

Another off the list

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As someone who likes to travel, I love a good traveler's list. Hearing the places on different people's bucket lists either help me find good places to travel to in the future, or remind me of past adventures I've been on. This, along with my love of reading, means I have a certain affinity for travel books.

The most recent travel book I read was the bestseller "1,000 Places to See Before You Die" by Patricia Schultz. When looking for things to do while studying abroad, I saw references to this book all over the internet. A couple months after I got back from my travels, I found it for sale in a used book sale and snatched it up immediately.

While some people may flip through the pages of a travel book, I sat down and read every entry, marking down the places I had been before.

This book had locations and events in countries all around the world, so as soon as I finished the western European part, I was out of luck until it came back the Americas. Not every state in the United States had something, but Wisconsin had a few. When I found out I would be moving to Iowa, I had to check to see if there were any cool places I had to visit.

"1,000 Places to See Before You Die" had a single entry for the state of Iowa - the Iowa State Fair. The book calls it "America's most famous ag-extravaganza" and lauds the thousands of animal and vegetable entries, as well as the infamous Butter Cow.

This edition of the book is about 20 years old and therefore lists the price for the fair at \$8, just half the price of a ticket for this year's fair. I was curious how well the entry met the test of time, aside from the prices, so I went to Des Moines last Friday to check it out.

I had no plans to see any of the concerts nor did I want to set foot on a single ride, so that limited my fair options. I marked off the different display buildings and food I wanted to try on the map, slowly making my way to each one. I made sure to try the 2023 winner of Best New Food at the Iowa State Fair, the deep-fried bacon brisket mac-n-cheese grilled cheese (it was great, by the way).

The whole time, I was wondering what it was that supposedly made this state fair stand out from all the rest. I saw multiple things from the listing in my travel book. Butter cow: check. Giant pumpkin: check. Deep-fried, calorie-dense food: check.

On my drive back to Creston, I tried to think of why the author of the travel book called out this specific state fair. While I certainly had fun, I can confidently say that it is no different than any other state fair I've been to.

Maybe I feel this way because I've always lived in the Midwest. The book talks about all the agriculture at the Iowa State Fair, something that is prevalent in every state fair in this area. Being from Wisconsin, we also had our fair share of barns packed with animals and 4-H centers teeming with people and their projects.

The only thing that makes the Iowa State Fair stand out to me is the amount of politicians and wanna-be politicians getting their photos taken and making speeches. While I didn't see any when I saw there, thank God, I saw plenty of news coverage about it.

To me, this is something that would make me want to stay away from the fair. The author of the book must agree, as the importance of the Iowa State Fair in the presidential caucuses isn't mentioned in the entry.

When I really think about it, I think that the inclusion of the Iowa State Fair in the travel book has more to do with the author's background than the event itself. Patricia Schultz grew up on the East Coast and now resides in New York City. While I may be wrong, I think that the concept of a fair revolving entirely around agriculture might have seemed a little exotic to her, resulting in its inclusion in the book.

In the end, while I'm not sure it should have been an entry in the travel book, I'm still glad I went. Not only was the Iowa State Fair a solid fair, I got to check another place from the book off my list.

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