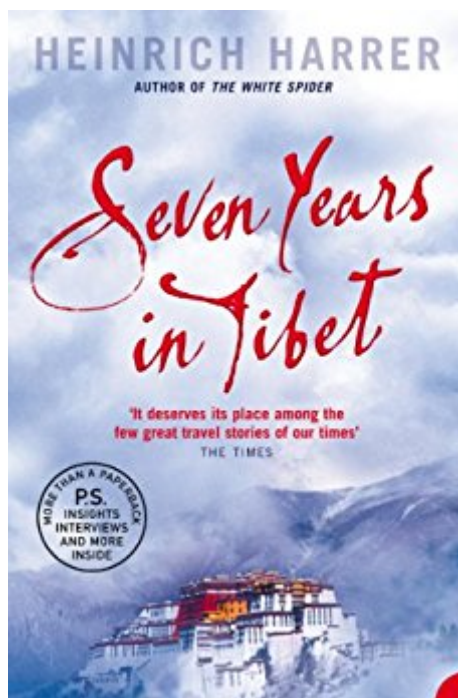


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# Seven Years In Tibet (Paladin Books)



## Synopsis

A landmark in travel writing, this is the incredible true story of Heinrich Harrer's escape across the Himalayas to Tibet, set against the backdrop of the Second World War. Heinrich Harrer, already one of the greatest mountaineers of his time, was climbing in the Himalayas when war broke out in Europe. He was imprisoned by the British in India but succeeded in escaping and fled to Tibet. Settling in Lhasa, the Forbidden City, where he became a friend and tutor to the Dalai Lama, Heinrich Harrer spent seven years gaining a more profound understanding of Tibet and the Tibetans than any Westerner before him. More recently made into a film starring Brad Pitt, *Seven Years in Tibet* is a stunning story of incredible courage and self-reliance by one of the twentieth century's best travel writers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book has two distinct parts: [1] the difficult journey that Heinrich Harrer (author) and Peter Aufschnaiter had reaching the Tibetan capital, Lhasa and [2] Heinrich's experiences and observation of Tibetan life while living in Lhasa. In the first part, their difficulties were many and it was, among other things, fortuitous breaks in the weather and chance encounters with kind Tibetan nomads that allowed them to even survive the journey. During

this time, you see how difficult it was to travel at the top of the world, and you get a glimpse of the lives of the average Tibetan. In the second part, Heinrich (and Peter) soon become welcome guests of the Tibetan upper class. At this point, the book switches to glimpses of the life of the upper class, the religious pageantry displayed for the devout (and superstitious) multitudes and cloistered life of the Dalai Lama. The book ends with the Chinese conquest of Tibet and so the start, I assume, of the wholesale dismantling of the rich historical Tibetan culture described in this book.

For various reasons I was reluctant to start reading this book. However, once I started reading it, I could not put it down. The author obviously loved Tibet. You can feel his love of this country and the respect of its traditions and people. Very educational and enlightening book. I am amazed at what he and his friend had to endure in order to achieve their dream of seeing the Forbidden City.

At once a marvelous adventure story and anthropological study of Tibetan culture and customs before China's brutal cultural genocide. Herr was one of very few Europeans to not just visit this mysterious Himalayan land, but to live, work and blend into the very life of Lhasa, "The forbidden city", and capital of Tibet. Whereby becoming not only a tutor, but life long friend of the XIV Dalai Lama.

A action adventure with a travel and cultural experience. The book does not give an insight into the personality of the writer, he is selfless in his effort to show what an amazing cultural time warp existed in that country. He leaves it to the reader to decide on the humanity of an ancient social system, and reflect on the benefits and downfalls associated with an isolated government.

Good story, but tends to bog down in many areas. Was surely written from life, which is seldom neat anyway. Could have used some editing in many areas, but the account of how Herr met and worked with the Dalai Lama is compelling, in a detached way.

Best first book for westerners about Tibet and the Dalai Lama (and China, by contrast), and a great adventure read - amazing true story and piece of world history. (This is not the Brad Pitt vehicle, but the real thing.) Weep for Tibet and our own loss of a most remarkable world treasure.

Don't let the fact that Seven Years in Tibet has been made into a movie stop you from picking up a

copy of Heinrich Harrer's classic, real-life adventure. Whatever the movie's merits, or lack thereof, by most accounts the original story--the book--remains the best-told version of an incredible journey. Originally published in German in 1953, Harrer's Tibetan travelogue did not appear in English until the 1980s or become widely read until the 1990s. Harrer's tale provides the amazing details of his escapes, survival, evasion, and physical challenge. Beyond the reward of finally arriving in Tibet, Harrer experiences the greater victory of actually creating an enjoyable life for himself in Lhasa and eventually serving the Dalai Lama himself. Born in Carinthia, Austria, Harrer spent his youth skiing and hiking in the alps. In 1936, the author secured a place on the Austrian Olympic Ski Team and became the winner of the World Students' Championship Downhill race. Reluctant to make ski movies as a follow-up career, Harrer strove to win a place on a Himalayan climbing expedition. In 1943, the author was invited to join a German-Austrian team on the Nanga Parbat Expedition, which was led by Peter Aufschnaiter. After this second thrill of a lifetime, the young mountaineer found himself facing yet another unusual life challenge. After the expedition, while waiting in Karachi, India (which was then British territory) for return transportation to the West, World War II broke out. The climbers were arrested and taken to an internment camp at Dehra Dun, near the border of Tibet. After two years and two failed attempts, Harrer and Aufschnaiter finally succeeded in escaping. Their subsequent struggle to reach Tibet, and eventually Lhasa, required them to draw on every skill they knew as mountaineers and athletes, as well as their college educations and general handy man know-how. They faced obstacles and dangers--rugged terrain, the altitude, winter weather, diminishing supplies, lack of funds, injury, roving bands of thieves, and the hazards of traveling without documentation--that only the truly determined could overcome. As though a gift to reward their efforts, when the two men finally did reach the "forbidden city" of Lhasa in January of 1946, after nearly two years enroute, they were not turned away. In their isolation from the rest of the world, the Tibetans were just as curious about these two Europeans as Harrer and Aufschnaiter were about the citizens on "the rooftop of the world." In addition, the Tibetans in and around Lhasa assumed that any foreigner who had made it this far must possess proper paperwork. Once in Lhasa, the Tibetans actually found it quite amusing that these two men had managed to make it into the mystical city without passes. It was truly a feat, considering the measures Tibet's leaders undertook to keep out foreigners--in fact, Harrer notes that he met no more than seven other foreigners during his five years in Lhasa. While the first half of the book deals with the two mountaineers' struggles to reach the holy city, the second half of the book concerns the fascinating details of how Harrer and Aufschnaiter managed to ingratiate themselves with the locals, eventually becoming respected members of the community. Harrer presents his understanding of Tibetan daily

life, culture, and society, and details how he established himself as a citizen. Harrer finds his first job when he builds a fountain in a friend's yard--which leads to more work as a landscape architect. He is commissioned to conduct a geographical survey, and later to construct a dam. He even serves as an ice skating instructor to the locals. Eventually his work leads the Dalai Lama's family to befriend him. As a result, he becomes a tutor to the young holy man. One of the more interesting duties he had was to make films of various ceremonies and festivals for His Holiness, and he is even asked to construct for him what might be the first home cinema. He managed to take advantage of his status as royal film maker and shoot his own photos whenever possible. They must be invaluable today! For many readers, the most valuable part of this book is that which concerns Harrer's interactions with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and his resulting observations. As an outsider and non-Buddhist, Harrer reports that the Dalai Lama was impressively intellectually curious and intelligent, hard working and full of initiative. Despite his youth, the boy king had already established a highly developed sense of diplomacy and vision for his country. As he helped this famous young man learn as much as possible about the wide world beyond, Harrer laments that Tibet's desire to remain neutral in world affairs and her resulting political isolation made her an easy target. If only this boy had had a chance to rule, he notes, Tibet may have met with a different fate. Unfortunately, both Harrer and the His Holiness' good intentions were foiled in 1950, when the country was invaded. Harrer knew his time had come to leave his adopted country, but he has remained a life-long champion for his beloved second home. Few places on earth conjure up as many images of tantalizing mystery as Tibet. Fortunately, *Seven Years in Tibet* offers us a unique glimpse, from a what is truly an insider's view, into the untouched culture of Tibet. Harrer's book is often regarded as the best account of the "real" Tibet, as it once was, and as many hope it will some day return.

Be prepared that this was nothing like the movie but a fascinating read none the less. I give it 3 stars because the writing itself was mediocre and the details to help you envision certain aspects were a little lacking, fortunately I have been to Tibet myself (specifically Lhasa) and could call upon my own awe of the country -- despite Chinese occupation -- but wish this book was able to describe in better detail the way in which your breath is taken away at every scenic turn of the head.

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