

The Art of Travel

By Alain de Botton

5 Journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than a moving plane, ship or train. There is an almost quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new places. Introspective reflections which are liable to stall are helped along by the flow of the landscape. The mind may be reluctant to think properly when thinking is all it is supposed to do.

10 At the end of hours of train-dreaming, we may feel we have been returned to ourselves - that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. It is not necessarily at home that we best encounter our true selves. The furniture insists that we cannot change because it does not; the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, but who may not be who we essentially are.

15 If we find poetry in the service station and motel, if we are drawn to the airport or train carriage, it is perhaps because, in spite of their architectural compromises and discomforts, in spite of their garish colours and harsh lighting, we implicitly feel that these isolated places offer us a material setting for an alternative to the selfish ease, the habits and confinement of the
20 ordinary, rooted world.