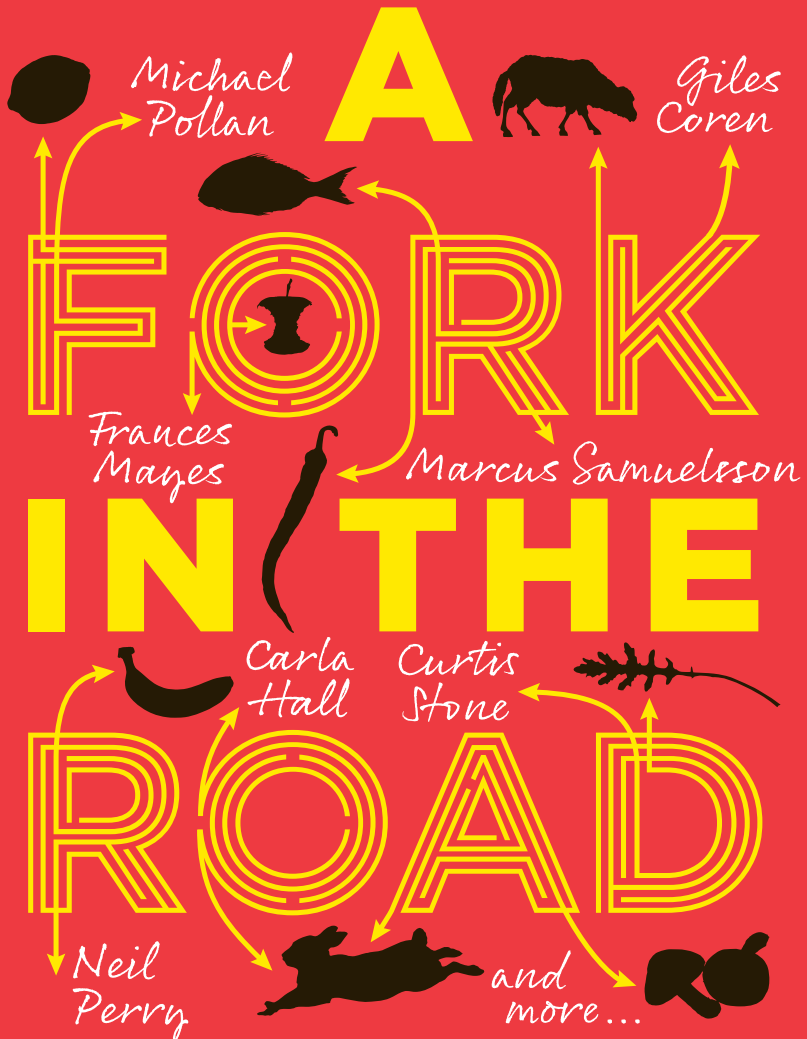
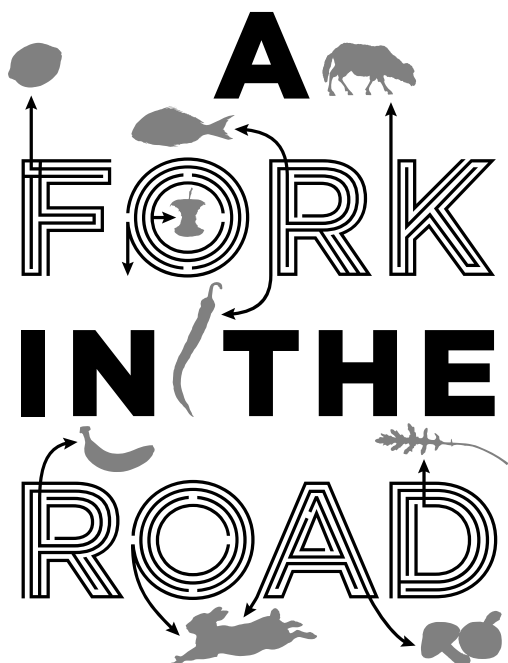


lonely planet



**TALES OF FOOD, PLEASURE  
& DISCOVERY ON THE ROAD**

EDITED BY JAMES OSELAND



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## **JAMES OSELAND**

James Oseland is the editor-in-chief of *Saveur*, America's most critically acclaimed food magazine. Under his editorship, the magazine has won more than more than 40 awards, including numerous James Beard journalism awards, and three from the American Society of Magazine Editors. His 2006 book, *Cradle of Flavor*, a memoir with recipes about his time living in Southeast Asia, was named one of the best books of that year by *Time Asia*, *The New York Times*, and *Good Morning America* and went on to win awards from the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Culinary Professionals. He is the also the editor of *Saveur's* cookbooks, including *Saveur: The New Comfort Food*, published in 2011, and *The Way We Cook*. He is writing *Jimmy Neurosis*, a memoir of his punk rock youth in the 1970s, for Ecco Press, a Harper Collins imprint. James has lived in India and Indonesia and now resides in New York City with his husband, Daniel.

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# INTRODUCTION

*James Oseland*



**E**very traveler has two or three or even a hundred of them: moments on a journey when you taste something and you're forever changed. It might be a fancy or dazzling dish served by a tuxedoed waiter, or it might simply be an unexpected flavor or unfamiliar ingredient, offered by strangers and encountered by happenstance. At their most intense, these tastes of the new reveal something elemental about the place you're in, and about yourself. These are the kinds of experiences I asked the writers in this book to capture in their stories.

One of my earliest such epiphanies happened when I was twelve. My father took me to a restaurant in Chicago called Jacques, one of the great American temples of French cuisine in the postwar era, a kind of place that doesn't exist much anymore. Though we were only an hour from our suburban home, this elegant redoubt in Chicago's downtown Loop

felt like another planet. Dad told me that Jacques was one of the best restaurants in the country. I don't know if that was true, but the duck à l'orange I had there certainly transformed me. The limpid and tangy sauce, the rich and fatty meat, the mingling of sweet and savory flavors—it was too magnificent for words. My enjoyment of the dish, which I'd ordered at Dad's suggestion, seemed to draw me closer to this taciturn man who'd always been a mystery to me. More than that, it made me feel, for the first time, like an adult. Or at least it gave me a taste of what being grown up might feel like.

Another moment of transformation through food happened seven years later, on my first solo trip abroad, to Southeast Asia. One stormy night, on a visit to Penang, Malaysia, I stumbled upon a night market in the middle of a field on the edge of town. While wandering through the warren of food stalls, in the center of which a Chinese opera troupe was performing, I met an old man who spoke a little English. He took me around to all the vendors, pointing out the foods each of them was selling. I sampled nearly everything, but what I remember more vividly than almost any dish I've eaten since is the *char kuey teow*, a Malaysian street-food staple of stir-fried rice noodles. I was blown away by the new flavors: the briny taste of fresh-caught cockles, the bite of Chinese spring onions, the hot, spiky funk of chile sambal, and the deep savor that I later learned can only come from ingredients that have been stir-fried in pork fat over extreme heat. The food was literally life-changing. I felt I suddenly understood this place, and I

realized with equal suddenness that I wasn't necessarily the person I thought I was up until that moment. I'd discovered another part of me. The depth and brightness of the flavors told of a world that was utterly different from what I'd known, and they told me I had a place in it.

Now I seek out that feeling of discovery wherever I happen to be eating. Even the lunch-hour meals I dash out for from my office in Manhattan can transport me, and put me in touch with something fascinating. A sortie to my favorite South Indian vegetarian place on Lexington Avenue or to my favorite Korean lunch counter on 32nd Street loosens the grip of the workday and lets me experience the world again in a purely sensory way. These humble meals tell me that there is always another epiphany around the corner. They remind me of the great, exciting promise of life.

There really is something fabulous and even miraculous about the act of eating. Savoring food is the one thing we do every day that is direct and unmediated. Taste does not lie. It's pure. The impressions it leaves are sharp, invigorating, and emotional. And those impressions can last a lifetime.

That's what I find so beautiful about the essays in this book. Each of them says something ineffable about how we process and remember tastes and sensations, and about how they alter our view of the world. The stories encompass a vast mosaic of experience, from bitter to sweet to everything in between, and an equally vast range of voices. Some are rough, some are intensely refined. But they all have one thing in common: they chronicle food and eating in a deeply personal way.



## INTRODUCTION

Each story will take you on a journey, whether it's restaurant critic Gael Greene supping on star fruit in the Peruvian jungle, novelist Francine Prose coaxing a cassoulet from the kitchen of two bickering restaurateurs in rural France, or chef Martin Yan watching his mother at the stove when he was a child in Guangzhou (a wholly transporting experience that didn't involve leaving home). But the essays in this book offer more than armchair travel. They will arouse your appetite for life-changing moments of your own. They will prompt you to seek your own fork in the road.