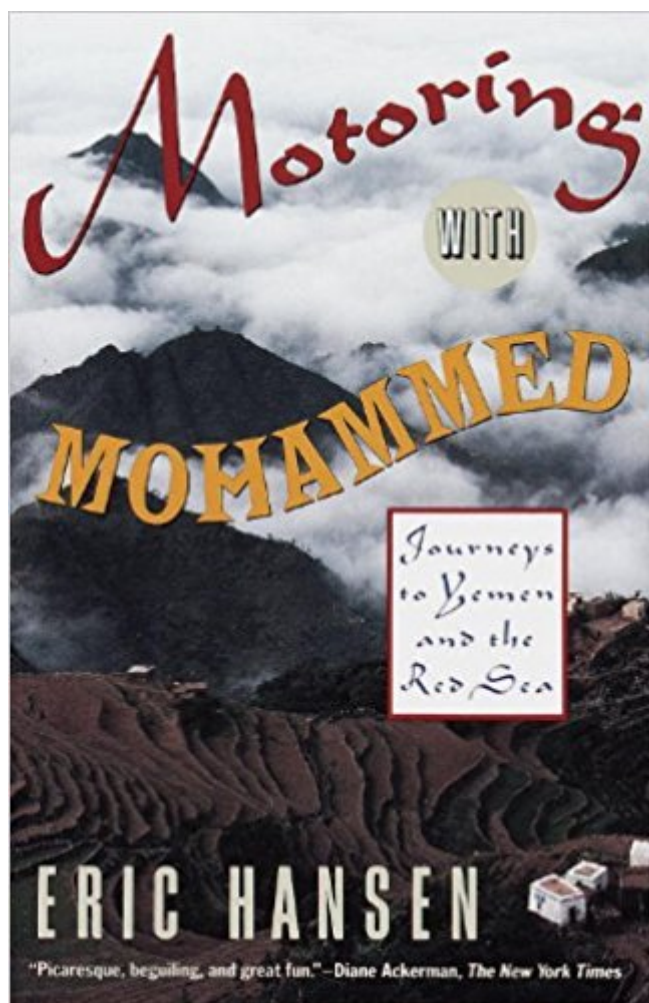


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Motoring With Mohammed: Journeys To Yemen And The Red Sea



Synopsis

In 1978 Eric Hansen found himself shipwrecked on a desert island in the Red Sea. When goat smugglers offered him safe passage to Yemen, he buried seven years' worth of travel journals deep in the sand and took his place alongside the animals on a leaky boat bound for a country that he'd never planned to visit. As he tells of the turbulent seas that stranded him on the island and of his efforts to retrieve his buried journals when he returned to Yemen ten years later, Hansen enthralls us with a portrait -- uncannily sympathetic and wildly offbeat -- of this forgotten corner of the Middle East. With a host of extraordinary characters from his guide, Mohammed, ever on the lookout for one more sheep to squeeze into the back seat of his car, to madcap expatriates and Eritrean gun runners- and with landscapes that include cities of dreamlike architectural splendor, endless sand dunes, and terrifying mountain passes, Hansen reveals the indelible allure of a land steeped in custom, conflicts old and new, and uncommon beauty.

Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Vintage; 1st Vintage departures ed edition (February 4, 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 067973855X

ISBN-13: 978-0679738558

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 56 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #297,529 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Travel > Middle East > Yemen #16 in Books > Travel > Middle East > Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United-Arab-Emirates & Yemen #283 in Books > Travel > Asia > General

Customer Reviews

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Eric Hansen lives in San Francisco, but over the last twenty-five years he has traveled throughout Europe, the Middle East, Australia, Nepal, and Southeast Asia. He is the author of *Stranger in the Forest*, *Motoring with Mohammed*, and *Orchid Fever*. His articles, photographs, and reviews have appeared in the *New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and *Outside* magazine, among other publications worldwide.

"Khat ... also known as qat, gat, chat, and miraa ... is a flowering plant native to tropical East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula... Khat contains the alkaloid cathinone, an amphetamine-like stimulant which causes excitement and euphoria... Traditionally, khat has been used as a socializing drug, and this is still very much the case in Yemen where khat-chewing is predominantly, although not exclusively, a male habit... Khat consumption induces mild euphoria and excitement. Individuals become very talkative under the influence of the drug and may appear to be unrealistic and emotionally unstable. Khat can induce manic behaviors and hyperactivity... A recent British study found khat to be much less dangerous than tobacco or alcohol." - from Wikipedia

Peripatetic scribblers wander to such obvious destinations as Italy, France, Greece, China, India, Australia, the , or Alaska, then write a book to tell the rest of us vegetables all about it. Here in *MOTORING WITH MOHAMMED*, accomplished travel writer Eric Hansen immerses the reader in North Yemen. (Where, you say?) North Yemen squatted next to the Red Sea just to the south of southwest Saudi Arabia, and joined with South Yemen in 1990 to become the Republic of Yemen. Hansen's narrative is served up in two parts. Well, three, actually. The first takes place in 1978 when, after a 7-year period of wandering in other backwaters, the author is shipwrecked in the yacht "Clea", on which he was part of a five-person crew, on the uninhabited North Yemen island of Uqban. The first four chapters describe this experience, during which, for safekeeping, he buried on the island the wrapped journals of his previous adventures. The trouble is, he forgot to take them along when he and his companions were eventually rescued after fourteen days. The book's second part - thirteen chapters - takes place during a ten-week period a decade later when Hansen returns to North Yemen to retrieve his cached journals. Unbeknownst to him, however, is that Uqban Island lay in a security zone virtually inaccessible to foreigners. This fact becomes frustratingly clear as he

unsuccessfully conspires with local help to cross the twenty miles of water separating the mainland from the island. Meanwhile, he cools his heels exploring, and falling in love with, much of the rest of the country. It's this developing love affair with North Yemen that's the basis for most of *MOTORING WITH MOHAMMED*. Whether he's tiptoeing across a precarious slope in the interior mountains, or witnessing the execution of a murderer, or participating in a communal qat chew, or sweating in a bathhouse, or feasting on stewed sheep's heads, Eric has a talent for observing the details that enrich the subsequent tale: "There is a trick to cracking open the skulls. You place the thumb of one hand in an eye socket (with the eyeball still intact), and span the skull and grip the roof of the mouth with the fingers. The other hand grasps the lower jaw. A sharp twisting motion is accompanied by a sickening snap and a popping sound. When done properly, the slippery skull and jawbone come away in two pieces. Then you prise open the cranium." (Happily, this passage refers to the feast, not the execution.) As the eighteenth and last chapter reveals, the author made the fortuitous acquaintance of the Yemeni ambassador to the United States at a Washington, D.C. photo exhibit of his nation's architecture eight months after the former returned to America sans journals. In the Middle East especially, it's all about whom you know. Thus, five months after that, Eric, shovel in hand, is sloshing through the Yemeni surf to a "fishing boat that smelled of rancid shark oil and pureed dates", which, Allah willing, can convey him and an agent of the National Security Police across the sea to Uqban. Truly, as the title of this chapter implies, "It was written." I shall most certainly never make it to Yemen. Yes, researching "San'a", the capital of Yemen, on the Web does almost compel me to visit on a whim. But, being married, my own happy-go-lucky journeying days are over. Besides, Yemen seems at times to be, um, a bit too raw. But, through Hansen's eyes and wonderfully evocative prose, I'm taken there in fine style, and that's what a five-star travel essay is all about.

I second the views of several reviewers that this is one of the best travel books they've ever read. Hansen takes us through Yemen as if we were riding (or sailing) with him. I never gave much thought to or knew much about Yemen but, thanks to Hansen, I have a new and positive view of it. His willingness to get out and experience many facets of this country enriches his descriptions. His good humor and sensitivity to its people are gratifying. But this is more than just a travelogue. Hansen's quest for his buried notebooks is a compelling story in itself. That plot and this venue combine to make this an irresistible and meritorious book. I look forward to reading more from this intrepid and gifted writer.

An entertaining travel adventure novel/memoir. This would have been given 5 stars except for the authors penchant for getting a bit wordy in describing events scenes to the point of boredom. After a bit I just skimmed those when I saw those paragraphs coming. Other than that a great read.

Fantastic read. I learned a lot about Yemen many years ago. I still would never go there.

One of those great travel/adventure yarns that makes you either wish you had done all that, or glad you read the book before starting out for a place that weird.

What happens when you get shipwrecked on a beautiful island but leave seven years worth of precious journals hidden in the sand when you are suddenly rescued? Well, in Yemen, you can't just go back there and pick them up- if they're there. What a story! Once again, Eric Hansen does not disappoint us.

This is the best of Eric Hansen's books, no mean feat considering that his writing is always top of the line. Motoring with Mohammed is a snapshot of a time and place long gone, and of international, off the beaten path travel before most Americans bothered to leave the US other than to go to resorts. Great writing, [ick it up, you won't be sorry.

oh, what a read! I wish things were so simple today. Eric had a great adventure. I will think of his story whenever I smoke my Midwakh.

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