

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Two Laps Around the World

Tales and Insights from a Life Sabbatical

by Bob Riel

1. Bob and Lisa traveled to more than a dozen countries during their journeys. Was there one that you found particularly intriguing? Why?
2. These journeys took place because the author and his wife took time off from their careers for what they termed a “life sabbatical.” How realistic would it be for you to take a similar period away from work? Do you think most people could benefit from a sabbatical? If you had this opportunity, would you use the time for travel or for another activity?
3. Throughout the book, there are numerous tales about encountering different cultures and about the varied ways in which people perceive the world. Is there a cross-cultural story that was especially interesting or surprising to you?
4. During their travels, Bob and Lisa chose to focus primarily on non-Western cultures. If you had several months off to travel, where would you go? Why? Does this book inspire you to visit a part of the world you wouldn’t previously have considered?
5. At one point, the author makes note of some “sensuous memories” that evoke recollections of a particular place, such as the red earth of Kenya, the “soothingly beautiful” sound of the Islamic call to prayer in Turkey, and the “smoky and spiritual aroma of incense” in Bali. What places have you traveled to that evoke sense memories?
6. There are 15 Life Lessons and Global Rules in the book, which are a series of insights that arose from Bob and Lisa’s experiences on the road. Which of these resonated the most with you? Why?
7. As a result of his reflections during these travels, Bob concludes that, “Our life as a whole can best be understood as a progression of smaller lives.” What do you think of this statement? Looking back on your own life, does it seem to cycle through different periods of roughly seven years each, as the author suggests?
8. While thinking about his interests and passions in life, Bob references a quote by the late Joseph Campbell about “the perils of not following one’s bliss.” Do you think that you’re following your own bliss in life? Is this important or not? Why?

9. Although they occasionally splurge on a nicer hotel, Bob and Lisa for the most part stay in inexpensive, locally-owned lodgings. This is partly because they need to keep expenses down for a longer journey and partly because they fear being trapped in a “tourist bubble.” What type of accommodations do you seek when traveling? In your experience, how easy or difficult is it to break out of a tourist bubble?

10. Bob and Lisa have numerous experiences with different world religions. They visit Islamic mosques and Buddhist and Hindu temples, they have discussions with people of various faiths, and they experience the overlapping strands of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Middle East. This leads the author to conclude that, “Religions are different because cultures are different, but at heart they are all seeking the same thing, which is an understanding of the transcendent.” Do you agree with this statement, that religions are outwardly different but that, in the end, they have similar aims?

11. As a result of their travel experiences and encounters with locals in Turkey, Egypt and Jordan, Bob discovers that “the people of the Middle East are some of the most hospitable individuals anywhere.” Does this conclusion surprise you? Did any of the stories alter perceptions you had about people from this or another part of the world? Have you had any personal travel experiences that changed your preconceived notions of a place or a people?

12. The author writes more than once about the unique experience of traveling. He concludes that, “We are somehow more alive when we travel. Our senses break open and we’re more alert to the energy of the life around us.” Do you find that you’re more aware of commonplace occurrences while traveling than you are at home? Do you think that people are more open to having new experiences on the road, when they are away from their home environment?

13. The first page of the book has a quote from Kurt Vonnegut - “Strange travel suggestions are dancing lessons from God.” Near the end of the first round-the-world journey, the author references this quote and writes: “Perhaps, I thought, by trusting our instincts, by opening ourselves up and taking this trip in the first place, Lisa and I were merely leading ourselves to the encounters we most needed to have... This journey was about chasing our intuition and following through with our desire for a life sabbatical. It was about encountering the world and ourselves, knowing there was something to learn from all the people and experiences that crossed our path. And it was about listening to whatever the universe, or God, had to say to us.”

Would you interpret this quotation the same the author does? Do you recall any instances like this in your own experience, where you followed your intuition and made a choice that seemed a bit unconventional at the time but which turned out to be a key decision in your life?