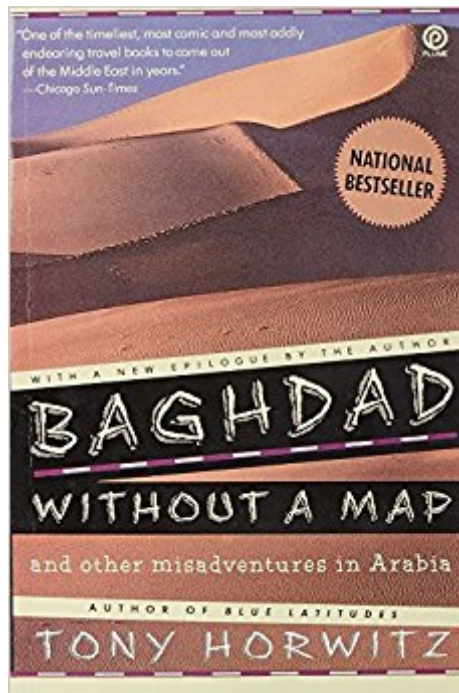




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Baghdad Without A Map And Other Misadventures In Arabia



Synopsis

“A very funny and frequently insightful look at the world’s most combustible region.”
•The New York Times Book Review
NATIONAL BESTSELLER
With razor-sharp wit and insight, intrepid journalist Tony Horwitz gets beyond solemn newspaper headlines and romantic myths of Arabia to offer startling close-ups of a volatile region few Westerners understand. His quest for hot stories takes him from the tribal wilds of Yemen to the shell-pocked shores of Lebanon; from the malarial sands of the Sudan to the eerie souks of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, a land so secretive that even street maps and weather reports are banned. As an oasis in the Empty Quarter, a veiled woman offers tea and a mysterious declaration of love. In Cairo, “politeness police” patrol seedy nightclubs to ensure that belly dancers don’t show any belly. And at the Ayatollah’s funeral in Tehran a mourner chants, “Death to America,” then confesses to the author his secret dream to visit Disneyland. Careening through thirteen Muslim countries and Israel, Horwitz travels light, packing a keen eye, a wicked sense of humor, andchutzpah in almost suicidal measure. This wild and comic tale of Middle East misadventure reveals a fascinating world in which the ancient and the modern collide. “As a document of the cultural impasse that brought on the war, this is unsurpassed.”
•Village Voice
“High-spirited and entertaining.”
•The New Yorker
“A timely and incisive insider’s description of the mysterious Arab World . . . Tony Horwitz is an ideal guide for American Reader.”
•Chicago Tribune

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Customer Reviews

Horwitz has the touch, the ability to astutely capture the ludicrous essence of an experience while filling in all the pertinent socio-historic details. He chews qat with the Yemenis, plays soccer with the Sudanese Dinka refugees and listens to an endless refrain of "You are the perfume of Iraq, oh Saddam" in Baghdad. Horwitz' eye and wit are equally sharp, and his book is an exceptionally good read. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Horwitz (One for the Road , Random, 1988), now a Wall Street Journal reporter, covered the Middle East in the late 1980s and returned to Baghdad in August 1990 following the invasion of Kuwait. With a sense of humor and eye for detail, he presents the turbulent Middle East from the vantage point of the "man in the street," whom we meet in traditional Yemeni villages, sophisticated Cairo, regimented Libya, disintegrating Sudan, a luxury hotel in the United Arab Emirates, and a seedy Baghdad nightclub. Among other adventures, the author attends the funeral of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran. A Jewish American, he shows empathy for Arabs in the Middle East. The Kuwait crisis will focus attention on the two chapters on Iraq. In comparison with Christopher Dickey's Ex pats (LJ 6/15/90) and Charles Glass's Tribes with Flags (LJ 4/1/90), Horwitz's book better captures the point of view of the average person and covers more territory, omitting only Syria from his itinerary. A valuable and timely acquisition for public libraries.- James Rhodes, Luther Coll . , Decorah, Ia. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I love non-fiction and this book is best in class, mixing great writing, history and insightful observations. I first read this book in 1992 and decided to try it again, knowing how much has changed in the intervening years. Sadly, while many of the characters have changed, some of the underlying fundamentals have not. It was a great read then and stands the test of time.

Tony Horwitz has created a miasma that can only be compared to an Abbot and Costello movie from the 1940s. There's dancing girls, strange snakes in bags, sand homes reaching into the sky and furtive spies watching everyone as they run here and there with long swords threatening poor Lou Costello. And, as the two Americans try to hide, try to find something good to eat and lose their passports once again, over steaming sand is the photo of Allah or is it Saddam Hussein, urging on his hatchet men who drive crazy cabs, crazy airplanes and beat-up tanks in their quest to prove their manhood and their love of God. But, back to reality, it's only the young thirtyish Tony who's our

guide through the Middle East. We're by his side for hours as he tries to get away from Khartoum or Baghdad or Tehran. Poor Tony is trying to get a good news story but all he can find is propaganda and really, really bad bootleg gin. If you thought you'd like to visit the Casbah after watching one of those old Bud Abbot movies, well forget it. Those sabers seemed funny in celluloid, but up close and personal they can ream you out pretty good. Tony Horwitz escaped many times from scrapes with death, and we wonder why he kept going back for more. We certainly don't want to visit the desert ever again. But we might just watch another black and white movie from the vault of A & C classics. HELP!

Pulitzer Prize-winner Tony Horwitz is one of my favorite nonfiction writers, so I'm not sure what took me so long to read *Baghdad Without a Map and Other Misadventures in Arabia*. My mistaken impression was that *Baghdad Without a Map* was about the Persian Gulf War. Actually, it's a delightful travelog of his journeys through the Middle East. Many of the stories are amusing, others are sad and some are downright disturbing. But always, Horwitz is interesting and entertaining. Horwitz's wife, Geraldine Brooks, became a foreign correspondent stationed in Cairo, and Horwitz (an unemployed writer) decided to join her and write freelance stories as he traveled through 15 countries and emirates throughout the Middle East. The author likes to look for the offbeat, and he went to camel races in the UAE, ate qat in Yemen, watched belly dancers in Cairo who weren't allowed to show their bellies, and tried to get around Baghdad without a map (Hussein's paranoia kept maps and weather reports from being published). He also touched on more serious topics as he dodged mines in the Persian Gulf, traveled to the Ayatollah's funeral in Iran, navigated the Jordan River between Israel and Jordan, priced weapons in Yemen and witnessed horrible conditions in the Sudan. But what Horwitz does best is talk to people, and he found a surprising number of Arabs who were willing to share their stories (not necessarily an easy job for a Jewish writer). This is how Horwitz was able to discover the true complexities of the Middle East. For instance, when in Tehran, he found "that there were two completely separate cities, one poor and devout, the other bourgeois and disenchanted. North Tehranis were frozen in time, like White Russians or French monarchists, left on the sidelines by the revolution." *Baghdad Without a Map* is just about the perfect book, but one thing would have made it even better--and that is the inclusion of photographs. In fact, this is a criticism I have of almost all of Horwitz's books. But other than that, *Baghdad Without a Map* is an excellent book and will give the reader a better understanding of the many issues still plaguing the Middle East. The edition I purchased even had a new epilogue written after the Persian Gulf War. And after reading this work, I can understand why

Horwitz's wife told him "Once the Middle East's in your blood, you've got it for life. Like Malaria."

It was with delight that I turned to another book by Tony Horwitz. I had thoroughly enjoyed his CONFEDERATES IN THE ATTIC and BLUE LATITUDES. I was not to be disappointed by this earlier book, BAGHDAD WITHOUT A MAP. It is, however, not quite as insightful as his later works, which were generated by a particular desire to explore history while traveling the places of history as they are today. This book is the result of family- and job-related circumstances: his spouse being assigned to the Middle East, and his need to be gainfully employed while accompanying her. In search of a story he can sell as a freelance journalist, he travels throughout the Middle East; the book is an account of his visits to various countries. (Iraq, contrary to what one might expect from the title, is but one of several countries that he writes about.) His narrative is engaging and entertaining. One discovers along with Horwitz the quirkiness, strangeness, abject poverty, and incompetent bureaucracies of many of the places he visits. As an almost casual visitor, and as a Westerner, Horwitz doesn't give us much by way of great insight into why things are the way they are. Nonetheless, his descriptions of what he finds makes for compelling reading: the debilitating hold that the narcotic qat has over the Yemenis, the now almost forgotten hell of life under Saddam, the butchery of the Iran-Iraq war, the bizarre world of Muammar Qaddafi, the odd, dual lives of progressive Iranians, and the dangers of traversing by boat the Persian Gulf to Iran and the Mediterranean to Beirut. Some of Horwitz's more interesting observations come about due to his being Jewish in a Muslim world--and, in the case of visiting Israel, being welcomed there with little scrutiny. What strikes him is that Israeli and Arab cultures have so much in common, including being mutually blind to those commonalities. Reading this book makes one despair of the West's ever coming to terms with the Middle East. Indeed, in the context of a war with Iraq almost twenty years after the events of this book, one sees many echoes of the West's past failings. For instance, Charles George Gordon, commander of a British force in the Sudan, writes in 1884, "It is a useless place and we could not govern it.... [How to] get out of it in honor and in the cheapest way . . . it is simply a question of getting out of it with decency" (p. 176). If Horwitz doesn't always illuminate the reasons for the apparent strangeness of Arab cultures, he is a keen and witty observer. His writing is lively, and he will keep your attention.

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