



# The Singular Pilgrim: Travels on Sacred Ground

*Rosemary Mahoney*

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## **The Singular Pilgrim: Travels on Sacred Ground** Rosemary Mahoney

In an increasingly secular age of high-speed travel and advanced technology, it is surprising to learn that the ancient tradition of religious pilgrimage is on the rise. Charting this phenomenon from Ireland to India, Rosemary Mahoney turns her sharp eye and discerning ear on the pilgrims she meets in the course of six extraordinary journeys. Never a passive observer, Mahoney is a full participant, soldiering barefoot through the three-day penitential Catholic pilgrimage on Ireland's Station Island, walking the five-hundred-mile Camino de Santiago in Spain, braving the icy bathwater at Lourdes, where pilgrims beseech the Blessed Virgin for miraculous cures. In Varanasi, India's holiest city, Mahoney befriends a curious young boy whose intelligence and sensitivity provide startling insights into this ancient culture, with its public cremations and elaborate prayer rituals. And in the Holy Land, she rows alone across the Sea of Galilee to spend an unnerving, hilarious night camped below the Golan Heights in search of the essence of Jesus, a vigil punctuated by a pack of howling cats and a bad case of the jitters.

What Mahoney discovers among the true believers and charlatans, the holy and the profane, is the single thread that binds all religions: the desire for a relationship with God. "If I was struck by anything," she writes, "it was the shared human struggle to find reason, to confront the natural fear of uncertainty and obscurity." The Singular Pilgrim is a book less about religion than about belief. "An affecting visit to the ancient, humbling act of pilgrimage . . . [Mahoney] conveys a genuine sense of spiritual mindfulness on the road, and there is no denying that these pilgrimages paid her back in full" (Kirkus Reviews).

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