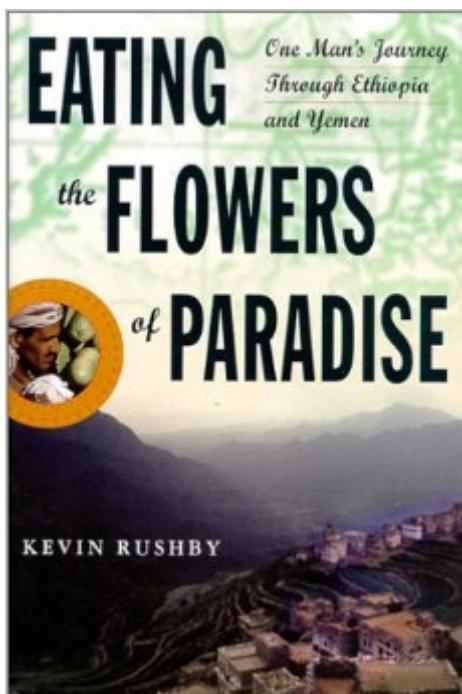


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Eating The Flowers Of Paradise: One Man's Journey Through Ethiopia And Yemen



Synopsis

Ethiopia in eastern Africa and Yemen on the Arabian peninsula remain as two of the most inviting outposts for travelers seeking the exotic, the exciting and, occasionally, the dangerous. In these two places Qat is just one name given to a green leafy plant that is cultivated there. When chewed, the leaves of this plant release two pharmacologically-active substances that produce a hypnotic, reverential à œhighâ • similar to marijuana, but distinctive in the thoughtful state it induces. Kevin Rushby traveled to Ethiopia and Yemen and discovered that the use of Qat is more than the casual use of a mild narcotic. He found that it is a way of life. Qat plays a pivotal role in all facets of the culture influencing everything from architecture to television schedules. Tracing the historic trade routes of Qat the author travels from the heart of Ethiopia over the Red Sea and into Arabia. Written with an exceptional combination of grace, wit and insight, Kevin Rushby proves himself to be a worthy successor to Paul Theroux, Bruce Chatwin and Jan Morris. From Addis Abbaba to Djibouti to Dire Dowa and on to Sanâ™a, Rushby discovers the soul of these places while meeting characters one might call "interesting" and avoiding situations one might call "life-threatening." Eating the Flowers of Paradise is a powerful and entertaining journey through exotic lands by one of the best new writers to emerge in recent years.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ever since I was a kid, I've always wanted to visit Yemen. Like author Kevin Rushby, I didn't want to do research there, earn money there, or take anything away from Yemen. I just wanted to see, hear, feel, and know what that faroff land was like. Thanks to my dear President and his warloving

cronies, I now have a snowball's chance in hell of ever achieving my dream. Keep on shootin' George, you'll definitely solve all problems that way. I must say, though, that the next best thing to a Yemen trip could be reading EATING THE FLOWERS OF PARADISE. Though the story of the author's voyage centers around qat, a leaf from a tree which grows in Ethiopia and Yemen, whose leaves are chewed to induce a feeling of dreamy well-being and melancholy happiness, this is a travel book par excellence. While Rushby starts his solo voyage in Ethiopia, his lack of local language, and the general lack of information about Ethiopia other than what he sees and does himself, do not entrance the reader. (Nor does he travel in the more interesting parts of the country.) He meets some wild characters [a Nigerian gem smuggler named Cedric or Arthur or...?] and has a few strange adventures in Djibouti, on the Red Sea coast. It is when he lands in Yemen that the book really gets good. Rushby speaks some Arabic. Yemeni rural people come alive in this book, their villages, the hospitality of all, the terraced mountains where qat, coffee, and other crops are grown, the magnificent, rugged scenery of remote parts of the country. Readers may pick up some recent history, some facts about former times, and details of qat growing and use, but this is a very existential travel book, not given to long-winded explanations. Rushby makes no bones about it. He wandered the Yemeni "outback" looking for good highs.

Kevin is a good artist. He vividly describes his travels, and you feel that you are there. For those places in Yemen where I have been, I felt like I was there again. He is accurate in his descriptions, as well as poetic- a rare art. His book is focused on a destination- traveling the old qat route, and this helps give more cohesiveness than you find in most travelogues. There is a rare vivid description of demonic manifestation and folk Islamic exorcism, in great detail. As an added bonus, the ubiquitous Tim Mackintosh-Smith shows up again, as he seems to do in every book about Yemen. We can see some of the same journeys Tim reports in Yemen, but from the perspective of his fellow traveler. And there is even an oblique reference to the boat of Eric Hansen from Motoring with Mohammed. I value this book for the same reason I find it wanting. I wanted to learn more about qat- what I couldn't find anywhere else: how it effects you, to what extent it is addictive, what the side effects are. There is too much contradictory material in the literature, and so you almost have to go to an addict to discover these questions. And now having read Kevin, I am fairly sure that I will not do qat again. Kevin is also a drug addict. He denies it, pointing out the difference between a true addict and the average qat user like himself. But what he describes has all the earmarks of addiction.

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