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Holiday gift list: books for the Perceptive Traveler

Posted on Wednesday, November 14th, 2012 by Kerry Dexter

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A memoir from a talented artist who draws deep into her roots in place for her work, an unusual view of a piece of Ireland's past, an unexpected look at life in medieval times, a seasonal story, a book that traces the history of cookies, a pocket sized series of guidebooks on the world's great cities: Something there for many a perceptive traveler's holiday gift list.....

Though no one lives there now, the rocky and windswept Blasket Islands off the southwest coast of Ireland held small close knit communities for centuries. Robert Kanigel tells of times of transition in the first half of the twentieth century as scholars, linguists, and travelers came to the Blaskets, and looks at the idea of stranger, encounter, community and travel through stories of their visits and the stories of they people they met in [On an Irish Island](#).

Sissy Spacek knows a good bit about place and encounter, from her years spent growing up in small town north Texas, a background which she takes into her art as an actor. While her memoir [My Extraordinary Ordinary Life](#) is the story of a life spent in art, it is also a story of family, both the one she came from in Texas and the one she created with husband and fellow artists Jack Fisk. Warm humor, dry wit, artistic insight and and a thoughtful restraint in personal detail make this a good read for all interested in engaging story, from a woman whose acting credits have included Coal Miner's Daughter, Badlands, The Help, Raggedy Man, In the Bedroom, and Missing.



Want something to eat while you read, or perhaps there's a cook on your gift list? Cooks and historians both will go for Brette Sember's [Cookie: A Love Story: Fun Facts, Delicious Stories, Fascinating History, Tasty Recipes, and More About Our Most Beloved Treat](#). She's got holiday

cookies, cookies from different regions of the United States and different parts of the world. cookies you know and ones you've never thought about. Sember does not stop at recipes, either: she follows the history of how cookies came to be and why they are different and the same the world around.



There's another sort of hands on in [Great Medieval Projects You Can Build Yourself](#). In a seasonal mood, you could learn how to make spiced almonds and salted pretzels while learning about medieval markets, where people ate both of these. Author Kris Bordessa will also teach you how to make your own jester's hat as you learn about life in a medieval castle. There are dozens of other projects. The book is good for middle grade students and up, but it's just as engaging for adults, and would make a great gift for kids and adults to share.

You'll know for the title that [Silver Bells](#) is a novel set at the holidays. A Christmas tree farmer from Nova Scotia, his teenage son who is seeking a path other than farming, his daughter who loves them both, a widow in Manhattan who has her issues, and who passes by the tree stand on a New York Street corner — those are the main players in the story. When it was made into a movie, also called [Silver Bells](#), some details of the story line were changed, but they both work really well, variations on related ideas, and a holiday reminder of patience and faith.

Lonely Planet has a series called Encounter, which focuses on pocket sized guides to the world's cities. Lately, I've been reading the ones on [Amsterdam](#), [Montreal and Quebec City](#), [Edinburgh](#), and [Dublin](#). What I've found is that even more so that is usual with Lonely Planet, the tone of these books reflects the perspective of the writer — so read the writer biography page and look over a selection of entries to see if the outlook will be a good fit. That said, there's good solid information in each book, and all of them have really useful neighborhood maps. There are highlights, neighborhood guides to sites and places to eat and clubs, and short overview essays on subjects such as food, lodging choice, customs, and aspects of history. All in all, a good taste of what a city may hold and maps that'll be helpful in navigating your way.

Want more gift ideas for travelers who read, including several non book items? Check out this list from [A Traveler's Library](#).

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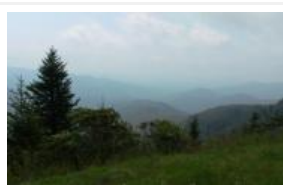
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