

[FELLOW TRAVELER]

Born Observer

Writer Mira Jacob finds inspiration in travel and family—and records it all in her journals.

Mira Jacob's debut novel, *The Sleepwalker's Guide to Dancing*, deftly spans decades and leaps continents, taking the reader from 1970s India to the modern-day United States and back again. It's no surprise that Mira was (as she puts it) "born traveling." She credits early travel with cementing her identity as a writer. "I was always an outsider of one sort or another," she says. "I learned to observe and retreat into journals when I felt overwhelmed."

JWM: What's the first thing you do in a new city?

MJ: I get a cup of tea and a map and pull out my journal. The tea and the map are orienting; the journal is for sketching. You never see things quite as clearly as the moment you land somewhere unfamiliar.

JWM: How is it different traveling with family versus traveling alone?

MJ: I moved my family to Barcelona for six months last year, which was everything it was supposed to be — siestas and tapas and learning how to live differently together. It was wonderful. But there's a lot of negotiating you do with a small child, a lot of interpreting the world for them that requires filtering things that, as an adult, you might just absorb. So I was thrilled last week to go to Mumbai by myself, to step into the tumult solo, and see where it all led. I could spend hours in the Colaba Causeway market, procuring sandals and scarves and Ganesha nesting dolls.

JWM: Tips for traveling in India?

MJ: There are two kinds of travelers in India: those who try to find the familiar and are undone by the rest, and those who take it all in and just go. Taking it all in, or as much as you possibly can, makes for a hell of a better trip.

JWM: Favorite traveling moment?

MJ: A few years ago I took my then two-year-old son

to India. I was nervous that it would be hard for him, as it was for me growing up, when I couldn't handle the food or felt homesick. But he loved it. The food, his relatives, the rickshaws! On the way to the airport in Chennai, the morning we were leaving, he opened the window and sang, "Goodbye, India, we're sad to see you go!" It broke my heart and put it back together again in one swift moment. □

