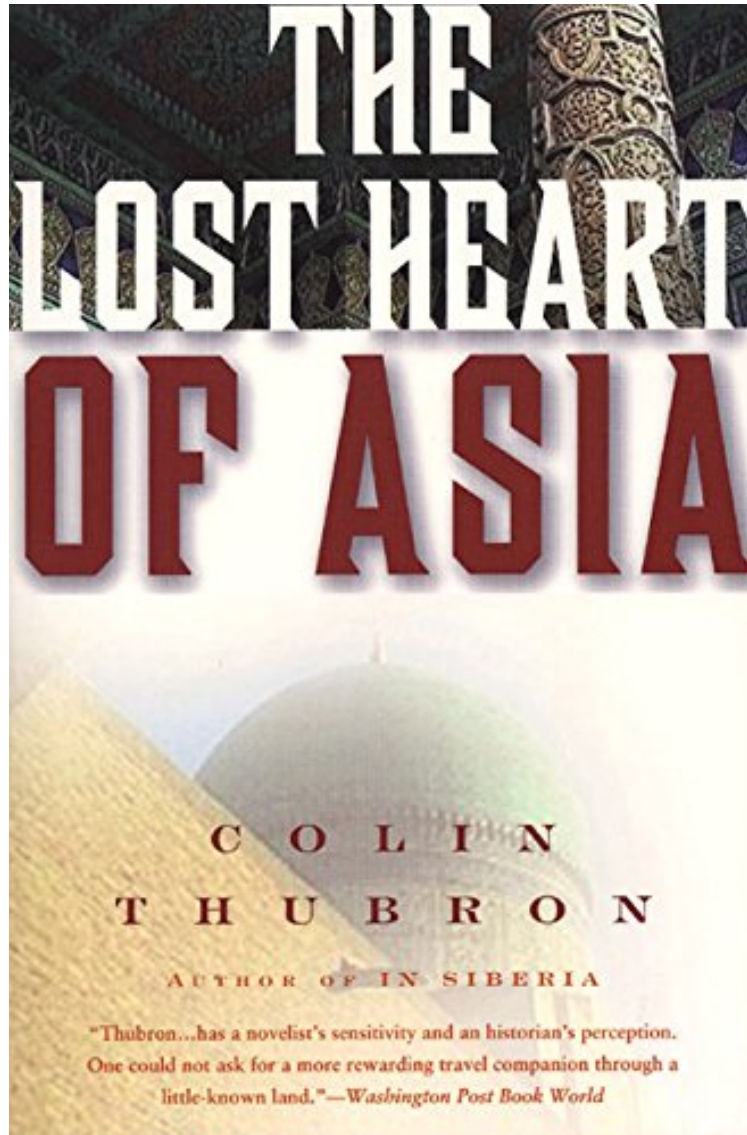


The Lost Heart of Asia

Colin Thubron

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Colin Thubron : The Lost Heart of Asia before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lost Heart of Asia:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Recommended reading before a visit to the 5 Stans By Margo I am reading this book in preparation for my trip to Central Asia. Although this book was written just after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, it offers a richly detailed history of this seldom visited part of the world. I am looking forward to seeing what has changed since the author's visit. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good read

by a real world traveler!By SopsThis fellow goes where others might fear! He describes places and people in the regions of the world that I can only imagine and allows the reader to "see" them with the mind eye.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Superb readBy Klaus KSuperb

A land of enormous proportions, countless secrets, and incredible history, Central Asia--the heart of the great Mongol empire of Tamerlane, site of the legendary Silk Route and scene of Stalin's cruelest deportations--is a remote and fascinating region. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent republics, Central Asia--containing the magical cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, and terrain as diverse as the Kazakh steppes, the Karakum desert, and the Pamir mountains--has been in a constant state of transition. The Lost Heart of Asia takes readers into the very heart of this little visited, yet increasingly important region, delivering a rare and moving portrayal of a world in the midst of change.

.com West of China, south of Russia, hemmed in by mountains, steppe, and desert, lie the five Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. Cut loose from Moscow in the early '90s, the five "Stans" (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) discover that their newly found freedom plays tug-o-war with despair and a nostalgia for the certainties of the Soviet past. It's during this time that author Colin Thubron travels the width of central Asia, asking questions about the past, present, and future. Not content to simply bounce from place to place, Thubron travels from person to person, uncovering their many vibrant stories and developing a deep understanding of the area's lesser-known history. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks debate the place of Islam. Koreans and Germans, descendants from forced migrants, wonder if they know enough of their ethnic tongue to return to their homelands. Russians find themselves left behind, disbelieving, as the tide of Russian power recedes toward Moscow. Central Asia was mostly off limits to foreigners during the Soviet years, and while officials are still uncertain about how to deal with a backpack-wearing solo traveler, the locals Thubron meets are not. Thubron finds the heart of Asia in the hearts of its people, swimming in a sea of tea, vodka, and hospitality. From the oldest-known Quran to a deserted Soviet naval base on the shores of a high mountain lake 1,500 miles from the ocean (used to test torpedoes far from spying eyes), Thubron's writing echoes the melancholy emptiness of the wide spaces he passes through. The Lost Heart of Asia is a rare meeting of a marvelous writer and a mysterious land. --Ken PeavlerFrom Publishers WeeklyA 6000-mile journey takes Thubron (Where Nights are Longest) through Central Asia to the countries of the ancient Mongol empire of Tamerlane-Tashkent, Kazakh, Samarkand, Bukhara-more recently part of the Soviet Union. He supplies helpful historical background and a multitude of conversations with residents. He shows that while several generations grew to adulthood under communism, previously proscribed nationalist, Muslim and other religious practices have quickly reasserted themselves as these republics have gained nationhood. Thubron finds a range of reactions to the collapse of the Soviet Union: some people are nostalgic for the unity it provided, however repressive the regime, but many seem overjoyed and look forward to material improvements even though the problems confronting each country are sobering. Thubron has a gift for describing the ambiances of unfamiliar villages and cities, but his self-conscious literary style sometimes distracts from the instructive content. First serial to Conde Nast Traveler. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistThubron, a fine novelist as well as an accomplished travel writer, has developed exceptional skills of observation and dramatization. He absorbs every scene and conversation and then distills them into incisive commentary, poignant anecdotes, and remarkable metaphors. His last travel book, Behind the Wall, chronicled his journey across China. Now Thubron ventures farther into the great continent of Asia, exploring its landlocked, remote, and "fearful heartland" in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. As he travels by bus and train from one isolated and disconsolate central Asian city to another, he inhales an overwhelming atmosphere of hopelessness. Without the structure of Communism, life seems to be drifting into chaos and apathy. Communities lack jobs, money, and a sense of purpose. Although many Muslims are pleased to be able to practice their religion openly, they know that faith alone won't revitalize life in their neglected countries. As Thubron explores Turkenia, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Kazakhstan, visiting markets and mosques, he becomes attuned to a pervasive sense of displacement and vacuousness, of ethnic divides and distrust. In this land of conquerors and tyrants, times of peace and creative flowerings have been brief and infrequent. The future promises to be no different. Donna Seaman