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Contact: Cassie Dendurent Nelson
212-340-8132; cassie.nelson@perseusbooks.com
Ashley Sytsma, Rick Steves Europe Through the Back Door
425-608-4293; ashley@ricksteves.com

America's favorite tour guide makes an impassioned argument on how travel can foster cultural understanding

TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT By Rick Steves

“Ideally, travel broadens our perspective personally, culturally, and politically,” writes nationally renowned travel writer and producer and host of the popular PBS television series *Rick Steves' Europe* at the start of his thought-provoking new book, **TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT** (Nation Books; May 11, 2009; Trade Paperback Original). “Suddenly, the palette with which we paint the story of our lives has more colors. We realize there are exciting options to the social and community norms that our less traveled neighbors may never consider....But you can only reap these rewards of travel if you're open to them. Watching a dervish whirl can be cruise-ship entertainment...or a spiritual awakening. You can travel to relax and have fun. You can travel to learn and broaden your perspective. Or, best of all, you can do both at once.”

In **TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT**, Steves applies the same charm and wit that has made him one of America's favorite tour guides to a thoughtful book that offers a simple framework for how we can better learn about the rest of the world and its people through the pleasurable act of travel. Drawing on his own far-flung excursions to both well-traveled and less-traveled destinations, Steves shares what he has learned about the world—and about himself—by opening his eyes, ears, and heart to the ordinary people he has met along the road and witnessing the realities of the places they call home. From Europe to Latin America, North Africa to the Middle East, armchair travelers here accompany Steves as he absorbs lessons in tolerance, cultural diversity, and new outlooks, learning what it means to be both an American and a citizen of the world.

In Bosnia, Croatia and Montenegro, republics of the former Yugoslavia that were torn apart by brutal internal wars in the 1990s, Steves talks with Croats, Serbs and Muslim Bosniaks alike, discovering that every story is both personal and complex, and that one man's George Washington is another man's Hitler. Most of the people he encounters in these friendly cities and villages express only regret for the waging of the massively destructive war in their homeland. Opting to visit El Salvador rather than a placid beach in Costa Rica or Mexico, Steves comes face to face with a nation where the insurmountable boundary between the rich and powerful minority and the desperately poor majority is hard for middle class Americans to wrap their minds around. Taking part in a twenty-fifth anniversary memorial to slain liberation theologian Archbishop Oscar Romero, Steves feels connected to his host country as he never could from the sanctuary of a luxury resort. In Turkey and Morocco,

he samples a secular Islam that runs counter to the stereotypes of the anti-western jihad. Invited to make a TV program on Iran, he steers clear of the Iranian government's well-documented offenses and anti-American policies, discovering instead the humanity of most of the 70 million Iranian people and the glories of their ancient culture.

In his long career, Steves' focus has been European travel, and he feels a special affinity for the continent that is at once so similar to the United States and in other ways so different. Celebrating those differences, he looks at the ways in which Europeans get it right—at least in his opinion—including working fewer hours, benefiting from broader social services (with admittedly higher taxes), and adopting more libertarian attitudes toward sex and drugs. Steves locates the success of the European Union in its “internal Marshall Plan,” which benefits smaller, “net receiver” nations, but also acknowledges the growing pains associated with immigration and “guest workers” in once largely homogeneous countries. He applauds Europe's desire for peace, as well as its growing support for the claims of ethnic minorities. Despite American foreign policy in the last decade, Steves says most Europeans admire the United States and cherish our international friendship—even if they don't always understand our lifestyle choices.

Even with his love of travel and the diversity the world has to offer, Steves admits to being unapologetically proud to be an American, whose happiest day of any trip is the day he comes home. But his American identity is augmented, not diminished by travel. “In addition to gaining a keen appreciation of how blessed we are, travelers also understand that with these blessings come responsibilities,” he writes. “Protecting the poor, civil rights, and our environment are basic to good global citizenship. Travelers experience lands that have a wide gap between rich and poor, places without basic freedoms an American might take for granted, and regions where neglect has led to ruined environments. Packing that experience home, we can become more compassionate, even (and especially) during difficult times.”

Passionate, though never dogmatic, **TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT** will help readers acquire an international outlook as they explore the world beyond their own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Steves is the host, writer and producer of the popular PBS television series *Rick Steves' Europe*, with an eighth season in the works. Over the past 15 years, Steves has hosted nearly 100 travel shows for public television (most still airing in rebroadcasts) and numerous pledge specials. He has also written twelve country guidebooks, nine city and regional guides, six phrase books, and *Europe 101: History and Art for Travelers*. His guidebook to Italy is the bestselling international guidebook in the U.S. He lives in Edmonds, Washington.

ABOUT THE BOOK

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By Rick Steves

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ABOUT THE WEB SITE

www.ricksteves.com/politicalact

This site, which will go live on April 30, 2009, contains more information about topics covered in **TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT**, including streaming video of Rick's lectures, a script and related information for the *Rick Steves' Iran* public television special, essays and videos about drug policy reform, blogs and rough journals from trips that inspired chapters in the book, and more. Readers will also learn about worthwhile causes that Rick is personally involved in and passionate about, and can share their own experiences traveling as a political act.

*For additional information about **TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT** and other Nation Books, visit us online at www.nationbooks.com*