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From Jarrow To Java (on A Beer Scooter)



Synopsis

A book based on some of the unique characters and situations encountered in the course of a large construction project in East Java during a crucial time in Indonesia's history. The cast includes all the usual suspects Europeans, Australians, Americans etc. but the starring roles are Indonesians. The account is based around the job, the impact on the area, the people, the ladies, the pubs, the problems, the perceptions...and misconceptions. Featuring an introduction to Javanese customs and culture plus their effect on interaction between expats and locals, including the often weird and wonderful way that Indonesians view foreigners ...plus how some Westerners behave when given the keys to the sweetie shop. The timescale covers immediately before, during and after the downfall of the Soeharto regime. Although based in Indonesia the anecdotes will appeal to anyone who would like to expand their social and geographical boundaries, and just possibly gain an insight into how other people live, laugh, endure and survive.

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Customer Reviews

Don't read the book unless you have ten hours to spare. "From Jarrow To Java (on a Beer Scooter)"

by Joe Writeson is a book you can't put down. And it's one easy to pick up after a restless night sleep digesting the characters. Joe will make sure you come out of it totally immersed. Now that's a hard act to follow. And he doesn't even promise that in the forward. He should really warn readers that his book is highly addictive, and write out a prescription for sleeping pills for avid readers who stay up all night reading his fascinating account on the Beer Scooter. Joe is fly on the wall, in the book, taking very sharp and ribald observations. Other times he's just a good drinker, leaning on the bar, avoiding mosquitos, and generally adding to the conversation. He's a hard worker and has just grinded his teeth in the North Sea. With change comes some responsibility. Safety is his concern. He needs to speed up a project that is languishing in corruption. Along the way he earns his respect. "The job description and my skills were a perfect match. Karma? Kismet? Serendipity? Fate? Who can say? But the posting was to change my life forever." Joe's adventures begin while managing local workers on a coal plant that powers most of Bali, and in the book it's under construction, during the height of the Suharto Empire. Most of the book revolves around his work, his colleagues and the locals servicing the 10000 strong crew of workers. Money was spewing out the vent holes. Corruption meant a gravy train for many, and fortunes were made and lost. Greed a prime factor, and of course some hard work, Joe goes into the characters of East Java. They are real and one of them throws a few punches from the pages. He's the Rocky of their team. Some chapters will horrify you. Joe is thrown 30 meters off his motor bike in the chapter Born to be Wild...ish, he escapes a King Cobra and a jumping snake in the chapter Fangs for the Memory. He goes back to where he fell off his Beer Scooter, and finds boulders and trees, and a skid mark in the rice field. He had missed most of the danger obstacles, and came out of it with a few bruises. His wife realises it was a close call with death, and confiscated the keys. He didn't ride a bike until ten years later. The Beer Scooter itinerary covers the cultures, aspirations, quirks and way of living for the East Javanese. Oh, and the Balinese. Herman the German, a man power recruiter, who says to Joe, "Us Europeans should stay together." Joe says he was making good money," but if he had it his way he'd screw the work force. Funny how quickly 'us Europeans' can revert to 'local habits'". He did Joe over by getting a free weekend in Bali on the company's expense account. But with the help of a wild boy of Borneo toting a Japanese sword, he writes, "Thirty minutes later we were at the nearest ATM withdrawing the amount owed plus some 'beer money' for the lads who had escorted a s***-scared Herman and myself to the cash point." A marriage of convenience turns into something more serious. Joe gets on well with the grandfather at the village ceremonial gathering, who is the local arak distiller. Later the marriage will turn into something more serious. We aren't sure if the village is in Madura or somewhere near Bunywangi. Why let small details get in the way

of a good yarn? Joe weaves in his life as an expat working for a Japanese firm. There's tonnes of cash and characters and services springing up in this community to service the workers of the power plant. One guy opens up a church. He accepts all Christian denominations. Another Chinese opens up a western bar, and almost gets it right except for not chilling the beer. Stan the orangutan, who is fed booze, french fries (with ketchup), and cigarettes, which he chews, making sure he spits out the filter and paper, are one of the many wonderful characters that stand out in Jarrow to Java. But Joe's mate Jock, who recently bought the bar, is having problems with the primate. "Stan was now roaming around the bar in a distracted manner swaying his upper body from side to side and baring his teeth at the staff." Jock asked the previous owner what was the problem with the orangutan. "Ahh he's probably got a hangover." Jock figured out it would be cheaper to mix arak, rice whiskey, with beer. Stan became more docile and Jock's maintenance costs of the boozing orang-utan went down down considerable. Joe is the Boss and must deal with the locals, on an off site. At first it was trying but over time he becomes well versed in local culture. He explores how he sees things through the local's eyes. His translator is called a few times to sort out some stuff. The phone has been cut off. His driver got into an accident. An Indonesian wants to buy the bike back he sold to him for half the price. The jihads, a bunch of brainwashed teenagers, who Joe calls the Jihad J&^koffs, wrote crude notes saying they'd kill all prostitutes and infidels if they didn't leave town. That was during Ramadan, "The culprits were soon identified as they had left a load of their leaflets in their school photocopy machine." The police rounded them up, and told them to keep off their turfs, many of the brothels and Karaoke joints ran in the town. Scams in Bali are revealed. The Teddy Bear picnic, set in Bali, is another alcohol fuelled adventure into Kuta Fantasy land. The big fat Australian Sheila saves Joe's team from a Bali scam. The boys wanted to have a hat collection. Not just for her help, but the big pendulous boobs that were flapping out of bikini top. And her partner, the Bondi Surfer, Joe sums up his communication abilities that are on level with Stan. Hilarious stuff. Grunt grunt, and yeah, grunt. Sheila and the surfer were made for each other. If only the Surfer gave as much attention to her as he does to his surf board, she'd be in Boganville heaven. Civil strife. He'll stick around and get double time. That's the time when the demonstrations flooded Jakarta and threatened to spill out across the archipelago. Lots of beer is consumed, games concocted. It's not all happy and funny anecdotes, though. The Chinese fleeing the rape and pillage from Surabaya, are attacked ruthlessly by gangs, explains Joe, going into both sides of the argument. There's a riot going on. A donkey cart, a guy carrying a computer monitor, company cars and bikes stolen. He has a picture of this in the book, allaying fears that he's making up big porkies. Bonuses weren't paid to the subcontractors, explains Joe. He's getting wiser, and wondering if this

was just a big set up for an insurance claim. The gold diggers, there's a few of them. Veronica is a real laugh and has a few husbands on the go. Seeing Veronika leave the Italian restaurant, with stolen plates and forks and salt holders, and being told to hand them back by the manager, who places a dirty napkin back into her bag, is pure gold material. She'll get her come uppance soon. Her boyfriend, a German engineer, encourages her to ring up a big bill on his name. He never does fly back to Jakarta to sort out the bill. But Joe reasons she still has some cash tucked away from the other four husbands. And another gold digger, who married a very rich old Australian man with one foot in the grave. A year later he died, and she bought land in Bali. She did cry at the funeral, and Joe reckons it was the incense that watered her eyes. The impression is that poverty and the chance for a better life leads many of these girls into marriage with the expats. There's no smugness in Joe's writing. He writes what he sees. Nothing is put on. The material he writes about is too rich to embellish it. A Texan falls in love with a young beaten wife, who gets a divorce, and starts a successful hair salon in Hollywood. Serenading Dan, the Casanova, plays romantic prankster, and helps a few office staff who are distressed from bad relationships. Eventually he'll marry an office staff. Like Joe, he falls into the softie category. Come to think of it, all of Joe's mates in this book have a heart of gold. Those who are mean and desensitized to the local culture, usually get their come uppings. A snake bites one guy's toe, and a South African is flown out of the country for serious treatment of the pox. The miscreants are weeded out with karmic gestures. Indonesia is diverse, and the anecdotes Joe dishes up don't suggest otherwise. It's a kaleidoscope of impressions, and lasting one is that someone has at last got a carbon copy in book form of what East Java and Bali is really like. Scammers everywhere, fortunes lost, love gained. If only Joe's mate had consulted some of the jaded expat drunks in Sanur, he might not have been shafted with a property by the Balinese. Every miner, rigger, expat and traveler should read this book, and so should Paul Carter. There aren't many expat books on Indonesia. It might not have the title *Burmese Days*, but it reads much better. No literary pretension, which is the book's saving grace. A man who likes to write has picked up a pen and made notes. He's then compiled it. The outcome is a book that should have a larger audience. It's self published and the format is a bit ratty and a few typos. It only adds to the charm of the book. Joe has tapped into the hearts and minds of the Indonesians, and had a few laughs along the way.

Stories from Java, told with sensitivity and humour by a master storyteller who found himself working for a Japanese company, living in a Javanese village, and acquiring a mother in law who'd taught her daughter all about forest mushrooms. Compulsory reading if you've thinking of visiting

Indonesia, or you've spent part of your life being the white mouse in the brown rat pack anywhere, A++ primer if you're even thinking of doing either. Fair warning though, if you were born without a sense of humour, you won't be laughing aloud at times while you're reading it, and Indonesia definitely isn't for you!

"From Jarrow To Java (on a Beer Scooter)" by Joe Writeson is a very humorous book of the author's life in Java. Joe Writeson left his home and just by chance accepted a position to oversee a huge construction project that seemed doomed in East Java. What ensues when he takes on this monumental task is quite hilarious. Yet, you can feel his frustration in trying to get the project going and completed. He runs into many obstacles, some of which will have you laughing out loud. One of the most important people he meets in Java is the woman he will marry. This book is very well written, humorous, yet tells of the frustrations and accomplishments in taking on such a huge project. This book will capture your interest from the beginning to the end. Thank you Mr. Writeson for a truly great book. I very highly recommend "From Jarrow to Java". It is most definitely "my cup of tea"!!

Good read, read whilst on the go. From Jarrow to Java is full of humor and provides the reader cultural insight from the perspective of Joe(first person) into the broad culture of South East Asia, Indonesian culture and micro Javanese culture. Light to read with each chapter providing different situations, like a set of mini stories. Thoroughly enjoyed it, definitely a must for expats thinking of moving to a foreign country.

Good stories, but really poor writing. This author needed a good editor.

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