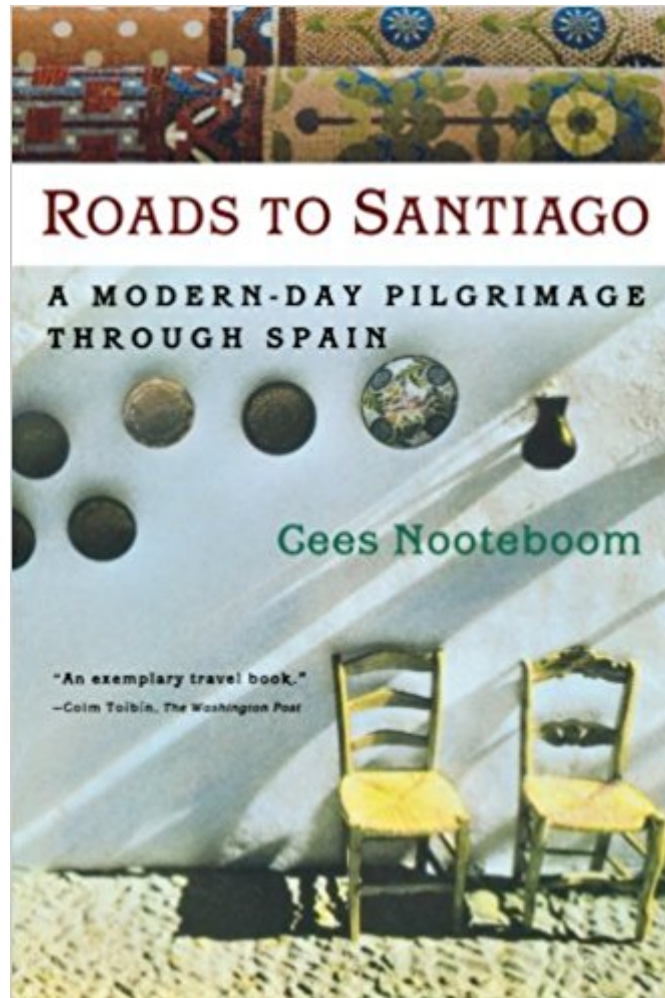




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Roads To Santiago



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Synopsis

Roads to Santiago is an evocative travelogue through the sights, sounds, and smells of a little known Spain-its architecture, art, history, landscapes, villages, and people. And as much as it is the story of his travels, it is an elegant and detailed chronicle of Cees Nooteboom's thirty-five-year love affair with his adopted second country. He presents a world not visible to the casual tourist, by invoking the great spirits of Spain's past-El Cid, Cervantes, Alfonso the Chaste and Alfonso the Wise, the ill-fated Hapsburgs, and Velázquez. Be it a discussion of his trip to the magnificent Prado Museum or his visit to the shrine of the Black Madonna of Guadalupe, Nooteboom writes with the depth and intelligence of an historian, the bravado of an adventurer, and the passion of a poet. Reminiscent of Robert Hughes's Barcelona, Roads to Santiago is the consummate portrait of Spain for all readers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A worthy travel book does not encourage a reader to follow in the author's footsteps in search of the "good spots" so much as it creates a sense of adventure and the desire to understand a place. In Roads to Santiago: Detours and Riddles in the Lands and History of Spain, Dutch author Cees Nooteboom seeks out the soul and spirit of Spain in a way that suggests a journey of self-discovery as much as an actual expedition. Although the stated goal is to reach Santiago de Compostela--a church in northwest Spain that was once the object of pilgrimages during the Middle Ages--Nooteboom doesn't follow a single or direct route to the village. The more serendipitous the journey, the better. Nooteboom followed many "detours," taking nearly every back road he found

and making sure to avoid anything resembling a major thoroughfare or urban center. The result of his circuitous travels is this collection of moving essays on Spain's history, geography, architecture, and people. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this series of essays, Nootboom (The Following Story, LJ 8/94), one of Holland's most popular and translated authors, ventures through what he calls his "adopted country," from Barcelona to Santiago. Detours are what Nootboom delights in, and true to form he takes the reader through detours of monasteries; art galleries; La Mancha in search of Don Quixote and Dulcinea; the Prado museum in Madrid, where he waxes eloquently about Velazquez and Nootboom's favorite, Zurbaran; and churches and courtyards in cities and villages once protected by their geography and now isolated in the empty plains of the Meseta. The strength of Nootboom's book is in his lyrical descriptions of Spain, a country he believes has never been quite a part of Europe. Some knowledge of European history is required to appreciate his work fully. Recommended for large public and academic libraries or where there is demand for literary travel books. David Schau, Kanawha Cty. P.L., Charleston, W. Va. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

strange and absorbing about a history of which I knew very little. I like his style of writing, the clarity of expression, the whimsical turn of phrase and the depth of description.

Excellent

A fantastic travel log ! Nootboom has deep knowledge about history and art historyI love it!

Cees Nootboom (born 1933) is a Dutch novelist and travel writer. He wrote *ROADS TO SANTIAGO* in 1992, after having travelled in Spain off and on over the span of forty years. I bought the book thinking that its focus would be the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. And, indeed, the book ends, after 330 pages, in Santiago at the Cathedral and the Plaza de las Paterias, where a priest keeps the great hand-written ledger of the pilgrims who have arrived at the end of one of the three or so most ancient and venerable religious pilgrimages of humanity. But that Santiago is the terminal point of the book owes more, I think, to literary effect and Nootboom's conceit that Santiago "is the true capital of Spain" than to the religious Camino de Santiago. Instead, the book is, as indicated by the subtitle, a pilgrimage through Spain, with many diversions and musings. The

"route" crisscrosses and meanders all across the country, slipping once into Portugal and even taking a brief hop to the Canary Islands. I doubt very much that the book is based on any one trip through Spain; rather it almost certainly is the result of several trips, one or more of which, based on internal evidence, occurred in the mid-1980's. Nooteboom tends much more to the byways and backwaters of Spain than he does to the heavily travelled and touristed areas (indeed, there is no mention of the Mediterranean coastal areas or of Barcelona). And, as a pilgrimage, the book is more historic and humanitarian in nature than religious, although Nooteboom is quite sensitive and attuned to the spiritual dimension of the places he visits. Here is how Nooteboom introduces the reader to his subject: "Spain is brutish, anarchic, egocentric, cruel. Spain is prepared to face disaster on a whim, she is chaotic, dreamy, irrational. Spain conquered the world and then did not know what to do with it, she harks back to her Medieval, Arab, Jewish and Christian past and sits there impassively like a continent that is appended to Europe and yet is not Europe * * *."

Nonetheless, Nooteboom clearly loves the land. Nooteboom scatters throughout the book germane historical discussions, so that by book's end one cannot help having learned, or been reminded of, a fair amount of Spanish history. He also includes discussions of some of Spain's greatest painters and writers, including insightful chapters on Velázquez, Zurbarán, and Cervantes (among other things, he visited the cave where Don Quixote was born - i.e., the cave where Cervantes was imprisoned when he supposedly wrote the beginning chapters of the first great novel). He is especially fascinated by, and knowledgeable about, Romanesque architecture, and time and again he goes out of his way to visit some remote, and often locked-up, 800- or 900-year-old Romanesque church. As a bonus, the book contains over sixty black-and-white photographs (most taken by Nooteboom's wife), which are well-coordinated with the text. The book also includes a map of the Iberian peninsula that would have been more useful had it contained more of the places mentioned in the text. *ROADS TO SANTIAGO* is literary travel writing near its best. It is NOT, however, a travelogue or travel guide, although anyone contemplating an extended stay in Spain or a leisurely journey through the country could profit from it. Nor is it for the impatient. Nooteboom is inclined to philosophical or historical musings, and he is prone to taking off on some rather Borgesian flights of fancy. A few of his fanciful conceits were perplexing or silly (like Borges), and on occasion I found the book verbose. But on the whole *ROADS TO SANTIAGO* is a very informative and charming pilgrimage through Spain, on both the spatial and temporal dimensions.

Cees Nooteboom is a well-known Dutch novelist and travel-author. Spain is his favourite country (like mine), he lives partly on the Spanish island Menorca. This book of essays was published in

Dutch in 1992 and includes articles written between 1979 and 1991. Nootboom is a traveller who has a great interest in the history of a country : i.e. in the case of Spain the historical relations between Christians, Jews and Moors. He also has a particular interest in medieval (Roman) architecture. His 'route' is somewhat unsystematic : he does not follow one road, but his travels are full of 'detours' (time and again he is attracted by unknown place names). Nootboom certainly doesn't limit himself to the typical must-sights'. Sometimes Nootboom seems to be travelling more in the past than in the present, but his comments on the places he visits are always personal, original, (he avoids 'cliches') providing a deep insight in the roots of Spanish culture. Therefore "The roads to Santiago" is not an easy travel-guide but rather an interesting book to take with you when touring through this country : it's a revelation to visit places and read Nootboom's comments at the same time.

This is a spectacular book, written by the best kind of travel writer. Mr. Nootboom's passion for Spain, Spanish art, and Spanish architecture is infectious. I did the pilgrimage to Santiago in September of 2003, and understanding the Camino in the larger context of Spanish history (which Mr. Nootboom limns so admirably) was invaluable. I don't believe I would have looked for, much less appreciated the Romanesque architecture I saw along the way. Coincidentally, his love of the great Spanish painters Zurbarán and Velázquez inspired me to visit New York for the Velázquez to Manet exhibit. I consider this one of the essential books to read before you set out for Santiago de Compostela. Guide books will get you from A to B. This book will help you understand the importance of A, B, and all the points in between.

First of all, Cees Nootboom is a shining oasis in the arid intellectual desert of contemporary travel writing, and secondly, you should let go of everything that makes you unhappy, and set sail tomorrow. The sheer profundity and wit of Nootboom's observations left me, for one, in like total dumbstruck awe, and his seemingly divine ability to translate the most visceral of emotions into words (a medium of communication I had always, up till now, considered inferior) made me feel a little bit the same way I felt the first time I went skydiving. Folks, this here is a man who knows how to travel, as well as being a freakin' miracle of a writer--and anyone who is capable of firing a sincere philosophic-type synapse will LOVE HIM. Also read "The following story," all you existential types out there--he's like a dreamy, colorful Camus, and his prose will make your eyes feel clean for the first time in years.

I agree with the other 5-star reviews, and would only add that Ina Rilke's translation is masterful. (I will read just about anything she translates from Dutch into English.)

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