



A Fortune-Teller Told Me: Earthbound Travels in the Far East

By Tiziano Terzani

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“An utterly charming and engaging travel book that offers vivid portraits of unusual corners of Asia, told by a skilled raconteur whose eyes were open wide.”
—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

Warned by a Hong Kong fortune-teller not to risk flying for an entire year, Tiziano Terzani—a vastly experienced Asia correspondent—took what he called “the first step into an unknown world. . . . It turned out to be one of the most extraordinary years I have ever spent: I was marked for death, and instead I was reborn.”

Traveling by foot, boat, bus, car, and train, he visited Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. Geography expanded under his feet. He consulted soothsayers, sorcerers, and shamans and received much advice—some wise, some otherwise—about his future. With time to think, he learned to understand, respect, and fear for older ways of life and beliefs now threatened by the crasser forms of Western modernity. He rediscovered a place he had been reporting on for decades. And reinvigorated himself in the process.

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A Fortune-Teller Told Me: Earthbound Travels in the Far East By Tiziano Terzani Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #149150 in Books
- Published on: 2002-04-23
- Released on: 2002-04-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.10" h x .80" w x 5.50" l, 1.05 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It was 1976 when Tiziano Terzani was warned by the fortuneteller in Hong Kong: "Beware! You run a grave risk of dying in 1993. You mustn't fly that year. Don't fly, not even once." Sixteen years later, Terzani had not forgotten. Despite living the life of a jet-hopping journalist, he decided that, after a lifetime of sensible decisions, he would confront the prophecy the Asian way, not by fighting it, but by submitting. He also resolved that on the way he would seek out the most eminent local oracle, fortuneteller, or sorcerer and look again into his future. So after a feast of red-ant egg omelet and a glass of fresh water, he brought the new year in on the back of an elephant. He even made it to his appointments: Cambodia, to cover the first democratic elections; Burma, for the opening of the first road to connect Thailand and China; and even Florence, to visit his mother, a trip that would take him 13,000 miles across Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, and Siberia. In this way, that jet-hopping journalist rediscovered the art of travel, the intricate chains of chance which lead to discovery, and the mass of humanity he'd overlooked in his rush for newsworthy quotes. And he also saved his life.

Terzani's odyssey across Asia is full of revelations and reflections on the dramatic changes underway in Asia. Having spent two decades on the continent, he brings a deep love for the place to his journeys, but also the eyes of someone troubled by the changes he sees. Burma and Laos, finally open to outside contact, are now funnels for AIDS and drugs; Thailand has been traumatized by its rapid development; China is an anarchy fueled by money rather than ideology, where Mao has been transformed into the god of traffic. Surrounded by the loss of diversity wrought by modernism, Terzani asks if the "missionaries of materialism and economic progress" aren't destroying the continent in order to save it. Fortunately, there is a flip side to his occasionally dispiriting commentary, one that Terzani discovers in his hunt for fortunetellers. Through his side trips to seers who read the soles of his feet, the ashes of incense, and even the burned scapula of sheep, it becomes clear that the Orient of legends, myths, and magic still determines people's lives as much as the quest for money. By staying earthbound, Terzani lived to tell of an extraordinary journey through the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of Asia.--*Lesley Reed*

From Publishers Weekly

"I was marked for death, and instead I was reborn," declares Italian-born journalist Terzani (*Saigon 1975; Goodnight, Mr. Lenin; etc.*) and readers of this vivid memoir will believe it. In 1976, early on in his career as a *Der Spiegel* correspondent in Asia, Terzani was warned by a Hong Kong fortune-teller not to fly in 1993 or he would die. When the fateful year came, Terzani submitted to the warning (no easy decision given all the voyages his work requires), and that year traveled, sometimes with wife Angela in tow, by ship, car, bus and train through 11 countries, including Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Mongolia. Dividing his lucid, graceful and unsentimental prose into 27 anecdotal chapters, Terzani takes readers to the International Thai Association of Astrology, investigates the use of raw garlic and red peppers as a bulwark against the AIDS virus and decries the domestic dog butcherings in Hanoi and constant creeping Westernization throughout the continent, which he encounters and laments in myriad forms. Talking with shamans and soothsayers, Terzani finds the Westernized mind "more limited... a great part of its capacity has been lost. The mind is perhaps the most sophisticated instrument we have, yet we do not give it the attention we give our leg muscles." Terzani's ease and candor and his care for local politics, religion and everyday life make for a full journey of mind, body and spirit. (On-sale date: June 19) Forecast: This book was published by HarperCollins UK in 1997; the delay in its issue here lessens its immediacy considerably. As an Italian correspondent for a German magazine who works in Asia for his living and has a strong Luddite strain, Terzani offers an idiosyncratic, decidedly non-

American point of view it's this book's great strength, but also a possible liability with the less internationally minded.

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From Library Journal

The author of *Gai Phong*, a riveting eyewitness account of Saigon's liberation, and *Behind the Forbidden Door*, an account of early post-Maoist China, Terzani, a resident of Asia and multilingual correspondent for *Der Spiegel*, has written an extraordinary and nuanced account of a journey through the Far East and Southeast Asia. In 1993, heeding a nearly stale 13-year-old fortuneteller's warning against air travel that year, Terzani visited Burma, Thailand, Mongolia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore by train, car, bus, and foot. Along the way, he sought prophecies from soothsayers, astrologists, monks, and fortunetellers, often in old and fabled places. Making many contacts, he was able to venture into the heart and soul of Asia where ancient customs and new fads coexist, where past wars and politics leave room in their wakes for drug lords, and where occult beliefs persist. Asia is felt rather than described. Highly recommended for public libraries. Margaret W. Norton, Oak Park, IL
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