Foreword Review LGBTQ+ NONFICTION

Escapades of a Gay Traveler: Sexual Cultural and Spiritual Encounters

Joseph Itiel
Harrington Park Press (Dec 10, 2002)
$34.95 (255pp)
978-1-56023-198-1

With a taste for the exotic, the author's adventures span more than forty years and roam through the sites and bedrooms of four continents. Itiel came of age in the mid-1950s, long before it was possible to be out of the closet. Still, he has been able to enjoy sex partners from around the world at will into his seventies, exploding the myth that gay men are no longer desirable after the age of fifty.

Sometimes the sexual encounters were free; other times they involved payment. One session involved having sex for money with a partner whose entire family was in the same room with just a curtain separating Itiel and his partner from them. "Suddenly, my partner started speaking; not to me, but to his family on the other side of the curtain. He may have been reciting holy verses from the Vedas, but to my untrained ear it sounded more like a sportscast."

Itiel has a fascination for different cultures, languages, and foreign men. As he traveled the world, he managed to master, to varying degrees, languages including Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese, English, Spanish, French, German, and Tagalog. He also mastered the ability to pick up men and have sex with his ideal type: thin men who are younger and darker than himself.

The book describes dalliances with yoga at an ashram in India, teaching Hebrew in Mexico to students studying for their Bar Mitzvahs, visiting a coeducational bathhouse in Japan with heterosexual family members of an employee, and parlays with a gay Geisha.

Itiel has published gay travel guides to the Philippines, Mexico, and Costa Rica, as well as two books concerning gay hustlers. His knowledge of different cultures is captivating, as is his uncanny ability to find sexual partners even in countries where being caught engaging in gay sex carries severe penalties. At seventy-one, Itiel's libido remains active as ever.

One might find it sad that Itiel never mentions a long-term committed relationship in his life. Instead he enjoys sexual romps lasting from a single night to repeated hookups, with none seeming to involve much more than sexual gratification. Relationships aren't for everybody, however, and Itiel seems satisfied having led a full life.

Escapades of A Gay Traveler is both entertaining and informative as one is able to learn about gay culture and practices across a multitude of societies.

JOHN R. SELIG (March / April 2003)

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