



# Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer

*Chuck Thompson*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer

*Chuck Thompson*

**Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer** Chuck Thompson

**From Bangkok to Bogotá, a hilarious behind-the-brochures tour of picture-perfect locales, dangerous destinations, and overrated hellholes from a guy who knows the truth about travel**

Travel writer, editor, and photographer Chuck Thompson has spent more than a decade traipsing through thirty-five (and counting) countries across the globe, and he's had enough. Enough of the half-truths demanded by magazine editors, enough of the endlessly recycled clichés regarded as good travel writing, and enough of the ugly secrets fiercely guarded by the travel industry. But mostly, he's had enough of returning home from assignments and leaving the most interesting stories and the most provocative insights on the editing-room floor. From getting swindled in Thailand to running afoul of customs inspectors in Belarus, from defusing hostile Swedish rockers backstage in Germany to a closed-door meeting with travel execs telling him why he's about to be fired once again, Thompson's no-holds-barred style is refreshing, invigorating, and all those other adjectives travel writers use to describe spa vacations where the main attraction is a daily colonic.

*Smile When You're Lying* takes readers on an irresistible series of adventures in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and beyond; details the effects of globalization on the casual traveler and ponders the future of travel as we know it; and offers up a treasure trove of travel-industry secrets collected throughout a decidedly speckled career.

## Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer Details

Date : Published November 27th 2007 by Henry Holt & Company (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9780805082098

Author : Chuck Thompson

Format : Paperback 324 pages

Genre : Travel, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Writing, Essays, Humor, Adventure

 [Download Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Tr ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer**  
**Chuck Thompson**

---

# **From Reader Review Smile When You're Lying: Confessions of a Rogue Travel Writer for online ebook**

## **Jennifer says**

Certainly, I am not nearly as much of a seasoned travel writer as Mr. Thompson (its been two years for me) but I still found many reasons to disagree with him on a variety of points, mainly in his use of so many generalizations. Like, the entire Caribbean sucks. Thompson says this then forces the reader to slog through his interrogation of a colleague who writes about Caribbean travel. It is painful. Also, the Caribbean doesn't suck, St. John is a paradise, as my travel documentarian friend and I who went on vacation there a few years ago will attest to.

As a traveller, I like to make generalizations also (for instance, if questioned on the worst nationality of tourist I will say hands down, Italians and Englishmen who pronounce their th's like an f -stop asking for "chips" everywhere you go!), but don't rail against assumptions in one chapter then make them in the next. It gets tiring not to mention discrediting. I picked-up this book for laughs and to get some tips but more often than not, found his rants exhausting and uninteresting.

Now, this is not to say that I didn't enjoy some parts of the book. The anecdotes are worth reading. They leave you wanting more and missing them when you are steered into a diatribe- if only the two were blended more seamlessly.

---

## **Wendy Baxter says**

Who knew that the best travel experiences and therefore the best travel writing consist primarily in the amount of booze, blow and blow jobs to be had? Not only that, but apparently this makes for authentic travel writing and anyone not including these things is obviously blowing sunshine up the reader's ass. And here I thought all along travel and travel writing was all about beauty and education. Silly me. And no, I didn't bother finishing this book. After the seemingly endless list of things the author hates following closely on the heels of a chapter in which apparently being a good ambassador means creating "cultural exchanges" (if you know what I mean), I just couldn't take it any more. And that's to say nothing of the non sequitur rant about the teaching profession and how we are all a bunch of whiners and losers. yeah, don't even bother to crack the cover on this one.

---

## **Miramira Endevall says**

This is one of the most whiny travelogues I've ever read. Does Thompson honestly believe that travelers buy into all the hoak printed in travel magazines, or in (gods forbid) in-flight magazines? Okay, sure, he was forced to regurgitate idiotic platitudes when writing for such magazines, and the poor boy only traveled to certain places because he was being paid to do it. But for crying out loud, dude, you were PAID TO TRAVEL. In every job I've ever had, I've had to regurgitate sappy crap for some customer's benefit - but that's life. In every job there comes an assignment that sucks - but that's life. If he hates his industry so much he should find another; his self-pitying whining is utterly banal.

This book is outrageously patronizing, as though he expects modern travelers to book a hotel room at an exotic "romantic getaway" right after ordering the Teletubbies Sleep-With-Me (as seen on TV!) to protect them from in-flight neck cramps. Thompson wonders why when people first meet him they despise his "radioactive personality." Perhaps because he's a arrogant prick who thinks that nobody in the world is as enlightened as he?

One final point: Most of Thompson's proud "exploits" are tales of utter stupidity, and the only way he made it through them intact was by the sheer dumb luck of being male. I second Valerie's desire for good travelogues written by women who travel alone, though I suspect we'll be waiting quite awhile.

---

### **Betsy says**

I would like to rate this book at least a 4; it brings to life a world of travel that magazines and guidebooks just don't. Here we get the inside scoop of why we hear the stories that we do, and why we don't hear the stories we don't. Confessions... is an engrossing tale for adventurous travelers as well as writers or wannabes (like me).

My problem, then? This book is grossly objectifying of women. I gave it measurable latitude, too, because he was going into other cultures and talking about himself in past tense, and I realize that people get shallower glimpses of others in short periods of time in regards to the first issue and gain enlightenment as they age in terms of the second. But this guy talks about women over and over as if they are another product to purchase. Over and over.

---

### **Anne Walbridge says**

Felt like being stuck in some sweaty tropical dive bar, sticky counter and all, trapped next to some guy trying way too hard to be cool.

---

### **Mateo says**

Thompson's a smart and funny writer with some excellent and funky travel stories, a jaundiced worldview, and precious little respect for sacred cows. So points for that. But the book's basically a concatenation of what-shall-I-piss-on-now rants wrapped in lad-magazine snarkiness. Here's a short list, from memory, of some of the things that Thompson dislikes: travel magazines, feminists, Dallas, Eric Clapton, travel writers, expats, locals, the Caribbean, and American teachers (for complaining about low pay and long hours when, apparently, they should feel blessed that they're not hauling dung buckets in Calcutta). Thompson has got basically one gear--in Paul Nelson's memorable phrase on a different subject entirely, "his machine subtracts, but it doesn't add up"--and that gear gets tedious. I don't care how funny and observant you are, 200 pages of "and here's ANOTHER thing" ranting will eventually sound like an eighty-year-old neighborhood drunk bitching about the music that kids listen to today. Although when it comes to Lady Gaga, I'm right there.

---

## **M G says**

I enjoyed the first half of the book but honestly by the second half I was bored. I finished it for the sake of finishing it but struggled to do so. I'm not sure if it was because I wanted the big overarching narrative/quest for meaning that he clearly states he won't give, or the fact that I wanted more of an expose on the travel industry and less of a personal narrative, or because I found his narrative self-indulgent, either way, it wasn't my favourite travel memoir. I just found the story got bogged down in personal anecdotes that didn't really deliver on the underbelly of the travel industry, rather they focused on the underbelly of his own travel adventures, much of which felt like the meanderings of the stereotypical, jaded Gen X'er.

---

## **Rich Saskal says**

"Smile When You're Lying" is a memoir by veteran travel writer Chuck Thompson pitched as a takedown exposé of the travel writing genre.

While Thompson's cynical gonzo persona itself comes across as much of a cliché as the many travel writing clichés he mocks, the proof is on the page, and I kept turning them.

After reading Thompson's own deflation of some of the common rubrics of the travel -writing trade, I can't be sure if any of the tales he tells about himself are themselves true or, more to the point, tell the whole truth. Think of him as the guy at the bar with funny stories to tell that you enjoy even as you smell a bit of bullshit. I didn't really care, because the stories are funny, entertaining and often a bit thought provoking, and Thomson does have worthwhile insight on the roles of travelers and the tourism industry and a healthy perspective about how little the modern first-world traveller really has to complain about anything.

---

## **Amanda L says**

In sum: disparaging remarks about nearly every region the world, replete with reductionist stereotyping. Sure, you'll laugh of loud, but it might be followed by an immense shame that you're eating up a racist's (is he? or is he just too consumed with his grandiose ego to realize when a joke is about to cross a very definitive line? still can't say) generalizations. Is it any wonder that his grand conclusion is that Belgium, one of the more racist, nationalist places on earth, is hands-down the most underrated, fairest (pun intended) of them all? -- according to Chuck Thompson.

Took me half a year to get through because you really can't swallow so much of the endless anecdotes (that illuminate more about the kind of person Thompson is than of any of the countries he's talking about) in a single sitting.

1.5 stars rounded up to 2 for the sometimes-astute humor. Overall, however, this left a bad taste in my mouth. And since this is being written first thing a.m., I'm about to go brush my teeth.

---

## **Catherine says**

By Thompson's own admission, on page 208 he writes, "I'm not, as a rule, what's known as a "charmer" with the ladies." In my estimation, that's an understatement. Thompson muses about his pals' bad behavior but consistently claims to have shied away from any transgressions himself. Yeah, right. I found his writing to be not only crass, but also disjointed at times and peppered with unimportant digressions. There were a few stories referring to sports where he really lost my interest altogether. I did, however, agree with a few of his opinions, and he doesn't hesitate to express a lot of his opinions, i.e., his distaste for the Caribbean. But come on, Orange County a favorite locale?! Judging by the rest of his opinions, he's oblivious to the far right-leaning populous in that area. Maybe he was being facetious. In a nutshell, I didn't like Chuck Thompson, and therefore, I can't recommend this book.

---

## **Lisa Schmeiser says**

It says something about our world when a travel book published in 2008 feels like a quaint relic of an earlier era -- but this one does. Perhaps it's because so many of Thompson's essays are linked to his travels and experiences in the 1990s, and that truly is an era of travel we're never going to get back in this world of tiny bottles and shoeless security checks.

Still, this book has glimmers of potential: Thompson almost has the Joe Queenan knack for the comedic stiletto as descriptive sentence, and the few times he nails it are delightful. His takedown on everything wrong with travel writing is a joy to read, especially if you do read a lot of toothless gushers about delectable local dishes in paradise. And the essay pointing out the genuinely disturbing bedrock truth about the Caribbean -- it's founded in the misery of slavery and it's never really gotten better -- is a great *cri de couer* for examining how one's own travel preferences help or hurt local economies.

This is a borrow-from-the-library book, but be sure to borrow it the next time you're seething with irritation over a travel writer's dream itinerary as recounted in your local lifestyle rag.

---

## **Pete says**

In many ways, I am the sort of writer that this book is lampooning. I've trotted out clichés and purple prose for luxury travel brochures for the past six years. I try not to, but as Thompson neatly puts it:

'A big problem with travel writers is that they're all essentially required to share the same opinion about everything [due to the increasing need to sell first and inform second]. As a result, their copy tends to be defined by how many clever variations they can conceive while riffing on the same themes.'

Absolutely true. But you try writing a 116-page brochure on winter holidays to Scandinavia without allowing yourself to get a little overly-imaginative on the 100th time of being asked to describe the snow.

Writing for the industry and being constantly held to ransom by the demands of hotel chains, tourist boards and 'we'll fill our brochures with whatever you want as long as you take out an advert' directors is a constant source of frustration and moral conflict. So despite the risk of ridicule to my profession, I began this book excited at the prospect of having the industry exposed by a man more erudite and knowledgeable than I.

Sadly, Thompson fails to point out anything that the travel-reading public hasn't already heard. Lonely Planet drives people to the places it later derides as being over-developed. Conde Nast Traveller is largely bankrolled by adverts for Prada and Longines watches. Editors are disinclined to print negative reviews of the very hotels that just comped them a holiday. And it can feel a bit awkward when your champagne's delivered by a waiter whose hovel is right next to your resort. Well whoever would have thought...

Worst of all though is the attempt to blow the whistle on the bogus travel racket by sharing 'a few stories of the sort travel writers almost never get to write', none of which are really anything more than brief dinner party anecdotes. Being ripped off in Thailand, buddying up to prostitutes and cocaine transactions in your own home town hardly seem worthy of a 300-page book deal. I can personally think of many such Thompson-esque moments. Having my balls cupped by a schizophrenic, gun-wielding, homosexual ex marine in a West Hollywood bedsit. Singing Hey Jude with the Minister of Justice for Kosovo after gate-crashing an EU party in Pristina. Forcing down strips of raw, two-day old oxen at a mountain-top monastery on the Eritrean border. Buying weed on the roof of a windowless tower block in Gondar, Ethiopia from reggae-loving stoners and a pissed-off prostitute. And being tricked into taking AIDS medication by a Chinese 'healer' in central Java are just a few that come to mind.

Stringing out these kind of tales to form the basis of a book may be a huge coup for Thompson, but it grossly undermines the very point he's trying to make. Perhaps the reason these stories never made it to print (until now) is less to do with the never-ending greed of the huge corporations bankrolling most magazines and more to do with the fact that any hungover fresher just back from his gap year has a dozen just like them.

PS If you liked the rant-like nature of this review then you may well enjoy Smile When You're Lying. I'm probably just jealous that he got there before me.

---

### **Valerie says**

Insights into the life of a travel writer. The real reason they travel, someone is paying them. One of my favorite bits was about the fallacy of taxi drivers as people who know what's going on in any city. However, he kept alluding to travel writing as that glossy magazine sell you something kind of writing, and I don't read much of that. Almost all of the travel writing I read Bryson, Cahill, O'Hanolan, Salzman, O'Rourke, Bass is of the more personally honest variety, so it took me a while to appreciate his generalizations about travel writing. One thought that occurred to me while I was reading this, and thinking about my favorite travel writers, how come so few of them are women? I'm a big fan of those intrepid Victorian Women, Isabella Bird etc. but where are the modern, honest, funny women traveling, and why aren't they writing books for me to read? If anyone knows of a good female travel writer in this vein, please let me know.

---

### **Geoff Carter says**

Here's the deal: Chuck Thompson has spent years writing freelance travel stories for The Atlantic, Esquire, Maxim and the like, and over the course of these 322 pages, he burns it all down. Early on, he sets up this collection of (true, but no doubt embellished) anecdotes by telling you that he's going to share all the travel stories that the Conde Nast crowd isn't ready to hear; what he ends up doing is telling you about his druggy coming-of-age in Alaska, his Hunter Thompson-like cadre of friends and all the ways in which travel writing industry is doomed to eat itself. He sets out to commit career suicide, but this book will no doubt propel him

to that upper strata occupied by Tim Cahill, PJ O'Rourke and other "editors-at-large." Y'know, call-outs on the cover of Rolling Stone, occasional talking-head engagements on VH1.

It's a fierce, entertaining read that's maybe one more edit away from being truly great; to quote Foghorn Leghorn, that boy's got a mouth like an outboard motor. But Thompson's aim is true, and if you've ever traveled outside the US (which too few of us have done, or do often enough) or done any contract writing that is personally abhorrent to your character, you'll wanna hug the stuffing outta this magnificent bastard.

---

## **YoSafBridg says**

I almost put down Chuck Thompson's smile when you're lying: confessions of a rogue travel writer before i was 50 pages into it with the intention of never finishing it (which is something i rarely do~sometimes i will put down a book with every intention of finishing it and not ever doing so but for some reason i often plow through many as i ended up doing with this one~and there were a few interesting parts~more than a few in actuality...) It was Thompson's caustic personality that put me off more than anything (not that i know him or anything, but since this a non-fiction piece that he narrates i did get some sense of the guy and i don't think i liked him much~and he doesn't seem to like much of anything~tho maybe i'm getting him all wrong~he admits that many of the people he now counts as friends"apparently had to overcome some initial repugnance toward my supposedly radioactive personality." And i have come to really like a few people i absolutely hated upon first, second and third impression...)

But, shall we get back to the book? I can't remember why i picked it up (are you getting sick of hearing that from me?) I think perhaps because i like reading travel narratives (and no, Chuck, not the rhapsodizing, sunny type that the travel editors demand~as you argue in this book~and i do believe you, there~but the book type that describe the good and the bad) and this one purported to describe the "real story" from someone who had been to many, many places. Alas 'twas not to be.

This included less description of travel and more bitching about life and politics than much of what i've read of late. He describes experiences teaching English in Japan, traveling in Southeast Asia, some in former Soviet bloc countries and that seems to be about it (well there is a bit more but mostly it is just opinion spouting~he hates the Caribbean and really likes Latin America.) I must give Thompson credit for a sense of humour and there are a few bits worth reading as well as a few bits that were a little enlightening (and i suppose it's good every now and then to read things that just plain piss you off~more than just occasionally in fact.) There are a few travel tips most of which are common sense, some of which are silly and stupid, some of which are very helpful (rubbing batteries on your leg for a few extra hours of static electric charge~never knew...). The book takes a truly ugly and surprising turn at the end talking about the possible end of oil-dependent energy, which while true, seemed out of place.

Thompson does describe some of his youth in Juneau, Alaska (been there, done that~NOT to be confused with Anchorage as some reviewers have done~Thompson would be appalled) Alaska he describes as the whitest state in the nation (Utah being the second) having lived in both i would have to agree somewhat (that is IF you are excluding Native Americans and Hispanics which i suppose he is...) this is a very personal account about much more than travel (and very little travel at that. Mostly rant, rant, rant about anything and everything. I didn't absolutely hate it though. From what i can gather Thompson is about the same age (and i didn't disagree with everything he said~and i haven't been to many of the places he describes so i can't have an opinion on much of that...) as me so you would think we would have more in common (and perhaps we do~i often wonder exactly how unlikeable i am, and for that matter~exactly how parenthetical i can become...)

---