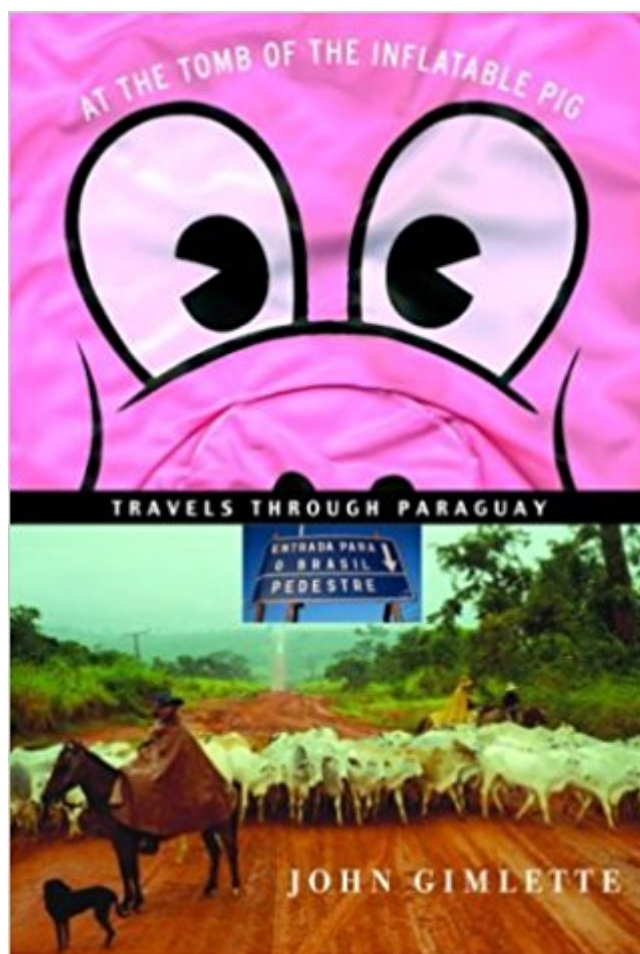


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At The Tomb Of The Inflatable Pig: Travels Through Paraguay



Synopsis

A wildly humorous account of the author's travels across Paraguayâ"South America's darkly fabled, little-known island surrounded by land." Rarely visited by tourists and barely touched by global village sprawl, Paraguay remains a mystery to outsiders. Think of this small nation and your mind is likely to jump to Nazis, dictators, and soccer. Now, John Gimlette's eye-opening bookâ"equal parts travelogue, history, and unorthodox travel guide"âbreaches the boundaries of this isolated land, and illuminates a little-understood place and its people. It is a wonderfully animated telling of Paraguay's story: of cannibals, Jesuits, and sixteenth-century Anabaptists; of Victorian Australian socialists and talented smugglers; of dictators and their mad mistresses; bloody wars and Utopian settlements; and of lives transplanted from Japan, Britain, Poland, Russia, Germany, Ireland, Korea, and the United States. The author travels from the insular cities and towns of the east, along ghostly trails through the countryside, to reach the Gran Chaco of the west: the "green hell" covering almost two-thirds of the country, where 4 percent of the population coexists "more or very-much-less peacefully" with a vast array of exotic wildlife that includes jaguars, prehistoric lungfish, and their more recently evolved distant cousins, the great fighting river fish. Gimlette visits with Mennonites and the indigenas, arms dealers and real-estate tycoons, shopkeepers, government bureaucrats and, of course, Nazis. Filled with bizarre incident, fascinating anecdote, and richly evocative detail, *At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig* is a brilliant description of a country of eccentricity and contradiction, of beguilingly individualistic men and women, and of unexpected and extraordinary beauty. It is a vivid, often riotous, always fascinating, journey.

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Customer Reviews

Over the past 500 years, Paraguay has been invaded by successive waves of conquistadors, missionaries, Mennonites, Australian socialists, fugitive Nazis and, perhaps most improbably, Islamic extremists. "An island surrounded by land," bordered by vast deserts and impenetrable jungles, Paraguay is a country uniquely suited for those seeking to drop out of sight or, like Gimlette, find themselves. The author was 18 when he first traveled to Paraguay more than two decades ago; return visits only deepened his appreciation for the nation and its tragicomic past. Gimlette seems to have gone everywhere and talked to everyone. He boats down piranha-infested rivers, hobnobs with Anglo-Paraguayan socialites and hunts down the former hiding place of notorious Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele. Gimlette, a travel writer and lawyer in London, proves a chatty, amiable guide to local institutions like the national railway (which has no running trains) and native wildlife, like the fierce, raccoon-like coatimundis (who, Gimlette writes, "make up for their absence of pity with fistfuls of dagger-like claws"). Yet he doesn't shirk from the nastier aspects of Paraguay's bloody history. Gimlette describes in horrific detail, for example, the rape and conquest of the Guarani Indians as well as the brutally repressive regime of Don Alfredo Stroessner (whose U.S.-backed dictatorship lasted longer than any other in the Western Hemisphere). Gimlette could have used some judicious editing-the narrative drags in parts, and its scattered chronology can be confusing-but he never fails to impress with his ingenuity, sincerity and sense of humor. 16 pages of color and b&w photos, not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

If some Americans can't locate Canada on a map, it's likely many haven't even heard of Paraguay. Yet this California-sized South American country has endured an astonishing run of totalitarianism, instability, and war. Travel writer and attorney Gimlette shares that chilling history, drawing anecdotes from survivors and descendants as he explores the country. While his own doings seem unavoidably flat compared to the outrages he relates (one war killed four-fifths of the country's population, and 9 out of 10 men), it is interesting to glimpse the country today, which is happier yet still a place where the black market dwarfs the gross national product. Gimlette's prose has an almost cartoonish cast at times (a past ruler of "the hookwormed rabble" is "rutting, greasy-pawed"), yet sometimes he turns a perfect phrase ("They already had chimneys and now they wanted fireplaces"). Moreover, he conveys, though he can't explain, a national character that it doesn't seem clichéd to call inscrutable. Fascinating and compulsively readable. Keir Graff Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Paraguay prides itself on being a country of "lace and legend". Strange, bizarre things occur almost daily and things that are readily accepted by the Paraguayans cause most Americans and Europeans to scratch their heads in amazement. I continue to contend that this is mostly because modern day Paraguay's culture and people and politics are based on the influence of the Guarani language that most people, even immigrants, speak. Most of us observe the Paraguayan's activities and events from a Euro-centric point of view that limits our understanding of the Paraguayan mind set and acceptance of things that causes our brains to short circuit sometimes. Those of you married into a Paraguayan family will lovingly appreciate the classification. The rest will just have to imagine the pleasure, shock and joy one experiences in the Paraguayan culture. This book is a good introduction for you. The author does a great job summarizing Paraguay's history and politics from "El Supremo" through relatively recent times. If you only want to read one book on Paraguay's history, then this is the one for you as it contains a summary of the Triple Alliance War (Paraguay versus Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) as the author visited many of the main battle sites and the Chaco War fought against Bolivia. Plus it touches on the revolution, Stroessner, Rodriguez and many of the other main political persons from recent times. You could use this book as your main information source for a college paper, or even a Master's Thesis. The author's observations will offend every one and no one as they are mostly spot-on and have little to no political-correctness restrictions. This book will cause laughter, amazement, anger, disgust, consternation, dumfoundedness and spark a general desire to visit Paraguay again, and again. The other reviews here do a good job of discussing the book's contents so I won't repeat it. If you want a good read with a little of everything included (murder, crime, romance, sex, business, trade, culture, etc.) then this should be the book for you.

Although most facts are presented accurately, the tone and perspective given in this book are negative and critical of human beings living in this country. He might have chosen to shock readers in order to achieve more interest. There are inaccuracies (I never heard that people eat piranha soup in Paraguay, for example. Lido restaurant serves its popular surubi soup!) and most facts are told to enhance and radicalize this warm hearted country. One can paint any kind of picture (with the good and bad) of any country's history, and this author used his darker side to enhance the bad in order to degrade it. Many Paraguayans welcomed the author with hospitality and he returned a slap on their faces.

j. Gimlette is one of the most well informed "travel" writers on Latin America. I know the history of these regions very well (I am a devote of his other book, "On the Wild coast" about the Guianas. Yes there are plenty of personal anecdotes, but there is also a lot of historical framing so while at first blush his analysis seems steeped in exotica. In fact, it's not: it's the magical realism of some of these places, and also he doesn't flinch from their often gaspingly brutal histories that have produced the absurdities and tragedies that now unfold there. His prose is elegant, often he breaks your heart. But he has bothered to explore the deeper dimensions of these places, so while at first blush it seems, as they say a "romp", he describes a terrible logic the reality of which affects him profoundly.

I read this book prior to a visit to Paraguay. It was most enlightening and enabled me to act as a tour guide in a country where there are no tour guides. The book seems surrealistic until you get there, then it makes perfect sense. One of my favorite stories is the tale of "The Opera Singer", one of Stroessner's henchmen who would sing arias while torturing his victims. The country is great, bring along your Spanish, little English is spoken there.

The inflatable pigs seem to have been some sort of countrywide Paraguayan fad during one of the author's visits. They occupy more space on the cover than in the text, and I don't recall any mention of them being present at any of the burial sites he mentions. Like Argentina, cemeteries in Asuncion seem to be quite unique. I am a Spanish professor, and have always wanted to visit all of Latin America. I was intending to visit Bolivia, but that seemed to require not just a visa, but a full-blown itinerary of a three week trip in a place where landslides, strikes and other incidents make planning rather difficult. It is also a fact that in Latin America as a rule, the hotels that book reservations tend to charge about five times more than those that don't have a website or any way of booking a reservation. So I got a visa for Paraguay (\$65) good for the life of my passport, and I will be leaving in a week or so. Mr Gimlette is an English lawyer who has spent rather a lot of time in Paraguay at different intervals, and he relates his experiences with the somewhat bizarre history of Paraguay. Unlike the Andean nations, Paraguay has a somewhat less spectacular geography. Water and rivers, not rocks and mountains have defined it. What makes it interesting to the traveler is its people and its history, and Gimlette intertwines these in a humorous narrative. The book has one map, but needs several more. Some of the pictures in the hardbound version are in color, but in the paperback, they are all black and white. There really needs to be an index. I am planning to return with more comments when I return from my trip. There are several good trip descriptions on igoyougo.com that I found useful.

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