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The Other Side of the Mirror: An American Travels Through Syria



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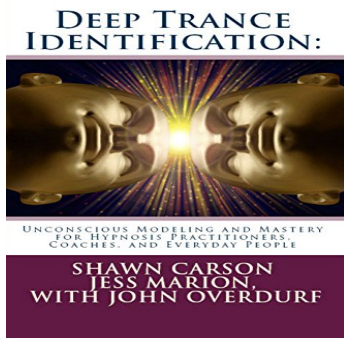
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The Other Side of the Mirror: An American Travels Through Syria

"A well-written, well-researched, and engaging introduction to contemporary Syria."#151;Library Journal (starred review)"American travel writing at its most generous and intrepid."#151;Adam Kirsch"A nuanced appreciation of the sights, sounds, and historical densities that make Syria one of the most rewarding countries on Earth. Like the great cities of Damascus and Aleppo, The Other Side of the Mirror is a thing of layered beauty and a source of endless surprise and stimulation."#151;Ben Downing"Engaging#133;I can vouch for the accuracy of her descriptions."#151;Malise Ruthven, New York Review of Books"Brooke Allen's The Other Side of the Mirror is a hugely welcome piece of travel lite

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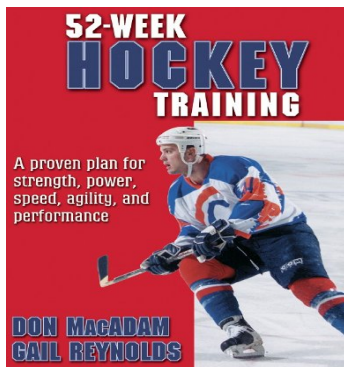
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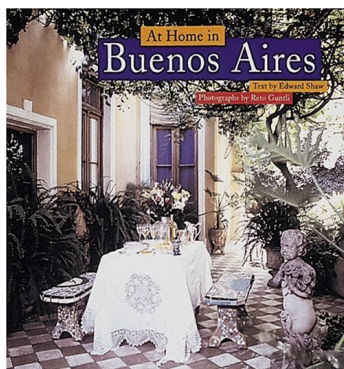
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What others say about this ebook:

Review 1:

In 1982, I saw beautiful land filled with a generous, industrious people. One could easily trace the history of numerous people of antiquity through its treasure trove of archaeological sites. At the time, I felt many of its treasures had been looted. Seeing the destruction and chaos currently underway, It is comforting to know that many of those splendid artifacts are safely on display in museums and art galleries in other countries.

Review 2:

How ironic that I would run across this book portraying a secular country welcoming American travelers with typical Muslim hospitality when daily TV images are showing a country being torn apart by Civil War. As the title indicates, Allen's goal is to go beyond US media images which fail to provide a window looking out on the world but rather a mirror that reflects our own fears and obsessions. In this, she succeeds. She is bright, well read and well traveled, as well as an observant traveler eager to meet local citizens, enjoy their foods, and explore their history and culture. She first traveled to Syria in the spring of 2009 with her family and was so impressed that she went back with two friends for a much longer visit in the fall. It was a time when US troops were still fighting in neighboring Iraq and the US state department was warning US citizens against Syrian travel. Although Allen is an excellent writer and includes numerous personal photographs, the descriptions of archaeological ruins which abound in Syria become a bit much for the average reader. One of the book's strengths is the selected bibliography which would be a great benefit to US citizens whether they intend to visit Syria or not. The book however lacks any maps which would greatly help to orient readers. Allen seems overly impressed with the secular goals of Syria's government and surprisingly unaware of deep ethnic and religious divisions and resentments that will explode in violence by the time her book is published. Despite this, her book is an excellent guide to understanding Syrian -- and broader Middle Eastern -- history and culture.

Review 3:

I'm really glad I read this book. I ordered it when I woke up to the fact that I had no knowledge at all about Syria except the current news about its role vis-a-vis Lebanon and Israel, and then the latest about the "Arab Spring." Well, I've seen Lawrence of Arabia numerous times, so I had some (wrong) impression of events in Damascus around the end of World War I.... I felt like U.S. news could tell me anything and I had no way to evaluate it.

The Other Side of the Mirror gives a first hand account by an American visitor who made two trips there in the last 5-6 years and really got into the local vibe as a visitor can see it, and into the huge richness and complexity of the place and of its many ethnic/religious groups and their long histories. It gave me a sense of who the national leaders are right now and what a peculiar position they hold. It also enabled me to get beyond simplistic ideas of what they and Syria have now and what they want.

In some places where the archeology got a bit too detailed for me, I skimmed, but in most chapters I read straight through. The author has a nice, humorous style and seems to have worked hard to find out objectively all she could. Her experiences there were basically very positive and stimulating, and she felt that Syrians generally treat western travelers very respectfully and helpfully.

There are lots of photos.

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