ODYSSEY TRAVELLER

Sri Lanka | Culture and History Small Grou Tour

Recommended reading for your journey

01

Sri Lanka: The Struggle for Peace in the Aftermath of War

Amarnath Amarasingam (Editor), Daniel Bass (Editor)

Even though Sri Lanka's protracted civil war came to a bloody conclusion in May 2009, prospects for a sustainable peace remain uncertain. The Sri Lankan army is no longer waging military campaigns and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are no longer carrying out political assassinations and suicide attacks, yet structural violence continues, and has arguably intensified since the war's end. Anti-Tamil discrimination, anti-Muslim violence, and Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism all increased in the war's aftermath, as President Mahinda Rajapakse's government invoked its military victory over the LTTE to silence any opposition. The election of Maithripala Sirisena as president in January 2015 began to alleviate some of the worst of these post-war abuses of power, but many long-term problems will take longer to solve. This book brings together scholars in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, law, religious studies and diaspora studies to critically engage issues such as post-war development, constitutional reform, ethnic and religious identity, transnational activism, and transitional justice. Through an interdisciplinary approach to post-war Sri Lanka, this volume examines the intractable and complex issues that continue to plague this war-torn island.

02

Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History

Nira Wickramasinghe

Sri Lanka in the Modern Age recounts the modern history of the island in an accessible yet unconventional manner. Where other histories have tended to focus on the state's failure to accommodate the needs and demands of minority communities, Wickramasinghe places their claims alongside the political, social and economic demands of other communities, parties, associations and groups, tracing their lineages to the colonial period. This updated second edition carries the book into the present, covering the brutal end of Sri Lanka's civil war and the making of oppressive stability that has grown in its wake. Drawing on recent work as well as on her own research in the field, Wickramasinghe has written above all a history of the people of Sri Lanka rather than a history of the nation-state.

03

The Elephant Gates: Vibrant Reflections of Life, Family, and Tradition in Sri Lanka

Chamalee Weeratunge

The Elephant Gates is a recollection of the simple pleasures of childhood caught up in an inevitable tide of change. With vivid and touching detail, it recalls Weeratunge s life, home, and family in her native village of Depanama on the island of Sri Lanka. Weeratunge s memories reveal a yearning for past times when traditions like celebrating the New Year or a Full Moon Day, still endured. Her poignant reminiscences evoke compassion for a misunderstood vagrant and a captive elephant, and curiosity for the appearance of the Pot-Bellied Merchant and Uncle Robert the Capitalist. She celebrates everyday heroes like the Coconut-Plucker, the Cook of Sweet Meats, and the Buffalo-Herdsman. With delicate diplomacy, cultural change is signaled by events such as the abandoning of the firewood hearth and the arrival of the television. These intricately woven stories are told with an engaging voice and graceful prose. Time, as it often does, has softened the edges and imparted a gentle humor in each vignette, whether in describing a rice harvest or sharing a game of checkers on the veranda. Ultimately, The Elephant Gates reaffirms our innate affinity for home, family, and the need to belong.

04

The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers

Gordon Weiss

In the closing days of the thirty-year Sri Lankan civil war, tens of thousands of civilians were killed, according to UN estimates, as government forces hemmed in the last remaining Tamil Tiger rebels on a tiny sand spit, dubbed The Cage. Gordon Weiss, a journalist and UN spokesperson in Sri Lanka during the final years of the war, pulls back the curtain of government misinformation to tell the full story for the first time. Tracing the role of foreign influence as it converged with a history of radical Buddhism and ethnic conflict, The Cage is a harrowing portrait of an island paradise torn apart by war and the root causes and catastrophic consequences of a revolutionary uprising caught in the crossfire of international power jockeying. Gordon Weiss has lived in New York and worked in numerous conflict and natural disaster zones including Bosnia, Afghanistan, Darfur, Pakistan, Congo, and Haiti. Employed by the United Nations for over twelve years, Weiss is now a writer, speaker and analyst of international affairs as well as a founding advisor to the International Crimes Evidence Project, currently investigating war crimes.

05

The Seasons of Trouble: Life Amid the Ruins of Sri Lanka s Civil War

Rohini Mohan

For three decades, Sri Lanka s civil war tore communities apart. In 2009, the Sri Lankan army finally defeated the separatist Tamil Tigers guerrillas in a fierce battle that swept up about 300,000 civilians and killed more than 40,000. More than a million had been displaced by the conflict, and the resilient among them still dared to hope. But the next five years changed everything. Rohini Mohan s searing account of three lives caught up in the devastation looks beyond the heroism of wartime survival to reveal the creeping violence of the everyday. When city-bred Sarva is dragged off the streets by state forces, his middle-aged mother, Indra, searches for him through the labyrinthine Sri Lankan bureaucracy. Meanwhile, Mugil, a former child soldier, deserts the Tigers in the thick of war to protect her family. Having survived, they struggle to live as the Sri Lankan state continues to attack minority Tamils and Muslims, frittering away the era of peace. Sarva flees the country, losing his way and almost his life in a bid for asylum. Mugil stays, breaking out of the refugee camp to rebuild her family and an ordinary life in the village she left as a girl. But in her tumultuous world, desires, plans, and people can be snatched away in a moment. The Seasons of Trouble is a startling, brutal, yet beau›tifully written debut from a prize-winning journal›ist. It is a classic piece of reportage, five years in the making, and a trenchant, compassionate examina›tion of the corrosive effect of conflict on a people.

06

Elephant Complex: Travels in Sri Lanka

John Gimlette

No one sees the world quite like John Gimlette. As The New York Times once noted, he writes with enormous wit, indignation, and a heightened sense of the absurd. Writing for both the adventurer and the armchair traveler, he has an eye for unusually telling detail, a sense of wonder, and compelling curiosity for the inside story. This time, he travels to Sri Lanka, a country only now emerging from twenty-six years of civil war. Delving deep into the nation s story, Gimlette provides us with an astonishing, multifaceted portrait of the island today. His travels reveal the country as never before. Beginning in the exuberant capital, Colombo (a hint of anarchy everywhere), he ventures out in all directions: to the dry zones where the island s 5,800 wild elephants congregate around ancient reservoirs; through cinnamon country with its Portuguese forts; to the Bible Belt of Buddhism the tsunami-ravaged southeast coast; then up into the great green highlands (the garden in the sky) and Kandy, the country s eccentric, aristocratic Shangri-la. Along the way, a wild and often desperate history takes shape, a tale of great colonies (Arab, Portuguese, British, and Dutch) and of the cultural divisions that still divide this society. Before long, we re in Jaffna and the Vanni, crucibles of the recent conflict. These areas the hottest, driest, and least hospitable have been utterly devastated by war and are only now struggling to their feet. But this is also a story of friendship and remarkable encounters. In the course of his journey, Gimlette meets farmers, war heroes, ancient tribesmen, world-class cricketers, terrorists, a former president, old planters, survivors of great massacres and perhaps some of their perpetrators. That s to say

nothing of the island s beguiling fauna: elephants, crocodiles, snakes, storks, and the greatest concentration of leopards on Earth. Here is a land of extravagant beauty and profound devastation, of ingenuity and catastrophe, possessed of both a volatile past and an uncertain future a place capable of being at once heavenly and hellish all brought to vibrant, fascinating life here on the page.

07

The Indian Ocean (Seas in History)

Michael Pearson

In this stimulating and authoritative overview, Michael Pearson reverses the traditional angle of maritime history and looks from the sea to its shores - its impact on the land through trade, naval power, travel and scientific exploration. This vast ocean, both connecting and separating nations, has shaped many countries' cultures and ideologies through the movement of goods, people, ideas and religions across the sea.   The Indian Ocean moves from a discussion of physical elements, its shape, winds, currents and boundaries, to a history from pre-Islamic times to the modern period of European dominance. Going far beyond pure maritime history, this compelling survey is an invaluable addition to political, cultural and economic world history.

08

Connectivity in Motion: Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World (Palgrave Series in Indian Ocean World Studies)

Burkhard Schnepel (Editor), Edward A. Alpers (Editor)

This original collection brings islands to the fore in a growing body of scholarship on the Indian Ocean, examining them as hubs or points of convergence and divergence in a world of maritime movements and exchanges. Straddling history and anthropology and grounded in the framework of connectivity, the book tackles central themes such as smallness, translocality, and the island factor. It moves to the farthest reaches of the region, with a rich variety of case studies on the Swahili-Comorian world, the Maldives, Indonesia, and more. With remarkable breadth and cohesion, these essays capture the circulations of people, goods, rituals, sociocultural practices, and ideas that constitute the Indian Ocean world. Together, they take up islandness as an explicit empirical and methodological issue as few have done before.

09

Spices in the Indian Ocean World (An Expanding World: The European Impact on World History, 1450 to 1800)

M Pearson

By turns exotic, valuable and of cardinal importance in the development of world trade, spices, as the editor reminds us, are today a mundane accessory in any well-equiped kitchen; in the 15th-18th centuries, the spice trade from the Indian Ocean to markets all over the world was a

major economic enterprise. Setting the scene with extracts from Garcia da Orta's fascinating contemporary Colloquies on the drugs and simples of India [Goa 1563], this collection reviews trade in a wide variety of spices, exploring merchant organisation, transport and marketing as well as detailing the quantitative evidence on the fluctuations in spice trade. The evidence and historical debates concerning the 16th-century revival of the Mediterranean and Red Sea spice trade at this time, are fully represented here

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