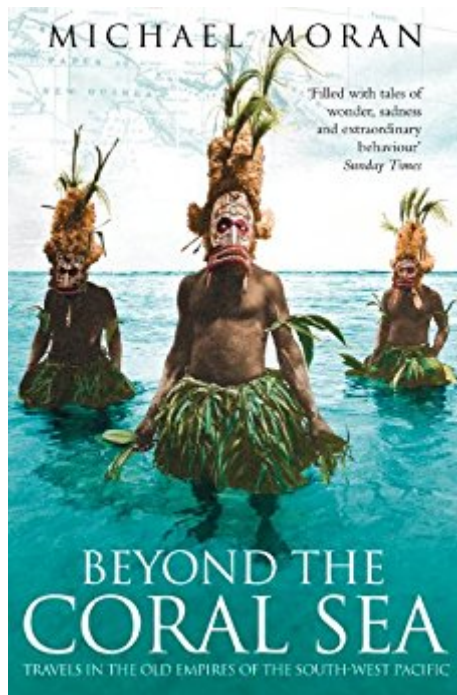


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Beyond The Coral Sea: Travels In The Old Empires Of The South-West Pacific (Text Only)



Synopsis

A romantic and adventurous journey to the hidden islands and lagoons beyond Papua New Guinea and north of Australia. East of Java, west of Tahiti and north of the Cape York peninsula of Australia lie the unknown paradise islands of the Coral, Solomon and Bismarck Seas. They were perhaps the last inhabited place on earth to be explored by Europeans, and even today many remain largely unspoilt, despite the former presence of German, British and even Australian colonial rulers. Michael Moran, a veteran traveller, begins his journey on the island of Samarai, historic gateway to the old British Protectorate, as the guest of the benign grandson of a cannibal. He explores the former capitals of German New Guinea and headquarters of the disastrous New Guinea Compagnie, its administrators decimated by malaria and murder. He travels along the inaccessible Rai Coast through the Archipelago of Contented Men, following in the footsteps of the great Russian explorer Baron Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay. The historic anthropological work of Bronislaw Malinowski guides him through the seductive labyrinth of the Trobriand Islands of Love and the erotic dances of the yam festival. Darkly humorous characters, both historical and contemporary, spring vividly to life as the author steers the reader through the richly fascinating cultures of Melanesia. 'Beyond the Coral Sea' is a captivating voyage of unusual brilliance and a memorable evocation of a region which has been little written about during the past century. Note that it has not been possible to include the same picture content that appeared in the original print version.

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Customer Reviews

This is the first book on the Island Provinces of Papua New Guinea rather than the Highlands for a hundred years and what a brilliant book it is! Finely-written with beautiful photographs (particularly of children and island landscapes) as well as excellent maps. Clearly a product of extensive research, this book gives the reader a balanced insight into a vanishing world in a way that is both informative and hugely entertaining. The islands are still almost pristine and 'stone-age' in character but not for much longer I fear. The stories the author tells of characters both historical and modern are almost beyond belief - often hilarious - obviously the apex of European eccentrics visited New Guinea. This is travel writing of the highest quality about a place most readers are highly unlikely to visit. The account of the great Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobriand "Islands of Love" is both penetrating and enlightening. Moran is one of those rare travel writers who respects what he sees and communicates this to the reader with dry humour and deep understanding. As a missionary tells him, life in Papua New Guinea can be both "terrible and wonderful" by turns. Moran steers us through this difficult cultural labyrinth with brilliance. I am looking forward to the Polish edition next year! "Beyond the Coral Sea" will become the standard work and required reading for anyone contemplating a trip to Papua New Guinea - even those who are not.

As a traveller who has spent a total of about 18 months in and around the island regions of Papua New Guinea, I found this book to be just what I look for before and during a trip to any area. Moran's trip illustrated exactly what a traveller will experience while in the country and also gives the historical background so that time is not wasted trying to discover how a culture or area has come to be what it is. While looking over the harbor of Rabaul and seeing the Duke of York Islands and the southern end of New Ireland, I felt as though I could feel the history taking place. Even Moran's encounters with modern day expatriots in airports and towns ring so true to my experiences that I felt he was writing about my trip without me knowing it. It is my goal to gain this insight for every country I visit but it is hardly realized. This book fulfilled that goal for Papua New Guinea and raised the bar for my travel reading in the future.

OBSERVATIONS:- Covers the brief German colonialist period- Investigates issues of poverty, cultural dislocation and crime (the "raskols")- Not so much on cannibalism per se, but it is disconcerting to read how relatively frequently uppity missionaries were eaten!- The Manus Island dances give new meaning to the term "Members Only"PROS- Well-researched- Multiple sets of great photos- Stories of adventurous missionaries and misfits such as Count D'Albertis, the Cambridge Seven, Bronislaw Malinowski, Baron Miklouho-Maclay and of course Errol Flynn- Good exploration of cultural concepts and artifacts such as malagan masks, tubuans, dukduks etc.- Best book chapter is the Essay on Kwato Island - very poignant, poetic and melancholyCONThe balance of memoir, travelogue, history and essay is good but not as good as other travel writers such as Robert D. Kaplan or Bruce Chatwin. Moran has all the right ingredients, but the proportions need tweaking.Great line: "once the tropics infects your blood, it enslaves you like a terminal illness"

This was a satisfying, informative, entertaining and thought provoking read. Having lived in New Zealand and Australia most of my adult life, I have never paddled up to the Coral Sea. I have been to other parts of Polynesia and Melanesia but what is described in this book is a series of cultures different from what I have encountered. Part history, biography and travel story it works on all those levels. It is clear on the legacy of European colonisation and the missionaries role in subverting existing beliefs and traditional tribal structures. Unsurprising many Europeans came to a bad end without quite realising why. The dangerous currents then are still in force today and Mr Moran encounters some of them in his travels. Yet what emerges is the richness of differences, even in short distances-these can often be baffling when on the surface there may be a sameness about the environment, the people and what they appear to do and believe in. It is a book I shall long treasure.

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