



Land of a Thousand Eyes: The Subtle Pleasures of Everyday Life in Myanmar

Peter Olszewski

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A vivid, insider's account of one of the most inaccessible and mysterious countries in Asia, this book looks beyond topographical features to discover the psyche of the people of Myanmar. Appointed to train local journalists for 18 months at the English-language weekly *The Myanmar Times*, and despite a measure of danger in accepting the assignment, Peter Olszewski throws himself into the daily life and culture of Yangon—even finding himself in a real-life, fairy-tale romance. Myanmar has recently been the focus of humanitarian and political outrage in developed countries, and this book gives a surprising, new perspective on the question of democratization.

Land of a Thousand Eyes: The Subtle Pleasures of Everyday Life in Myanmar Details

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From Reader Review Land of a Thousand Eyes: The Subtle Pleasures of Everyday Life in Myanmar for online ebook

Ron Brown says

I visited Myanmar in 2010 and travelled up into the north to Myitkyina by train. Spent several days travelling down the Irrawaddy River on a local river boat. In Bergan I met a local who took me to a village school where I donated books and pencils to the school and got to teach a grade 2 class (I'm a school principal when not travelling) I slept in a teak Buddhist temple between Kalaw and Inle Lake. I loved my time in this unique country with its beautiful people.

While travelling I read George Orwell's "Burmese Days" This set me on the path of numerous books on Myanmar/Burma. Thant Myint-U and Amitav Ghosh are authors that I have added to this list.

I approached Olszewski's book with some apprehension. There were interesting comments about him in Lonely Planet. I read a highly critical review of this book on a web site called Irawaddy.

It is difficult for many westerners to write an insightful, culturally unbiased, neutral book about many Asian countries. Sometimes these books are patronizing, slightly sneering with unappreciated humour or they paint the locals as sinless noble savagers.

I think Olszewski would openly admit that the paper he worked for was sanctioned by the regime and that his status and income gave him an ability to play the role of a well funded ex-pat who could indulge many of the sinful delights of an Asian city.

If you have a purist view where the regime is the personification of evil and aged Western men living there are drunken oversexed hypocrites then do not read this book.

If, like me, you do not have a black and white view then this book does offer some useful insights into Myanmar and its people. I particularly like "Unofficial Daughter No 1, Lasheeda. The way she has to strive so hard to gain so little. I was concerned that Olszewski might be exploiting her but I am sure she was fully aware of the relationship.

Throughout the book there are the occasional insights into the life of the people of Myanmar. I thought the section about Olszewski's plight in obtaining hot water was somewhat superior in attitude. But then I have had Asian people say to me that they admire Westerners who do not put up with second rate service and that many of their own citizens should demand better quality from businesses and governments.

Significantly the author does not join the chorus of loud condemnation of the Generals and their regime. He does point out the suffering that so many of the population experience because of poor decisions by the governments since the end of colonialism. His comments about Aung San Suu Kyi provide the reader with some reflection and thought.

He mainly focuses on individuals that he meets and their world view and presents facts for the reader to judge the behavior of the regime.

This is not an in depth highly researched account of Myanmar but for a traveller or someone starting out on a journey of exploration of Myanmar then it is a worthwhile start.

Nick says

A has to be read book, before even discussing any politics about Myanmar.

Visited this amazing country, with its true genuine people. Lets not ruin it more westerners

Kathryn says

Interesting perspective of an Aussie journalist who lived in Yangon for a year. His take on the politics and the military is a bit different but possibly more realistic than the traditional liberal establishment that believes they are doing the Myanmar people a favor by extending their political freeze out/boycott which just pushes them more and more into the role of being a puppet state of China.

April says

This is a fabulous book that I found quite by accident (it is free for download at wowio.com). Amy Tan's "Saving Fish From Drowning" got me interested in Burma so I was happy to read this travel account/memoir from Australian journalist Olszewski.

I'm so glad I did! It was fascinating, made even more so by Olszewski's great personality and sense of humor. He describes social customs, language and cultural barriers, spirituality, traditions and politics in modern Myanmar with such flair and style that I found myself captivated and rarely wanted to put it down. In addition, the love story that reveals itself mainly at the end of the book is heartfelt and just perfect for sap-lovers like myself.

Subvert says

I liked it. It makes me want to go to Myanmar, which I should really do while I'm still living in Bangkok. The book feels a bit like a diary, without really going towards some sort of climax. But the author seems really likeable, the situations where he has to carefully deal with the cultural differences are hilarious. I also liked the writing on Myanmar politics, as the author is quite closely involved himself by working for the heavily censored first foreign-owned daily newspaper, it adds quite a bit of nuance to the usual Western liberal Aung San Suu Kyi worship.

Probably the best book out there on expat-life in Myanmar.

Saturday's Child says

An interesting insight into this country from a Westerner who lived there for a period of time. Add it to your list if you are interested in finding out more about Burma as it is well worth the read.
