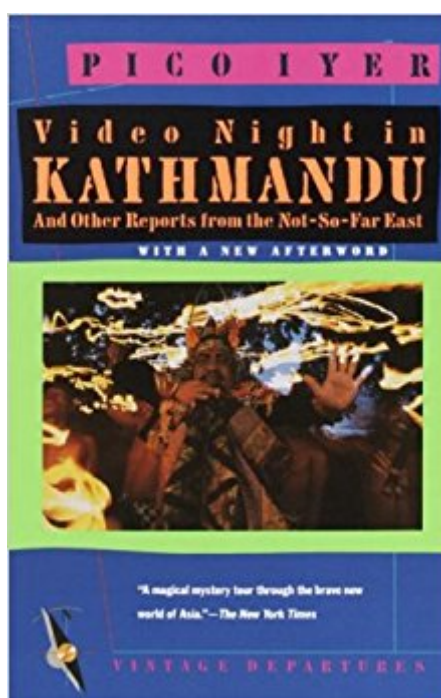


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Video Night In Kathmandu: And Other Reports From The Not-So-Far East



Synopsis

Mohawk haircuts in Bali. Yuppies in Hong Kong. In Bombay, not one but five Rambo rip-offs, complete with music and dancing. And in the People's Republic of China, a restaurant that serves dishes called "A Legitimate Beef" and "Ike and Tuna Turner." These are some of the images -- comic, poignant, unsettling -- that Iyer brings back from the Far East. The Time writer approaches his subject with a camera-sharp eye and a willingness to go beyond the obvious conclusions about the hybrid cultures of the East and West. "Quick-witted and perceptive -- something more than a deft and entertaining traveler's tale." (The New Yorker) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Only in India would the American film Rambo be remade with the title role played by a woman--in a sari, no less! Only in Hong Kong would a man at a cocktail party pick up a woman with the line "What do you think of the dollar?" And only in Video Night in Kathmandu will you find detailed, unsettling portraits of a Far East in flux as experienced by Pico Iyer, a travel writer beyond compare. Tibet, China, India, and Thailand--these are among the objects of Iyer's wanderlust, the subjects of 11 essays chronicling his travels. In India, he explores the lucrative Bombay film business: "The process of turning an American movie into an Indian one was not very difficult ... but it did require a few changes.... the Indian hero had to be domesticated, supplied with a father, a mother, and a clutch of family complications." As one film director told him, " ... for example, Rambo must be given a sister who was raped." In Bangkok he finds the sex trade is well nigh impossible to avoid: " ... by the time a third official government tout approached me with the novel invitation: 'My friend. You no

like birdwatching?' I was inclined to suspect that ornithology was not among his interests." Pico Iyer is more than just a travel writer. For four years, he wrote about world affairs for Time, and he brings to these brilliant, comical, and poignant essays his extensive knowledge of politics and culture as well as a journalist's eye for the telling details. Video Night in Kathmandu provides both a stark, unsettling view of modern Asia and an exploration of the ambivalent attitudes Asians hold toward the West. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In 1985, Iyer, a British freelance writer, crisscrossed eastern Asia to view the spread of America's pop-cultural imperialism through 10 of the world's oldest civilizations. With serendipity as his guide, he spent only a few weeks in each country, and most of his intelligence came by chance. Nevertheless, this traveler's casual observations make a book of warmth, charm and sensibility, and anyone intending to visit the Orient will greatly benefit from his arresting descriptions and shrewd assessments: Bangkok is a mixture of "pizzas, pizzazz and all the glitzy razzmatazz of the American Dream, California style." China displays "the get-rich-quick politics of the Cultureless Revolution." Money-mad Hong Kong is "the largest metropolis in the world without a museum." Despite its "impatience of limitations," Japan is obsessed by baseball and Disneyland. Tibet is "the latest way station of the Denim Route." The people of the Philippines, "masters of Asia's hospitality business," are the most depressing and desperate. One word characterizes Singapore: "McCity." In the end, it is poor, shabby Burma, "the dotty eccentric of Asia, the queer maiden aunt who lives alone" that has the most appeal. If the image abroad of America is "perplexingly double-edged" the responses it provokes are "appropriately forked-tongued," and, in the last chapter, "The Empire Strikes Back," Iyer begins to suspect that every Asian culture he visited is probably "too deep, too canny or too self-possessed to be turned by passing trade winds from the west." Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I lived in Japan, as did/does the author. This is the first book that, in my view, clearly explains the Japanese national mindset. It's not all about Japan, though, and the other nations he visits provide grist for more brilliant analysis.

A lively, perceptive view of Asia--an astonishingly vast range of countries included--in the mid-1980s, and even more valuable because it contains an epilogue which moves into the twenty-first century. Iyer approaches each country from a different perspective, then ties it all together in his conclusion. I appreciate the open-ended quality of this study, which reflects the

breadth of vision and understanding of the author. An endlessly fascinating book!

As I was reading, I couldn't help but think Iyer was trying to prove his point too much by rattling away with endless examples of globalism and American influence on Asian countries. Ok, so you can order guacamole in Indonesia. You can eat burgers in Nepal. Kids breakdance in Beijing. There are Philipinos singing Frank Sinatra in karaoke bars in the back alleys of Manila. We get the point. As an expat living in Asia, these things are a given, and in Asia 2010, I am surrounded by American culture everyday. But then I realized my gripe was based on one thing--the year 2010. Video Night in Katmandu on the other hand, was written in 1989, and it was a very different world then. Internet had barely a presence in Asia at that point, and only the rich had mobile phones. Online streaming movies and music were non-existent, and current and reliable world media in countries like China and Burma (or even Thailand, for that matter) was shaky at best. It's amazing to think how much things have changed over the last twenty years due to technology. Actually, it's a bit scary. Overall, the book is a quaint reminder of what once was, but its commentary on American influence in Asia seems to lack the punch it may have once had. That said, Iyer's writing is eloquent, and his cultural insights struck a good balance between humorous and heartfelt; a balance I hope to find in my own travel writing. I particularly enjoyed the Thai and Burma sections, and his final chapter, where he gives updates about some of the characters he met along his travels.

Pico Iyer has a great writing style you are there with him on his travels.

completely satisfactory

Highly recommend this book to anyone who has studied abroad, loves traveling, and/or wants to travel. His insights into the culture and people he meet encourage the reader to think more deeply about the people you interact with when traveling.

Pico Iyer is a writing star. His lyrics flow, his thoughts captivate. The book is slightly dated, but still worth reading and thinking about or studying if you want to be a travel writer.

Great book, excellent writing and interesting reading. Pico Iyer has great insight into the way the world works and the people driving its change

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