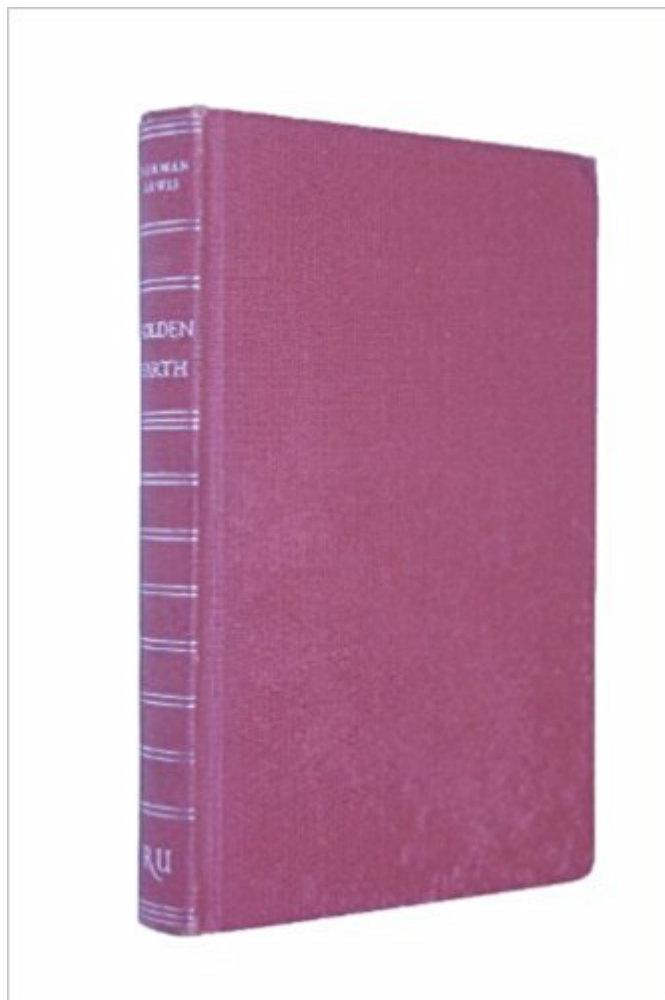


The book was found

Golden Earth: Travels In Burma



Synopsis

Like most travelers in Burma, Norman Lewis fell in love with the land and its people. Although much of the countryside was under the control of insurgent armies-the book was originally published in 1952-he managed, by steamboat, decrepit lorry, and dacoit-besieged train, to travel almost everywhere he wanted. This perseverance enabled him to see brilliant spectacles that are still out of our reach, and to meet all types of Burmese, from District officers to the inmates of Rangoon's jail. All the color, gaiety, and charm of the East spring to life with this master storyteller. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A wonderfully vivid book" --Daily Telegraph --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Norman Lewis is England's finest, living travel writer. He has written a dozen travel books, including such masterpieces as Naples'44, The Honoured Society and A Dragon Apparent. He has also written thirteen novels. Lewis regards his life's major achievement to be the reaction to an article written by him entitled Genocide in Brazil, published in 1968. This led to a change in Brazilian law relating to the treatment of Indians, and to the formation of Survival International, which campaigns for the rights of indigenous peoples. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cultural experience, however much has changed. An Ethnography is a non bias recording or written description of a culture and the people inside that culture. The author Norman Lewis travels into Burma and all around the country in an attempt to capture the culture. He shows minimal bias as all of his thoughts from the novel analyze his written experience; he lets the reader

“take it for what it is” I chose this book, because Lewis’s travels through Burma relate to my ethnography. I would not recommend this book as a travel guide as it was published in 1952. “My ignorance of conditions in Burma was quite extraordinary” In July 1949; the Prime Minister had announced that peace was attainable within a year. Having heard no more I assumed the peace was attained. The book was originally published 63 years ago; this is significant because so much has changed in Burma since then. Today, even after former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar (what was once Burma) there is still conflict and has been for over sixty years. This book was more intended as a cultural experience in a narrow time slot which the Country received its independence and the government regime wasn’t out of control. However, Lewis did do a terrific job at capturing the culture around him during his travels. “Apart from building pagodas, the ancient Burmese seem to have a set of extraordinary store by the act of compelling them. Just in biblical times battles were sometimes decided by individual combat between champions, there are many examples in Burmese history of conflicts being settled without fighting in favor of the side which could first complete a pagoda.” This is a worthwhile book to read in leisure time for pleasure, however should not be recommended as a travel guide.

Norman Lewis is one of the preeminent travel writers of the 20th Century. I had previously read the excellent *A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* concerning his travels in Indochina in the early ‘50’s, during the war for Vietnamese independence from French colonial rule. I’ve had a deep and abiding interest in Burma, alas sometimes known as Myanmar, visiting the country four times in the ‘80’s. When I discovered that Lewis had written a travel book on the country, based on his travels in the early ‘50’s, I considered it an essential read. Although the central authorities were discouraging, they did not give an absolute “no,” so Lewis was able to travel throughout most of the country, when there was considerable fighting due to separatist groups, a condition that exists today. He took a boat from Rangoon to the “deep south,” Mergui, via Moulmein (of Kipling fame). He describes his departure thus: “There was a lassitude in the air propitious to the embarkation upon a voyage to decaying southern ports.” He manages to return to Rangoon by air, and then on to Mandalay (whose only “romantic” part is its name.) From there he travels by jeep to the former British hill station at Maymyo (I probably took the same WW II jeep as he, some 30 years later). Perhaps half the book is centered on his experiences in the northern Shan States, between Lashio and Bhamo, including the market held every five days at Nam Hkam. He manages to reach the far northern town of Myitkyina, famous for the jade found nearby. He returns to Mandalay by

boat on the Irrawaddy, and on to Rangoon by train, despite the fact that the middle section has been destroyed by rebels. He writes with immense descriptive power, knowing the names of the birds and flora. He is also insightful into the human condition, with meaningful descriptions of the personalities that he encounters. And he studied his Burmese history before arriving, describing aspects of rule of various Burmese emperors, such as Bodawpaya (the Burmese Ivan the Terrible) dealing with such paradoxical issues that in a country where the killing of many animals and noxious pests is frowned upon, or outright forbidden, the Emperors would bury people alive to protect bridges and palaces. Some of his trenchant political observations: "The difference between common piracy and empire-building is a matter of scale and success." And one that resonated with my own experiences: "Although the classic English traveler is spurred on in almost all cases by nothing more sinister than an extravagant curiosity, it has been hard at the best of times for others to believe that he is not an agent of the Intelligence Service..." His conclusions also resonate, at least for that period, if not for today: "I state here my sincere belief that the average Burmese peasant working his own land, lives a fuller and happier life, and is a more successful human being than the average Western factory hand or office worker." But I had several problems with the book. Save for one powerful passage on the attempt of 20,000 to flee into India ahead of the Japanese in WW II, he mentions the impact of the war on the country minimally, and it was a devastating event for them. Likewise, he was light on the actual impact of British colonial rule, discussing in greater detail the invasions by the Mongols, and the Chinese. He never mentions the experience, and book written by a former British colonial officer in the '30's, George Orwell. Emma Larkin did justice to Orwell by writing a book on the places he lived. Finally, and most stunningly, he never mentions Pagan! The ultimate tourist destination for any Burmese visitor. Fortunately I was able to visit Pagan thrice; Lewis however had the time, and "guts" (or stupidity) to risk traveling in unsafe areas, and seeing so much more of the country that was "off-limits" in the '80's. Overall, a very good book for any traveler. Sadly the conditions he describes in the 50's are largely still true today, unlike the ones described in "A Dragon Apparent." Burma remains an enormous, open-air, history museum. Finally, Eland Publishers deserves much credit for keeping this book, as well as numerous other travel books in print.

I was mesmerized by the story telling. It was phenomenal to experience Burma in the 50's.

Not only a brilliant writer but his humanity moves the reader to see what we do to this beautiful land and its people in the name of progress.

I read this book in preparation for a trip to Burma that I was embarking on. Norman Lewis travelled there shortly after the country received its independence from the British and this book is best read as the reports of a historical eyewitness. Much has changed in Burma since Lewis travelled there and so this book only provides limited insights into contemporary Burma, but it is well worth reading.

Like those jerks who go mountain climbing before a snowstorm, this author went exploring in Burma in 1950 despite everyone's warnings. Hitching rides on broken down trucks, sleeping on bug infested floors, boarding trains that were expected to break down or be attacked, he somehow survived to tell about it. Some of his descriptions were well written, but I came away knowing more about his bad choices than about Burma. My time would have been better spent watching "Lonely Planet."

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