

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS  
University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

**Voyage: Spring 2016**

**Discipline: English**

**ENWR 2559-501: Travel Writing (Section 1)**

**Division: Lower**

**Faculty Name: Jahan Ramazani**

**Credit Hours: 3; Contact Hours: 38**

**Pre-requisites:**

none

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This class will be a platform to help launch your writing about your travel experiences on Semester at Sea, while deepening your critical thinking about travel and your ability to engage your audience. We will read strong examples of travel writing, including vivid and thoughtful pieces about the various countries and regions we are visiting. In class, we will discuss these examples to try to draw out the qualities of the best travel writing. Each student will write in travel journals every day of the journey, providing a fund of keen observations, rich insights, and broad reflections to draw on for more developed essays. Each student will also keep a travel blog and post vignettes after ports of call. In workshop classes, we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of each student's best travel essays, with the aim of helping one another to develop and hone these pieces to fulfill their strongest potential. By the end of the course, each student will ideally have at least two polished, engaging, sensation- and reflection-packed pieces of travel writing; a permanent record of port-by-port experiences in a travel blog; and the skills to continue writing about and reflecting on travel for many years to come.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To learn how to write thoughtfully, effectively, and vividly about travel.

To reflect critically on the beneficial and less salutary aspects of travel.

To deepen awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures you encounter.

To read some of the best pieces of travel writing.

To read travel writing about places we are visiting and so deepening our engagement with the site.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

All reading will be provided in PDF.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE**

Depart Ensenada- January 5

**B1- January 8: Introduction**

Discussion of syllabus, travel, and writing

**B2- January 10: Writing Hawaii**

James Houston, "Where The Hula Goddess Lives"  
Paul Theroux, "Paul Theroux's Quest to Define Hawaii"

Honolulu: January 12

**B3- January 13: Why Travel?**

Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel"  
Monte Reel, "How To Explore Like A Real Victorian Adventurer"

\*January 14, 5:00 pm: Hawaii Vignette Due

**B4- January 15: Conceptualizing Travel**

Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity," *The Tourist*, chap. 5  
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, chapter 1

**B5- January 18: Tips for Writing Well**

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guild to Writing Nonfiction*, from "Methods," 49-78, and "Writing about Places: The Travel Article," 116-32

Study Day: January 19

**B6- January 21: Tips for Writing Well (cont.)**

William Zinsser, "The 300-Word Challenge"  
Patti Marxsen, "The Art of the Travel Essay"

**B7- January 23: Writing Japan**

Sally Tisdale, "On Japanese Trains"  
Basho, excerpts from *The Narrow Road to Oku*

Yokohama: January 24-25

In-Transit: January 26

Kobe: January 27-28

**Field Lab, January 28: Nara, Japan**

\*January 29, 5:00 pm: Japan Vignette Due

**B8- January 30: Writing China**

Paul Theroux, “The Inner Mongolian Express to Datong: Train Number 24,” *Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train through China*, chapter 2

Peter Hessler, “Strange Stones”

Shanghai: January 31-February 1

In-Transit: February 2-3

Hong Kong: 4-5

\*February 6: China Vignette Due, 5:00 pm

**B9- February 7: Writing Vietnam**

Pico Iyer, “Yesterday Once More”

Haley Sweetland Edwards, “Our Own Apocalypse Now”

Ho Chi Minh: February 8-12

\*February 13, 5:00 pm: Vietnam Vignette Due

**B10- February 14: Comparative Asian Travel—A Pause for Reflection**

Study Day: February 15

**B11- February 17: Writing Burma**

George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

Mark Jenkins, “The Ghost Road”

Yangon: February 18-22

\*February 23, 5:00 pm: Burma Vignette Due

**B12- February 24: Writing India**

George Saunders, “The Incredible Buddha Boy”

Andrew McCarthy, “Clear-Eyed in Calcutta”

**B13- February 26: Writing India (cont.)**

Mahatma Gandhi, “Third Class in Indian Railways”

Cochin: February 27-March 3

\*March 4, 5:00 pm: India Vignette Due

**B14- March 5: Writing Mauritius**

V. S. Naipaul, “The Overcrowded Barracoon”

Clara Pinto Correia, “Mauritius and Réunion

Study Day: March 6

**\*March 7, 5:00 pm: Draft of Essay 1 Due**

**B15- March 8: Workshop Essay 1 (Field Lab)**

Port Louis: March 9

**\*March 10, 5:00 pm: Revision Due, Essay 1**

**B16- March 11: \*Workshop Essay 1 (cont.)**

Study Day: March 12

**\*March 13: Final Draft of Essay 1 Due, 5:00 pm**

**B17- March 14: Writing South Africa**

Lynn Freed, “Keeping Watch”

Robin Shulman, “World Cup Travels in Post-Apartheid South Africa”

Cape Town: March 15-20

\*March 21, 5:00 pm: South Africa Vignette Due

**B18- March 22: Comparative Travel (cont.)**

**B19- March 24: Travel and Humor**

David Sedaris, “Turbulence”

David Foster Wallace, "Shipping Out"

**B20- March 25: Writing Ghana**

Margaret Laurence, "The Very Best Intentions" in *Heart of a Stranger*

Ama Ata Aidoo, "For Whom Things Did Not Change" in *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*

Takoradi: March 27-28

Tema: March 29-31

\*April 1, 5:00 pm: Ghana Vignette Due

**B21- April 2: Travel, Humor, and the Other**

Binyavanga Wainaina, "How To Write About Africa"

Carl Thompson, "Representing the Other"

\* April 3, 5:00 pm: First Draft of Essay 2 Due

**B22- April 4: Workshop Essay 2**

\* April 5, 5:00 pm: Revision Due

Study Day

\* **B23- April 7: Workshop Essay 2 (cont.)**

Casablanca: April 8-12

\***April 13: Final Essay 2 Due, 5:00 pm**

**B24: April 14: Retrospective Discussion of Travel Writing and the Voyage**

April 16: Disembarkation Day

**FIELD WORK AND FIELD ASSIGNMENTS**

Experiential course work on Semester at Sea is comprised of the required field lab led by your instructor and additional field assignments that span multiple ports.

**Vignettes:** After 7-10 ports of call, you should write a one-page, 250-350 word vignette. They should explore meaningfully, thoughtfully, reflectively, and intelligently your experience in a specific port. At least 2 vignettes should be comparative, reflecting on some aspect of how the places we visit are similar and different. Each vignette is also intended for you to post on your

travel blog. The vignettes should draw on the observations in your personal travel journal.

Of these vignettes, you should designate 5 for a grade. Everyone must hand in a vignette for Hawaii, in the interests of providing you with an early grade. Everyone must also hand in a vignette for Japan, site of our field lab. After that, you should turn in a vignette for every two or three ports of call. Except for Hawaii, vignettes will be graded check plus, check, check minus. The average of these will convert into your overall vignette grade: check plus (A), check (B), check minus (C).

The vignettes should be a vivid distillation of some aspect of your experience in port. They should also draw on the resources made available by our readings and discussions to sharpen, focus, and deepen your writing. Vignettes should be compelling, coherent, engaging, and rich with specific sensations and reflections. The vignettes are worth a total of 25% of your grade. Vignettes handed in after the due date and time will receive no credit.

**Travel Essays:** Two of your main travel essays for the class will be more extended pieces of writing, each 1250-1500 words. One of these essays should be based on our Field Lab together in port. Because we will all be at the Field Lab together, our shared experience will aid us in constructively and critically discussing the essays in class, giving us a solid basis for helping each other to improve the essays through revision. The second 1250-1500 word essay should expand and develop one of your vignettes. These essays must be turned in on the due dates to receive any credit. Promptness is crucial for credit because of the workshop format. Each of the travel essays will be worth 25% of your final grade.

**FIELD LAB** (At least 20 percent of the contact hours for each course, to be led by the instructor.)

Field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field lab.

The field lab for this course takes place on January 28.

“Writing a Temple Town: Nara, Japan.” In this ancient temple town, we come into close contact with the aesthetics, religious traditions, and natural beauty of old Japan. We will visit the town with an eye toward reflecting on and writing up the experience in a compelling travel essay. Our objective will be to develop our ability to engage, reflect on, and explore a hallowed cultural site through our writing. The essay will make visible some aspect of our experience in the town—the cultural nuances, the built environment, the social structure, the history of the place, or the touristic coding and packaging. The essay should be reflective, original, and packed with sensation. You will be evaluated according to the quality of your participation in the field lab, the essay you produce after the lab, your assistance to workshop partners, and the insights you provide in class in reflecting on the lab, altogether worth 25% of your grade.

## **METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC**

Vignettes: 25%  
Field Lab Essay: 25%  
Second Travel Essay: 25%  
Class Participation: 25%

**Class participation:** In addition to the vignettes and essays described above, you will also be evaluated on your participation in class. Collaborative and constructive reflection on the assigned publications and on each other's writing is essential to the life of the seminar. We will also take the opportunity after each port to reflect comparatively on our experience and look ahead to the next port. Active participation is required, including pair exercises, group work, workshop feedback, and other ways of deepening our engagement with our voyage. Attendance is also required. You cannot pass the class without passing each of the requirements, including class participation and attendance.

**Evaluation of vignettes and essays:**

A – An “A” paper is written with exceptional originality, depth, and clarity. It goes beyond the bounds of the assignment and sheds new light on a topic. The piece is ambitious and inventive. The prose is elegant and engaging. It takes risks and makes insightful connections and intelligent observations. An “A” paper has few or no mechanical errors. Language is used skillfully, effectively, and concisely. The piece is well organized, flowing naturally and logically, making smooth transitions between sections.

B – A “B” paper is a solid paper that makes some thoughtful and insightful observations. A serious attempt is made to articulate complex ideas, but the writing may not be skillful enough to fully accomplish this goal. While the paper is generally organized, some areas may be wordy, imprecise, or have awkward constructions. The ideas are largely persuasive but perhaps predictable and even a little boring.

C – A “C” paper fulfills the basic demands of the assignment. This paper may attempt to present thoughtful ideas, but weak prose (disorganization, mechanical errors) prevents clarity. Conversely, this paper may be written adequately at the sentence level, but is too simplistic, dull, or superficial, lacking the depth required for a college-level essay.

D – A “D” paper is consistently difficult to understand and hard to follow. It has mechanical errors, makes simplistic observations, and/or fails to have a central theme or topic. It may largely be filler or aimless rambling.

**ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS**

All the essays and excerpts are listed above.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Access to the site for our travel blogs: <http://www.travellerspoint.com/community/>

### **HONOR CODE**

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."