

## Take a Vacation in a Book

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

A few weeks ago, my husband, son, and I went on vacation to the West Coast. After two and a half years of the pandemic, the trip was a celebration of some family milestones, and our time in San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and Monterey was the perfect place for adventure, sightseeing, and relaxation.

No trip is complete without making time for reading so I tucked a few paperbacks into my backpack, including a great book that takes place in San Francisco, Armistead Maupin's "Tales of the City." My interest in "Tales of the City" began in 1993 when it was made into a miniseries for PBS starring Laura Linney and Olympia Dukakis. After watching it on tv, I just had to read the books. What better time to reread it than this vacation?

The stories were initially written as a serial for the "San Francisco Chronicle" newspaper so each chapter is short and engaging and makes you want to keep reading and reading. Goodreads offers a great summary, "A naïve young secretary, fresh out of Cleveland, tumbles headlong into a brave new world of laundromat Lotharios, pot-growing landladies, cutthroat debutantes, and Jockey Shorts dance contests. The saga that ensues is manic, romantic, tawdry, touching, and outrageous."

This book and our travels got me thinking about how certain books embody the location where they take place. It's almost like the setting is another character in the novel: alive, colorful, and with a personality all its own. I've heard some people say that New York City is the fifth girlfriend in "Sex and the City" by Candace Bushnell.

If you can't get out of town this summer, perhaps you can take your mind on vacation. Here are a few books that embody their setting, transporting you far, far away.

If you're interested in a warm-weather California vacation, I'd recommend "The Guncle" by Steven Rowley, which takes place in Palm Springs. The publisher writes, "Patrick, or Gay Uncle Patrick (GUP, for short), has always loved his niece, Maisie, and nephew, Grant. That is, he loves spending time with them when they come out to Palm Springs for weeklong visits, or when he heads home to Connecticut for the holidays. So when tragedy strikes and Patrick finds himself suddenly taking on the role of primary guardian, he is, honestly, overwhelmed." The heat of the Palm Springs desert practically radiates off the page, making this a great choice for the pool or the beach.

Another great book about California is Taylor Jenkins Reid's "Malibu Rising." The book takes place in 1983 and recounts an epic end-of-summer party. With references to famous landmarks, surfing superstars, and local celebrities, the beachside neighborhood comes to life and readers wish they had a plane ticket and a time machine to go transport them to the party.

I'm waiting for my turn to read "Vacationland" by Meg Mitchell Moore so I can take a virtual visit to the Maine coastland. The publisher writes, "Louisa has come to her parents' house in Maine this summer with all three of her kids, a barely-written book, and a trunkful of resentment. Left behind in Brooklyn is her husband, who has promised that after this final round of fundraising at his startup he will once again pick up his share of the household responsibilities. Louisa is hoping that the crisp breeze off Penobscot Bay will blow away the irritation she is feeling with her life choices and replace it with enthusiasm for both her family and her work."

Cities are another great vacation destination. Some books that evoke the Big Apple are “The Catcher in the Rye” by J.D. Salinger, “The Chaperone” by Laura Moriarty, “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn” by Betty Smith, and “Behold the Dreamers” by Imbolo Mbue. “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens is a trip through time to London and “Lost and Found in Paris” by Lian Dolan takes you to the City of Lights.

Even though it’s for kids, this list wouldn’t be complete without the quintessential book about Boston, “Make Way for Ducklings” by Robert McCloskey. When Mr. and Mrs. Mallard needed to find the perfect place to hatch their eggs, they picked the most beautiful park in the Northeast: the Public Garden. If you ever visit there, you’ll see duck boats in the pond and a statue of the Mallard family marching down the path. Boston and the ducks go hand-in-hand.

Whether your summer travels take you away physically or mentally, I hope you have a great trip!