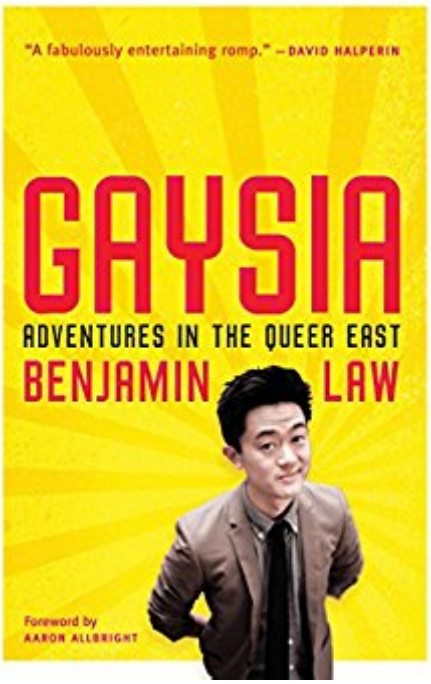
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Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East



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Synopsis

Benjamin Law considers himself pretty lucky to live in Australia: he can hold his boyfriend's hand in public and lobby his politicians to recognize same-sex marriage. But as the child of immigrants, he's also curious about how different life might have been had he grown up in Asia. So he sets off to meet his fellow Gaysians. Law takes his investigative duties seriously, going nude where required in Balinese sex resorts, sitting backstage for hours with Thai ladyboy beauty contestants, and trying Indian yoga classes designed to cure his homosexuality. The characters he meets Ã¢â ¬â • from Tokyo's celebrity drag queens to HIV-positive Burmese sex workers and Malaysian ex-gay Christian fundamentalists to Chinese gays and lesbians who marry each other to please their parents Ã¢â ¬â • all teach him something new about being queer in Asia. At once entertaining and moving, Gaysia is a wild ride and a fascinating quest by a leading Australian writer.

Book Information

File Size: 799 KB

Print Length: 296 pages

Publisher: Cleis Press (April 21, 2014)

Publication Date: April 21, 2014

Sold by:Ã Â Simon and Schuster Digital Sales Inc

Language: English

ASIN: B00H6UOI1E

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #141,771 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #2 inÃ Â Books > Gay & Lesbian > Travel #7 inÃ Â Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender eBooks > Travel #30 inÃ Â Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender eBooks > LGBT Studies > Gay Studies

Customer Reviews

I just finished "Gaysia," recommended to me by a friend, while on a business trip to Chicago. It is promoted as a wild romp through all of gay Asia - but ultimately, it is a far more fascinating and,

indeed, moving book than that. I might venture to say that this is an important book - particularly for westerners who don't know much about life in Asia. Most of us, in fact.Law, an ethnically Chinese Australian, begins his peregrinations in Bali at an all gay resort that seems to be setting up the book as a somewhat leering view of gay foreigners and Asian sex workers. But that's the trick of this book. It does indeed deal a lot with sex workers, and gay folks (and lesbians and transgendered folks) - but the leering tone rapidly turns to one of thoughtful observation. In what I'm sure was a calculated move, Law gradually moves his readers from the fun side of being gay in Asia to the side of oppression and marginalization. He explores aspects of gay truth in Asia that are as alien and disturbing to us as they are to him (him being a happily out 20-something Australian). And yet, unfailingly, Law approaches everyone he meets on his travels with respect, from transgender beauty queens to anti-gay yoga gurus. Sure, there are plenty of snarky asides - intended only for our eyes - but I gained enormous respect for Law, as I followed his journey along sometimes harrowing and often unnerving paths, meeting people and going places that are hard for me to imagine.For someone known as a comedian, and someone so young (young enough to be my child), Law evinces a deep maturity and sensitivity in this book, and the one of the penultimate moments, when he attends his first gay pride march - in Mumbai - was as moving for me as it was for him. This book is not all fun and games; but there is much here of great interest and value.

Beginning with the idea that Asia is the gayest continent, the author then takes on a most fabulous journey through Asia. Along the way we meet a colorful cast of characters. From the world of moneyboys in Bali to the world of transexual pageantry in Thailand to the hidden world of online gay meeting in China. The chapter on China was particularly powerful due to the description of a society not ready for gay men to live public lives as gay men.And the adventure continues in Japan in what was one of the more sad chapters. Though Japanese people don't see gay people as sinful, they do seem them as shameful. And then pretend that the non campy gay men ones do not exist. Lesbians are completely ignored.After Japan, the adventures continue in Malaysia, Myanmar, and India.For all the people that may emphasize cultural relativism, at the end of the day if you are reading this book in the US, Australia, or Western Europe, then be happy that your culture is much more open and welcoming. Still, the path to openness is one that all countries take and there are hopeful signs that gay rights and visibility are getting stronger in the region. I only wish that the author had visited Taiwan where gay rights are strongest so we could see what that kind of Asian acceptance looks like.

Fun collection of what are essentially short single-country essays about gay culture in Asia. In some places, gay is ok but in others it’s a horrible shame on your family. As an Australian man of Asian heritage, Law has a unique ability to jump right in to Asian cultures but has a distinctly Western point of view. It’s an interesting place to be and I love how Law explains his thoughts and ideas.

I found this book to be insightful, hilarious, and I think Benjamin Law is a very witty writer. I couldn’t put this book down! It is a book that deals with truth, and tragedy, that GLBT people face in Asian countries. But it deals with these tragedies, because the truth is, there IS a lot of tragedy that GLBT people face in Asian countries. Unlike GLBT in America, parts of Europe, and Canada, who enjoy many rights, regardless of the people who are homophobic and don’t like them, GLBT in Asian countries face a lot of discrimination, ignorance, and challenges, just because they are GLBT. They have no rights. Basic rights that all people should have.So I am not sure how this book could have been written without talking about these tragedies, unless the book was to create a fairytale-like existence for the GLBT in Asia. And then it would have been a fictional book about GLBT in Asia (not the purpose of this book). This book opened my eyes. It made me not only realize how fortunate I am to live in a "free-er" country like the USA, but it also made me ask my self, "What can I do to help my GLBT brothers and sisters" who are still discriminated against"? It made me realize that while I sit here all comfortable as a gay man, there are many people who don’t even know about HIV, how to get it, prevent it, or avoid it. That to me is a very sad, archaic reality that GLBT in Asian countries still face today.I love his candid insights, the sharing of his honest feelings, and his willingness to share his feelings about each country he visited.Great job Benjamin, and I hope you keep writing more books like this one!

Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East is a fully fascinating book, right from the get-go I was hooked by Law’s voice and his journey around Asia would be fascinating without the queer aspect. Being serious here, man should write a travel book. But learning about how these various countries tackle homosexuality, and learning about these features is wonderful, and well worth a read. The characters he interviews throughout are intriguing and there was no boring sections to the novel. Law’s an excellent writer, and I’m excited for his next work.

I wanted more depth/length to the stories and perhaps some updating to the text. Still, it gives some insight into how gay people are viewed, and behave, in the "Queer East" (to quote the author). I realize this is Mr. Law’s experiences on his travels but it would have been nice to have the situations

in the different countries filled out by more objective sources.

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