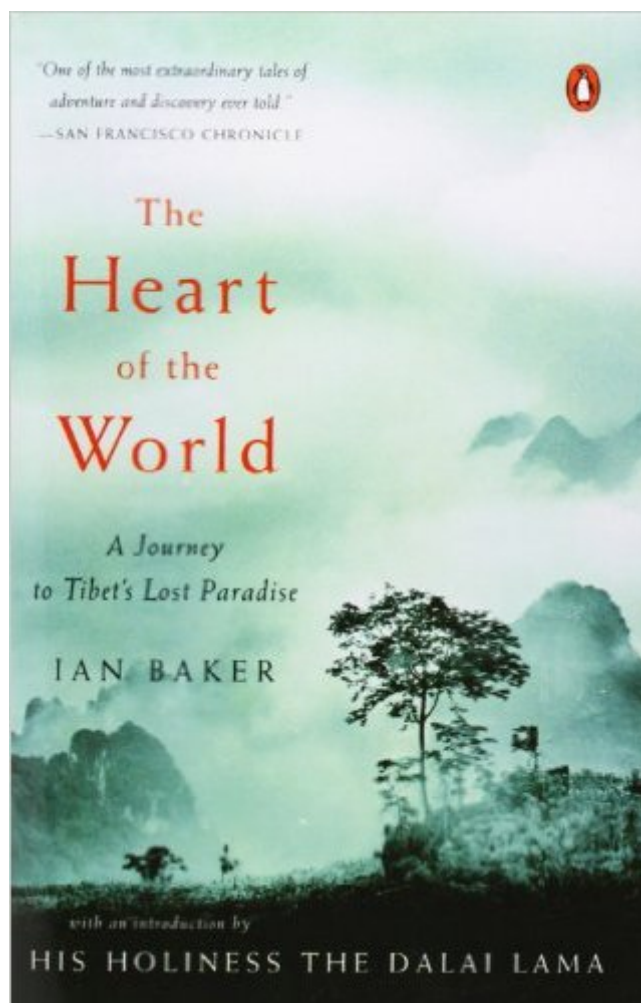


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The Heart Of The World: A Journey To Tibet's Lost Paradise



Synopsis

The myth of Shangri-la originates in Tibetan Buddhist beliefs in beyul, or hidden lands, sacred sanctuaries that reveal themselves to devout pilgrims and in times of crisis. The more remote and inaccessible the beyul, the vaster its reputed qualities. Ancient Tibetan prophecies declare that the greatest of all hidden lands lies at the heart of the forbidding Tsangpo Gorge, deep in the Himalayas and veiled by a colossal waterfall. Nineteenth-century accounts of this fabled waterfall inspired a series of ill-fated European expeditions that ended prematurely in 1925 when the intrepid British plant collector Frank Kingdon-Ward penetrated all but a five-mile section of the Tsangpo's innermost gorge and declared that the falls were no more than a "religious myth" and a "romance of geography." The heart of the Tsangpo Gorge remained a blank spot on the map of world exploration until world-class climber and Buddhist scholar Ian Baker delved into the legends. Whatever cryptic Tibetan scrolls or past explorers had said about the Tsangpo's innermost gorge, Baker determined, could be verified only by exploring the uncharted five-mile gap. After several years of encountering sheer cliffs, maelstroms of impassable white water, and dense leech-infested jungles, on the last of a series of extraordinary expeditions, Baker and his National Geographic "sponsored team reached the depths of the Tsangpo Gorge. They made news worldwide by finding there a 108-foot-high waterfall, the legendary grail of Western explorers and Tibetan seekers alike. The Heart of the World is one of the most captivating stories of exploration and discovery in recent memory "an extraordinary journey to one of the wildest and most inaccessible places on earth and a pilgrimage to the heart of the Tibetan Buddhist faith.

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Customer Reviews

An incredible book for anyone intrigued by the mysteries of Asia. The tale begins in 1982 when Baker overhears a conversation about a Tibetan sage who found a hidden paradise between vaulting cliffs in a little-explored corner of Tibet. Baker was curious. He had heard about Tibet's 'hidden lands,' secret places that - Tibetans believe - can only be found by a devout pilgrim who can endure physical challenge, and spiritual challenge, too. Baker, an accomplished climber and a determined student of Tibetan culture, resolved to find out more. He trekked into the mountains outside Kathmandu to find the sage, an old man with a long white beard, sitting in a small cabin on the skin of a goat. Baker asked for guidance on how to find a sacred Tibetan land, and the sage told him about a cave where he should first go meditate alone for a month. Baker complied. He even stayed an extra week. Back at his home in Kathmandu, Baker studied Tibetan and Western texts about searches for the 'hidden lands.' He zeroed in on a mysterious section of the Tsangpo River had for centuries tantalized explorers who were seeking a mythic waterfall. None had been able to find it, and Baker now wanted to try. Battling rough terrain and political obstacles, Baker traveled repeatedly into Tibet, a forbidding land of mountainous desert and striking Himalayan peaks. Each voyage was an exhausting ordeal, yet each one brought Baker circling a little closer to his prized goal, the unseen waterfall. In his marvel-filled book, Baker tells a story of uncompromising pursuit of hidden lands, and the spiritual adventures he has along the way. It is a remarkable tale, lyrically written in a way that captures the magic of wilderness travel.

I struggled with the star rating for this book. As a student of Buddhism I was intrigued. Baker's knowledge of scripture, Buddhist ritual and Western literature is amazing. His one pointed determination to reach the heart of the Tsangmo is to be admired. I raced through this book day after day to see what was going to happen next.. It was a very interesting read. I kept feeling as if there was something missing. It wasn't his writing style, he is an accomplished wordsmith....then it suddenly occurred to me.... most of his characters had no depth. I want to know about more than the history of the quest and the geography and that he struggled through difficult terrain. I wanted to know about the numerous porters who went with him. Who were these people of the Tsangpo? I wanted to know about his companions. I wanted to know more about his and other's feelings and thoughts, I wanted to feel his heart beating through the work. For instance in his first adventure there was a woman named Jill who suffered right along with him. We know nothing of her. In the second part all of a sudden they are without their glued on Chinese escort ...no explanation until they are into their 3rd or fourth adventure. Then it is mentioned in passing. He gets better in the

second adventure, but in the third lapses back into his cerebral intellectual form.... In the second there is a great story taken from the diary of one of his companions about how a Lama who has decided to go with them navigates a particularly difficult obstacle on the path. I would have liked to have had more of that. He speaks of love and compassion, but I don't see him ACTING with love and compassion. His poetic knowledge and depth of scholasticism is awe inspiring, but I would like to feel his heart.

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