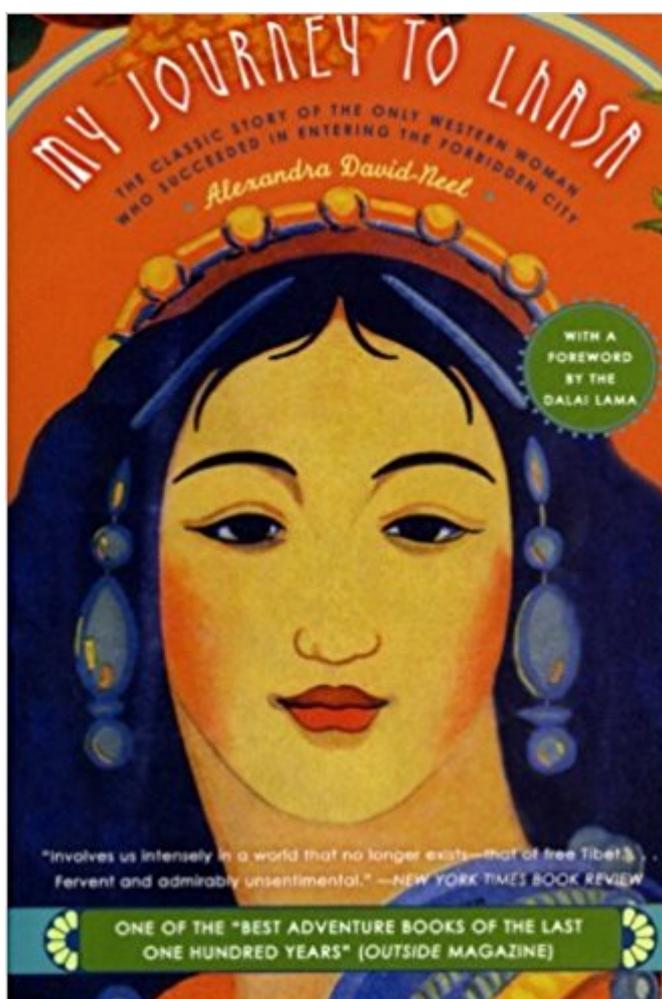


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My Journey To Lhasa: The Classic Story Of The Only Western Woman Who Succeeded In Entering The Forbidden City



Synopsis

An exemplary travelogue of danger and achievement by the Frenchwoman Madame Alexandra David-Neel of her 1923 expedition to Tibet, the fifth in her series of Asian travels, and her personal recounting of her journey to Lhasa, Tibet's forbidden city. In order to penetrate Tibet and reach Lhasa, she used her fluency of Tibetan dialects and culture, disguised herself as a beggar with yak hair extensions and inked skin and tackled some of the roughest terrain and climate in the World. With the help of her young companion, Yongden, she willingly suffered the primitive travel conditions, frequent outbreaks of disease, the ever-present danger of border control and the military to reach her goal.

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Customer Reviews

When I was reading the reviews of this book, I was struck by the one of the reviews. It was very negative, and the reviewer missed the beauty of this book entirely. I was glad that I had already read it. I read the reviews because I was curious to see if others had enjoyed the book as much as I did. I was buying it again as a present for a friend. The author was a very unusual person, and this book is very much worth the read. She wrote about customs and values honestly as she saw them. She was not a dispassionate viewer, but I also felt that she was not judgemental or superior. When customs of two peoples are as different as some of Tibet and France are, they will shock a person and that person will remark. However, I felt that she loved and respected the people she wrote about, and she did a remarkable job in recounting what she saw. She gave her readers the pleasure of a most unusual journey with her and her young companion through a country that was worth writing about.

In 1923 at the age of 55, Alexandra David-Neel put on the robes of a Buddhist monk and walked across Tibet for four months on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Lhasa. No European woman had ever entered the holy city before, and the road promised many dangers, from wild animals to blizzards to bandits. Her descriptions bear witness to a spunky evolved soul whose scholarly knowledge of Buddhism served her well in her adopted role as an itinerant monk. Her writing is elegant, punctuated by an unselfconscious humor and relentless perspicacity. Truly an adventure trek of many wonders.

My Journey to Lhasa is a marvellous, cliff hanging tale of adventure comparable to Lawrence of Arabia's epic account. David-Neel made her trek to forbidden Lhasa in the dead of winter succeeding where much younger, better equipped male explorers failed. Her thrilling yarn is the main highlight of a 101 year adventure packed life. This noted Buddhist scholar wrote 25 books on eastern themes after she made her death defying trip in her mid fifties. Although naysayers have claimed that David-Neel never went to Lhasa, our extensive research for our biography the Secret Lives of Alexandra David-Neel authenticates her travels as well as fleshes out the human aspect of this amazing character who Lawrence Durrell called "the most astonishing Frenchwoman of our Times."

Places of intense emotion reveal themselves only to the hardy and the intrepid. Every warm-blooded traveler knows this. But this story chronicles a veritable traveler boot camp! To bed down on rocks, sleep on snow, go hungry, thirsty and unclean, travel by starlight, dangle from a rope over a gorge, beg for food, awaken to the snuffle of wild predators... all this by a woman, almost a 100 years ago, 55 years old and on the run. Tibet is of fantasmagoric beauty, like that of a land spellbound by unscrupulous sorcery - harsh and unbending but so terrifyingly beautiful that one succumbs to its thrall. I could imagine her tramping through these fabled lands, forging through fog-filled valleys, melting into the moonshine or greeting a golden sunrise at the end of a hard night's trek, as her adventure unfolds in this well-paced account. I regret that she doesn't pause to paint a fuller picture of what must have been spectacular scenery. It is also interesting to sketch her personality through her own pen. She appears as a strong-willed, intelligent, somewhat arrogant woman of unwavering determination, gritty endurance and one who loves a challenge. I have to applaud her unconditionally for the original motivation that launched her on this endeavor. I found her use of Tibetan words occasionally distracting and the Introduction by Diana Rowan is downright hagiographic and entirely dispensable, or at least, deferrable until the end of the author's own story.

Yes, the style is a little dated, as one reviewer commented, but why should that be surprising? This is a period piece. If you are a traveler at heart this travelogue cannot fail to touch you.

This is most certainly a worth while book to spend some time with. Reading these early Buddhist-travel journals is a rare pleasure indeed. If you are looking for something similar, and in many ways more enchanting, check out John Blofeld's book, "The Wheel of Life: The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist." The time periods are similar with Neel's, but Blofeld spends most of his time not in Tibet, but in China, exploring back woods monasteries and meeting up with taoists and other mountain ascetics. It's just wonderful.

This story of a solo woman, over 50, travelling in a strange country in the early 1900's should be read by every woman who is wondering if they dare travel anywhere. Once you read Alexandra's story of her journey to Lhasa in Tibet, you will never be afraid to travel anywhere in the world. Her incredible courage, her determination and her love of Tibetan people and culture make this one of the best reads in a very long time.

This is a book which I think of often. Ms. David-Neel had or should I say has quite a strong spirit. I would recommend all of her books to anyone interested in spiritual growth, women's triumphs or walking across high Himalayan passes in the dead of winter with the Lama Yongden. I cross high Rocky Mountain passes regularly, but always in the comfort of an 18-wheeler.

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