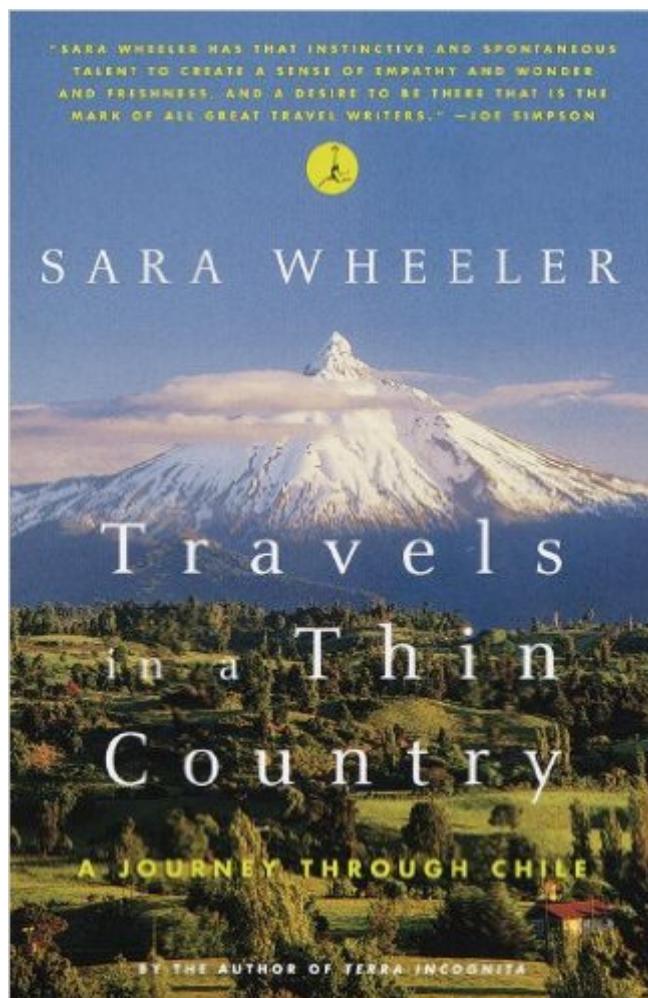


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Travels In A Thin Country: A Journey Through Chile (Modern Library (Paperback))



Synopsis

Squeezed between a vast ocean and the longest mountain range on earth, Chile is 2,600 miles long and never more than 110 miles wide--not a country that lends itself to maps, as Sara Wheeler discovered when she traveled alone from the top to the bottom, from the driest desert in the world to the sepulchral wastes of Antarctica. Eloquent, astute, nimble with history and deftly amusing, *Travels in a Thin Country* established Sara Wheeler as one of the very best travel writers in the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a 2006 reissue of a book written more than ten years earlier, and in her introduction to the reissue the author describes it as a young woman's book, but she is too kind: a rather silly and ignorant book would be more accurate. The central problem is that she doesn't seem to have decided what sort of book she was trying to write. A travel book may fall into one of three genres: a tourist guide, an analysis of the political and social character of the country visited, or an account of the adventures experienced by the author. Sara Wheeler doesn't appear to have had any adventures, so the third of these is a non-starter, but her book fails in both of the other two as well: it has too few descriptions of the places visited and too many accounts of the conversations she had about politics to succeed as a tourist guide; as a social and political analysis it has much too much chit-chat. In any case her knowledge of Chile is very superficial -- the kind of thing she would have heard from her political exile friends in London before she went, rather than things she saw

with her own eyes. One has the impression that her main objective was to confirm the ideas she had before going to Chile, and within Chile she stayed (amongst other places, of course) at the British Embassy and on the estates of very wealthy people, where no doubt, she was able to confirm her prejudices. She tells us, for example, that the Chilean population is riddled with anti-semitism: she could easily have picked up that idea from talking with her wealthy friends, but as a description of the population as a whole it is complete nonsense. Who could visit Lake Chungura in the far north of Chile without finding anything at all to say about its beauty?

Since I did a similar trip to the one in this book a few years ago, I was curious to see whether Sara and I also had the same experience. We didn't. Whereas I just left home, Sara apparently first spent much time learning Spanish and gathering a network of contacts in Chile, including a number of official tourist offices that gave her free or cheap accommodation and transportation, very briefly mentioned here and there. Her contacts in Santiago, some at the British Embassy and some filthy rich families, Chile's de facto aristocracy, gives her access to interesting people and a level of luxury that "normal" travellers seldom encounter. So reading the book is not the best way to figure out what you can expect to see and do on your own trip through Chile. Nevertheless there's a lot of background information about the country which may be useful to you. Also because she did her trip in the early 1990s, so a LOT has changed since then. All the destinations she mentions are still very much open to tourism, and you get a general idea of what they are like. I was disappointed that she only spent half a day in Torres del Paine, which to me was the most beautiful spot in the country. Also, she goes to "Chilean Antarctica", but there's not much of value to be gathered from reading her account of it. She only spent one day there, being guided by Chilean officials in and around a tiny settlement. Sometimes she's funny in a very British manner, but it rarely lasts more than one sentence at a time. One of the other reviewers appears to find Sara rather promiscuous, going off with one man after the other on, well, overnight adventures to remote places.

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