

BOOK REVIEW

“Healthy Travel - Central & South America” by Isabelle Young
Reviewed by Dr. Irmgard Bauer

Healthy Travel - Central & South America, 1st edition, by Isabelle Young, published in February 2000 by Lonely Planet Publications, Melbourne, ISBN 1-86450-053-0, A\$ 8.95 RRP.

This compact soft cover book (14x9x2cm; 200g, 456 pages) consists of 23 chapters, appendices, some WHO maps, many useful addresses/websites/contacts, and a number of drawings to illustrate the text. It is part of a series with three other volumes dealing with Africa, Asia & India, and Australia, NZ & the Pacific (these titles are not covered in this current review). The book fits easily in the tightest luggage. Due to the small size, the font size consequently is at a just acceptable level. A pretty green colour is used to highlight and decorate. Particularly important paragraphs are typed in this colour as well. Unfortunately, poor lighting such as from a small bedside table lamp makes it very difficult to read these paragraphs, a lone 40 Watt bulb dangling from the ceiling of an Andean budget accommodation will wipe out this part completely, a shame considering that these are usually paragraphs of particular importance. The boxed texts have this colour as a background which may make them equally difficult to read (a ‘light-test’ with the other titles revealed a similar problem, particularly the sandy beige of the volume on Africa).

The book covers comprehensively the following chapters/topics: Introduction; Overview; Before you go; On the move; Staying healthy; Diet & nutrition; Help...; Fever; Digestive system; Respiratory system; Ears, eyes & teeth; Skin; HIV/AIDS & sexual health; Rarities; Mental wellbeing; Women travellers; Men travellers; Babies & children; Older travellers; Climate, altitude & action; Water; Bites & stings; After you get back; Traditional medicine; Buying & using medicines; Medical services; First aid; Latin American terms; Glossary of medical terms; Index.

Several WHO maps are provided. It is slightly amusing to see in two of them (dengue fever and filariasis) that the offending bugs seem to take international borders very seriously.

Each chapter is written in plain English and in a style that does not make the advice sound too technical. Rather, very reasonable practical information is given paired with sufficient background knowledge to follow the rationale for the advice and to allow the reader to make an informed decision. Having a reasonably good knowledge of the area covered in this volume, it comes as a pleasant surprise to find the many specific and unique tips relevant to the geographic location which are normally only passed on from traveller to traveller. And this is what makes this series so different from conventional travel health books. Had travellers previously to pick what could be applicable to their destination, advice comes now area specific. This also includes culturally and geographically pertinent content which can make all the difference at a destination.

The content is up to date and correct at this point of time, very reasonable and comprehensive, practical and applicable, specifically suitable to the area stated. Where one normally has to make the transfer from advice in a travel health book to a real situation

oneself, here it has all been sorted out for the traveller.

The book, of course, does not away with the need to visit a GP or a travel clinic, in fact, it continuously points out the individual's responsibility to do so.

Medical advances will require a regular update of medication, dosage etc. The framework, however, will remain relevant for a long time. Although tentative attempts have been made, I personally would have liked more mention of how tourists' behaviour and tourism affect the health of local populations to encourage responsible behaviour at the destinations.

Apart from a few small problems such as misspelled local names, the colour and some small errors which will be corrected in the current production of the reprint, I don't think it gets much better than this. At the price of A\$ 8.95 (US\$ 5.95; £ 3.99; FF 39.00) and its compact size it is a must in the luggage of every traveller to Central and South America. It also makes a nice little farewell present for the traveller who has already everything