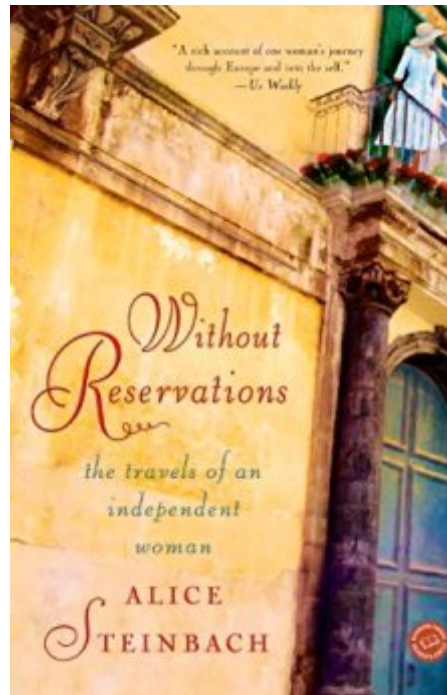


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Without Reservations: The Travels Of An Independent Woman



Synopsis

ParisDear Alice,Each morning I am awakened by the sound of a tinkling bell. A cheerful sound, it reminds me of the bells that shopkeepers attach to their doors at Christmastime. In this case, the bell marks the opening of the hotel door. From my room, which is just off the winding staircase, I can hear it clearly. It reminds me of the bell that calls to worship the novice embarking on a new life. In a way I too am a novice, leaving, temporarily, one life for another.Love,AliceIn the tradition of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's Gift from the Sea and Frances Mayes's Under the Tuscan Sun, in Without Reservations we take time off with Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Steinbach as she explores the world and rediscovers what it means to be a woman on her own."In many ways, I was an independent woman," writes Alice Steinbach, a single working mother, in this captivating book. "For years I'd made my own choices, paid my own bills, shoveled my own snow, and had relationships that allowed for a lot of freedom on both sides." Slowly, however, she saw that she had become quite dependent in another way: "I had fallen into the habit . . . of defining myself in terms of who I was to other people and what they expected of me." Who am I, she wanted to know, away from the things that define me--my family, children, job, friends? Steinbach searches for the answer to this provocative question in some of the most exciting places in the world: Paris, where she finds a soul mate in a Japanese man; Oxford, where she takes a course on the English village; Milan, where she befriends a young woman about to be married. Beautifully illustrated with postcards Steinbach wrote home to herself to preserve her spontaneous impressions, this revealing and witty book will transport readers instantly into a fascinating inner and outer journey, an unforgettable voyage of discovery.From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

As you can tell by the 5 Stars I loved this book and was loathe to reach the end, I was so involved in the life and travels of Alice Steinbach. Reaching the last words of the first section, Paris, I was sad knowing her other places of destination could never be so interesting, I was wrong, each had their own charm. The one *reservation* I have, I don't think she succeeded in finding her way as the independent woman she was seeking. She seemed to find at each stop along the way others to validate who she is. That said it takes nothing away from the book...One comes away knowing Alice and feeling she would be a wonderful friend. In fact I must have three more copies, two for friends I know will love it and one for myself..the copy I read I marked so many passages and made so many notes in the margins I want another copy in pristine condition not only wonderfully readable this book is lovely to look at, each chapter begins with the picture of a beautiful postcard...and the messages Alice wrote and mailed to herself, a wonderful idea! Another book by Alice Steinbach I read and enjoyed Miss Dennis School of Writing and Other Lessons from A Woman's Life, I saw no mention of this on the book jacket or in the book but I think after reading Without Reservations the reader will want to seek out more by this writer.

A previous reviewer is right - the title of the book is utterly misleading. Steinbach left her home and job for a year abroad with tons of reservations - both figurative and literal! She stayed at cushy, touristy hotels, even went on a package tour in Italy. So much for the literal reservations. As for the figurative ones, she fretted the whole time about cutting loose and finding real adventure, but never really did so. She used her time and considerable resources to travel like a typical tourist, and the book seldom gets beneath the surface of any location. In Paris she stayed on the Left Bank where tourists chase the ghost of Hemingway and Picasso. She ate at over-priced, tourist-trap cafes and on her first day spent half a week's food budget on face creams. The descriptions are flat and lacking any nuance or vitality, but she goes on and on about some fake grass laid down for a tourist-ensnaring arts festival! This is travel writing for those who like to play it extremely safe.

This book is beautifully illustrated with postcards the author wrote and sent to herself; and it is a wonderfully written account of her travels through Europe. But it is much more than a travelogue. Ms. Steinbach weaves details of her travels along with memories of the past and her hopes for the future. This book is an inspiration to those women who have always been defined as someone's mother or wife and long to be recognized as their own person, undefined by relationships. So whether you yearn to become an independent traveler in the literal sense or desire to travel through life on an independent journey, this book is well worth reading.

Who doesn't dream of quitting her job and traveling the world? Alice Steinbach wangles a leave of absence from her job and goes to Europe -- the dream with training wheels. Even though she has the security of knowing her home and job are waiting for her and she goes to countries that are comfortably strange, it is still a big leap for her. She makes the most of it and tells a great story. Steinbach seems to make friends everywhere she goes. She travels with the attitude of a college student backpacking through Europe, hooking up with temporary friends at each stop. She treats her affair with Naohiro like a summer romance, intense, but sure to be temporary. Sometimes you forget that she is a middle-aged woman with two grown sons and a responsible career back home. And that is the point. She wants to see who she is when the responsibilities of adulthood are stripped away. Is the young woman who wasn't afraid to take chances still there somewhere? Who is Alice Steinbach when she is not defined as "mother" and "reporter"? In nine months of travels through Paris, Britain, and Italy, she gradually sheds her inhibitions and fears, and gets reacquainted with living for the day. *Without Reservations* is an upbeat, sometimes bittersweet, narrative of what feels like a prelude to a bigger leap.

The title of this book is misleading. I was looking forward to a good read about a real travel adventure and instead found myself reading a self-indulgent memoir. There is very little that is independent about the itinerary (the entire trip is booked before she even leaves the US) and the author mulls over her own life experiences instead of painting images of the world she is meant to be exploring. This book is simply too average to recommend.

Reviewer: mg69 For Alice Steinbach, a year off means staying at top-of-the-market tourist hotels in the top European cities, drinking coffee in celebrity cafes, taking a group tour in Italy, enrolling in a summer school in Oxford and hanging out with other affluent English-speakers and compatriots. If you want an alternative to this sort of insulated travel experience, try "Au Revoir", Mary Moody's

lively account of a riskier year off or Sarah Turnball's genuine life change described in "Almost French".

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