

On Kindles, Journaling & the Power of Travel: Author Mary Morris



Mary Morris and a peek at one of her travel journals (middle and left). Chablé Yucatán pool courtesy Chablé Yucatán (right).

Meet the host of our new Indagare Book Club and upcoming Insider Journey to Mexico for a wellness and writing retreat at Chablé Yucatán.

As summer reaches its peak, and the avid readers among us are well into their recommended reads—one of our new favorites is former Indagare staffer Nikki Erlick's *The Measure*—the Indagare team is gearing up for our first ever **Book Club** and a brand-new trip offering, a transformative **wellness and writing retreat** within the lush jungles of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, both hosted by award-winning author and travel writer, Mary Morris.

From the dusty towns of Latin America to the Trans-Siberian Railway and, most recently, the jungles of India, Morris has chronicled her travels as a single woman alone on the road, around the globe, for over 25 years. The author of sixteen books, including *Nothing to Declare: Memoirs of a Woman Traveling Alone* (1988), *Wall to Wall: from Beijing to Berlin by Rail* (1991), and *All the Way to the Tigers* (2020), Morris is the

recipient of the Rome Prize in Literature and the 2016 Anisfield-Wolf Award for fiction. She has also contributed extensively in such magazines as *AFAR*, *The New York Times*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Islands* and *Town & Country*.

We had the opportunity to sit down with Mary before the September 14 virtual book club launch to discuss her career as a writer, her identity as a wanderer and to learn more about her plans for the virtual club—and how it will tie into the in-person journey at [Chablé Yucatán](#) in February.

To join the [Book Club](#) or learn more about the [Insider Journey writing and wellness retreat to Chablé Yucatán](#), click [here](#), or contact insiderjourneys@indagare.com for more information.



Mary Morris and a peak at one of her travel journals.

When did you know you wanted to become a writer? Was there a specific moment in your life when it clicked for you?

I don't remember ever wanting to be anything else; it's just what I did, what I've always done.

Of your 16 books, which one was the most fun to write and which was the most challenging?

I think I had the most fun writing *All the Way to the Tigers*. The research was great and, at times, even thrilling. I also loved all the tidbits of tiger lore that I gathered throughout the process. As far as the most challenging, it was definitely *The Jazz Palace*. That was 17 years of research and rewriting and many rejections, but it was the one book that wouldn't go away. It was really an homage to my hometown of Chicago and is perhaps the book that is nearest to my heart. I remain proud of it to this day.

Can you explain a little bit about the books you've chosen for our [Indagare Book Club](#), [The Writer and the Wanderer](#)? What do you hope attendees get out of the virtual sessions?

Clearly, there were dozens of books I could have chosen, but in the end I wanted to choose books where I loved the writing and with which I felt a deep connection. Each of the four books selected represents a personal journey undertaken by the writer. It's not

just a train ride through China or a hike across the Nubian desert. It's about getting over the loss of a parent, a devastating accident, an addiction or just the need to reclaim a piece of one's past. In each, the personal vision is as strong as the journey itself. I hope the attendees will get a sense of the inner journey as well as the outer journey and perhaps give themselves permission to own their experiences, and even write about them should they choose to do so.

Will the journaling workshops on the [Insider Journey to the Chablé Yucatán resort](#) connect in some way to the virtual club?

I hope that the readings will give the participants permission to mine their own experiences and not be afraid to share them. This will dovetail perfectly to the journaling workshops in Mexico.

What are some of the benefits of journaling?

Journaling focuses me. It helps me take all the random ideas that are floating around in my head and put them in one place. It's a crucial part of my process as a writer—as much as stretching is to a ballet dancer. Most of my journals are collections of random thoughts, facts, ideas, a scene I might have witnessed in a restaurant, an overheard tidbit...I eavesdrop a lot...a line for a poem that might never get written or, maybe it will—I'll know where to find it when the time comes.

What do you find to be the greatest gift of travel?

Travel offers a window, a portal to the world; It enables us to see in ways we perhaps had never seen before. It creates understanding and empathy, not to mention a sense of freedom that might be hard to find elsewhere. To paraphrase Proust here, travel isn't necessarily about seeing new places, but it is about seeing with fresh eyes. Learning to open our eyes, that is a lot of what travel means to me.

When you travel, do you pack books or a Kindle?

Both, actually. An e-reader certainly lightens the load—my Kindle is always full of stuff I want to read, but I also bring along one or two physical books, because technology is imperfect, and you do not need to charge a book. To the contrary, hopefully it recharges you.

What is a new release that is or was on your must-read list for this summer?

Great question. At the moment I have such a backlog of reading that I don't even know what's anticipated for the summer. But, I'm open to suggestions. Maybe our book club members will have some ideas.

Want to better get to know Mary? Tune in for season two, episode five of our [Global Conversations Podcast](#): Mary Morris, Author and Travel Writer.

Plus: Enjoy complimentary access to [The Book Club: The Writer and the Wanderer](#) when you sign up for our special [Insider Journey to the Chablé Yucatán resort](#) for a transformative wellness retreat. During your time in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, Mary will lead you on a discovery of your inner world—with the chance to reflect on past travels—during three guided journaling workshops; and there will be plenty of time to relax and rejuvenate while enjoying Chablé's signature spa, meditation and culinary programs. Amidst this tropical oasis, you'll find fresh beginnings and renewed creativity to welcome the new year in an inspired state of mind. Click [here](#) to learn more and reserve your spot.

- Bridget McElroy on August 4, 2022