

[Library ebook] Fool's Paradise

Fool's Paradise

Dale Walker

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Dale Walker : Fool's Paradise before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fool's Paradise:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. matchlessBy CaraculiambroBleedin' shame nobody has bothered to review this book (as of my writing); it's one of the best books about Saudi Arabia (and Bedouin culture) I've ever read, though it is light reading. Vintage marketed this book (now out of print, it seems) as "international travel," which seems to me a pretty dubious classification when you read what I say below, although since the guy spends most of his time wandering around a foreign country I guess I understand their reasons. But it's really a kooky adventure story . . . The plot is as follows: Walker (an on-again, off-again ESL teacher in Saudi Arabia during the boom years of the 70s and 80s), has heard many times from his students about the custom of "sexual hospitality" as practiced in some regions of Saudi Arabia, such as in the Asir (just north of Yemen). The idea of such a custom is that travelers (even "kuffar," non-believers) who are visiting into certain villages are put up in a house for three days and nights, no questions asked. Perks supposedly include bed, breakfast, and THE SERVICES OF A FEMALE. Anthropologists (and many Arabists) swear the custom was not a myth -- up until about the 1960s, when television helped to unify the country's mores, bringing them more in line with those of Riyadh. Naturally such a free-love custom is directly contrary to Wahhabi Islam, of course. Anyhow, Walker, the narrator, has been hearing about this custom for years. His students from the Asir (privately) swear to him it's not a myth, and students from other areas of the Kingdom angrily deny that such a custom ever (or could currently) exist. Well, on his last tour in KSA, Walker resolves to make an odyssey from Jeddah

down to the Asir, ostensibly to visit a former student but really to see if he can work himself into a situation where he is a recipient of this fabled "sexual hospitality." In other words, he spends the book basically trying to get a free ride on a Saudi chick. Well, I won't tell you how it ends, but that plot line is what Walker uses to hang his observations about the Kingdom, about Arabs, Muslims, Saudis, and the rapid modernization of their world -- and what it is like for a Westerner to live and travel there. Most of the books about Saudi Arabia are either about how the Kingdom supports terror, about the coming revolution, about the oil wealth, etc. Not this one. It's witty, amusing, and incredibly well-written. What Walker was doing spending his time as an ESL teacher is beyond me. It's neither overly-sympathetic to the Saudis, nor uselessly over-critical. In fine, a balanced, insightful, and deftly-written book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize. By Customer. Published in U.S. and England. Shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Already four good reviews on .2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyable and insightful traveler's tale. By chungking. Don't want to visit KSA because of a lifetime of hassles with the TSA? No worries - Dale Walker has taken that risk for you. I picked up this book on a whim - one dollar at a library sale. It turns out to be a very readable, informative and thought-provoking book - a real pleasure. I was surprised to see this listed as the author's first book (in his forties?). The writing is completely fluid, far more than some best-sellers that leap to mind. This book certainly deserves to be much more widely known, especially given the relevance Saudi Arabia has to our daily lives.

In this account of travel in one of the remotest corners of northern Saudi Arabia the author attempts to explain some of the complexities of the country which the Romans named "Arabia Felix" - "happy Arabia". He used public transport on his travels which allowed access to remote regions.