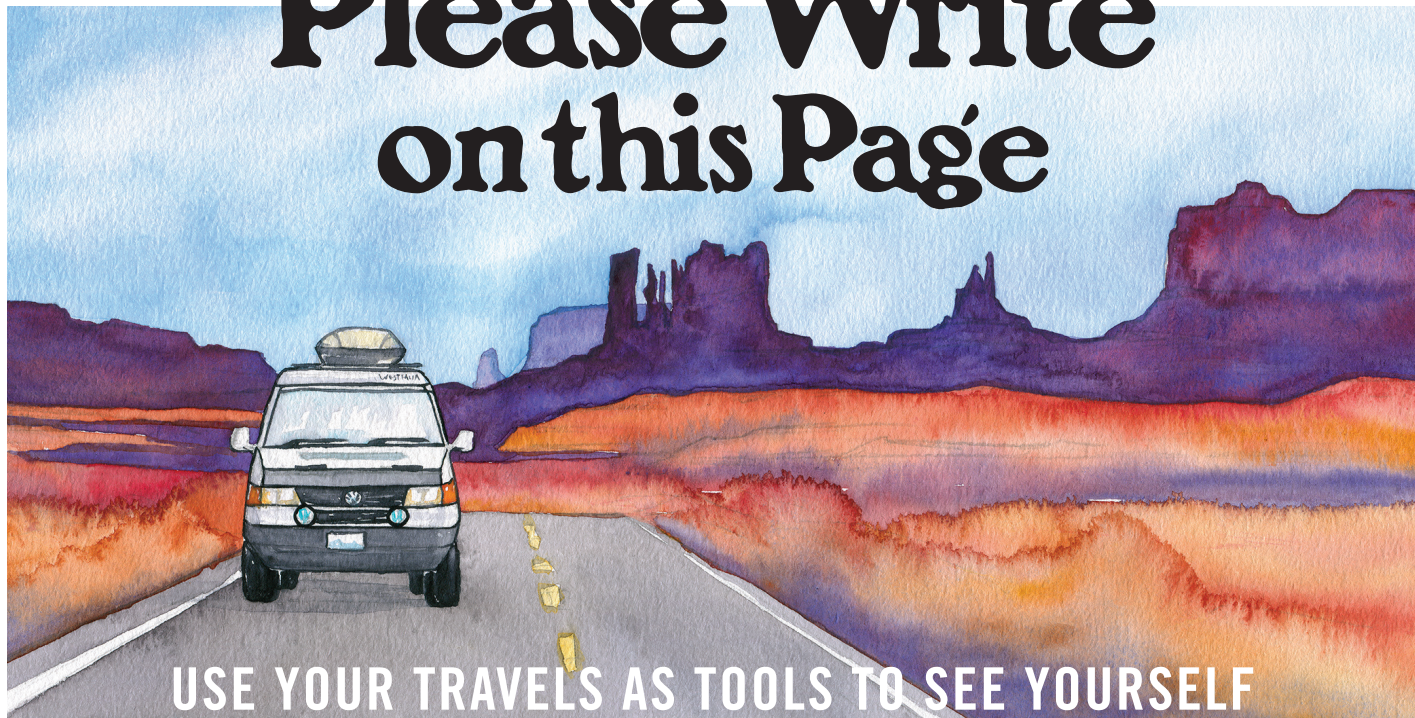


# Please Write on this Page



USE YOUR TRAVELS AS TOOLS TO SEE YOURSELF

STORY BY CHARLOTTE AUSTIN // @CHARLOTTEAUSTIN

ART BY CLAIRE GIORDANO // @CLAIRESWANDERINGS

**A POSSIBLY-CONTROVERSIAL CONFESSION:** I don't give a fuck where you've been. When we meet at a dinner party, I will not be impressed if you talk about the time you trekked through Bhutan. I don't care which mountains you've climbed, no matter how tall they might be, or where you've slept inside your impeccably-decorated van. But what I do care about—deeply, passionately, madly—is how those adventures have changed you. Don't tell me that your expeditions were expensive or glamorous or exotic or hard. Instead, I want to know whether they made you more humble. Tell me how those adventures have made you more self-aware.

There are many ways to use your travels as tools to carve out the things you want to see in yourself, of course. But there's one particular tool that I believe we're too often forgetting in the modern age: a nature journal. It doesn't need to be a beautifully curated artifact written in careful cursive in your freshest Moleskine. It doesn't need to follow a special format. It doesn't need to be something you'll post lovingly on Instagram or Pinterest—and in fact, it's probably best if you never post it at all. Because that's not the point.

The point is to walk into a landscape, sit down, and pay attention. Notice things. Listen. Ask yourself questions: How far is the sun from the horizon? Do the trees smell like cedar or damp earth or desert pine or nothing at all? Does the air have a taste? Watch the bugs, the way the wind blows dust across the ground, the color of the dirt, the waves that rise up inside your chest. It doesn't matter if you're in a national park or a gas station parking lot. Aldo Leopold said there are "one hundred little dramas" taking place around us in nature every single day. How long will it take you to find one?

Then take notes. Anywhere: on a scrap of paper, in the margin of your paperback book, in your journal, on the page we made for you in this magazine. Write in Sharpie, in pencil, in eyeliner or blood. Just do it physically, in words written by hand, because research suggests that handwriting actually changes brain function, making you focus in different ways than when you type. Remind yourself that you don't need to draw conclusions about what you see or feel or hear—the magic is held in the simple, revolutionary act of sitting still and noticing things. Stop drafting Instagram captions in your mind, because you do not need to draw the shapes that form constellations. It is enough to look up and finally see each star.

Keeping a nature journal isn't a new practice, of course. For as long as human beings have been exploring our external and internal landscapes, we've kept records of what we see. In prehistoric days, people recorded seasons by chiseling marks into animal bones and tracked migrations by smearing paint on

cold granite cave walls. Then there were stone tablets and leather scrolls, and, finally, paper. More recently, we've seen the journals of Charles Darwin, Lewis and Clark, Alexander von Humboldt, and Gregor Johann Mendel. Maybe you read Emerson and Thoreau and John Muir in school. Maybe you've read Gretel Ehrlich and Barry Lopez. Maybe not. But the point remains: There is a long history of naturalists keeping journals, and sometimes today we forget.

**"WRITE IN SHARPIE, IN PENCIL, IN EYELINER OR BLOOD."**

Why should you keep a nature journal? Because the word "naturalist" simply refers to someone who is attuned to and enthusiastic about the natural world. Because as Richard Louv documents in his book *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), becoming more intimately acquainted with our environment makes us not only measurably happier, healthier, and smarter, but also more grounded and more creative. Because a journal can be a speedbump forcing you to pause, breathe, and let yourself see and feel and hear things that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Because you can practice this anywhere, any time, at any level of detail. Because your notebook can't run out of batteries. Because it's free. And because the next time we're at a dinner party, your stories will be a lot more interesting. I promise. 👁

→ TEAR THIS PAGE OUT AND WRITE ON IT ←

## WHERE ARE YOU? \_\_\_\_\_

DATE:

WHAT IS ONE THING ABOUT THIS MOMENT YOU WILL FORGET BY TOMORROW MORNING?

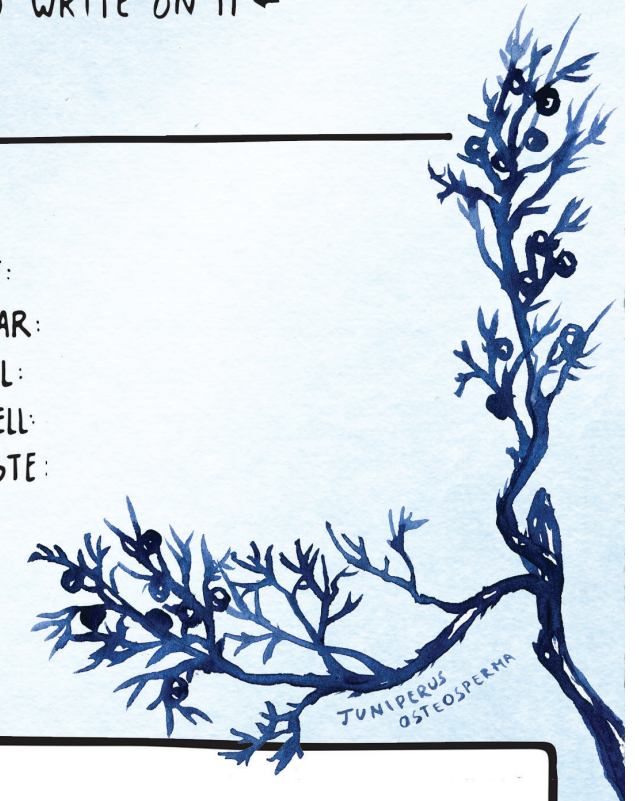
I SEE:

I HEAR:

I FEEL:

I SMELL:

I TASTE:



WHAT DOES THE DIRT LOOK LIKE? (RUB SOME HERE)



— A SKETCH OF THE SKYLINE —



WHAT IS ONE QUESTION YOU HAVE ABOUT THIS LANDSCAPE?

DO YOU SEE A PLANT?  
MAKE A SKETCH. OR PLACE A LEAF BEHIND THE PAGE TO MAKE A RUBBING  
(ONLY HARVEST LEAVES WHERE ALLOWED)