



Beguiling Burma - awe and wonder on the road to Mandalay

Patrick Forsyth

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Burma (Myanmar to some) is increasingly in the news as some change begins. Ruled for many years by a ruthless, repressive junta, it suffers regular earthquakes and cyclone Nargis left more than a hundred thousand people injured, homeless or dead. Yet this is a magical place: a country of contrasts with a rambunctious history and a culture that is both awesome and fascinating. Largely on a whim, the author decides to visit Mandalay, the "Golden City" foreseen by ancient Buddhist prophecies. Despite campaigns at the time suggesting no one travelled to Burma (thus supporting the regime) he takes a trip, much of it on the river cruiser "Road to Mandalay" sailing along the famous Ayeyarwady. He finds people are universally welcoming. Along the way he encounters taxis pulled by oxen; rings the largest bell in the world; learns how to wear a skirt, the difference between a stupa and a pagoda; and why florescent pink tiles are used in temples. In this lively and light-hearted account of his journey he watches the best sunset in the world on the plains of Bagan and, as the sun sinks below the horizon silhouetting countless pagodas, concludes that this wonderful country is worthy of everyone's attention, and perhaps help too. "(Patrick is) a born writer with a clear, transparent style, a great eye, and plenty of wit ... miles superior to most of the travel writing I read, and I read lots of it. It's also deeply felt, which is probably the most important thing of all ... I was really, really impressed." TIMOTHY HALLINAN, AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING POKE THRILLERS

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