced page in length. One critique goes to me, the other to the writer, who should also receive a notated, line-edited hard copies of their draft after we've discussed it in workshop.

**Participation:** Workshop participants are expected to regularly and punctually attend class. All assigned drafts and critiques must be completed before class convenes. Courteous participation in oral discussion is both a class requirement and another cornerstone of a successful workshop.

**Class Format:** Primarily discussion. Our goal is to improve our writing; our tools are the workshop community, where participants act as critical resources aimed at refining craft. Everyone will participate in discussions that explore the ideas and artistry of our written work. Everyone will discuss the instincts required for being a successful observer and recorder of the world.

All classes will begin with turning in annotated drafts and two copies of that day's critiques. We will then workshop, discuss background reading, and listen to presentations.

**Presentations:** Once during the semester, graduate course participants will make a short presentation on and lead a discussion of a piece of nonfiction writing that is not dedicated travel writing, which nonetheless utilizes elements of travel writing craft. These may be memoirs, historical essays, or similar pieces. Graduate students are expected to demonstrate the links between travel writing craft and their chosen literary nonfiction piece.

**Attendance and punctuality:** Participants are expected to be consistently present and on time; we have no workshop without the workers in the shop. Except in special instances, absences and lateness are unacceptable, as they prevent participants from fulfilling their responsibilities to their fellow writers in the group. Unexcused absences and lateness will adversely affect a participant's grade. Please contact me, preferably well beforehand, about any circumstance that will cause you to be tardy or absent.

**Conferences:** I'd love to discuss your work. I will make myself available each week to provide one on one critiques to whomever has submitted pieces that week.

**Evaluation:**

- **Participation (10%)**
- **Presentation (10%)**
- **Critiques (20%)**
- **Drafts of nonfiction 1, 2, and 3 (60%)**

**Accommodations:** It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

**Academic integrity:** Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.