ForeWord Reviews

TRAVEL

Tokyo on Foot: Travels in the City's Most Colorful Neighborhoods
Florent Chavouet
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Drawing is a solitary activity. Coupled with being alone and 6,000 miles from home, one could expect Florent Chavouet's first book, the graphic novel *Tokyo on Foot: Travels in the City's Most Colorful Neighborhoods,* to be a cold and perhaps unflinching look at a foreign land from the eyes of an outsider.

Thankfully, it is anything but. The colorful tome is warm and whimsical, full of surprising vignettes and buildings and bustling folks that comprise life in the teeming metropolis of thirteen million. It's like stumbling upon someone's well-illustrated sketchbook-cum-scrapbook, and enjoying all the treasures tucked inside.

His trip took place in 2006, well before a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami killed thousands and devastated parts of Japan in March 2011. (On his blog, Chavouet says he's donating an illustration for a Paris-based auction to help raise funds for the relief effort.)

When his partner Claire landed an internship in Tokyo, Chavouet took to the streets on his golden Alsus Bridgestone bike with a sketchpad, his trusty pouch of colored pencils, and a folding chair as his constant companions. He breathes life into the "most beautiful of ugly cities" with those pencils—Chavouet has a particular gift for drawing the trees, flowers, and grass that comprise Tokyo's few green spaces—and even manages to make the skyscrapers and street scenes glow.

He shines when showing everyday occurrences—a tofu vendor selling his food through city streets, crickets singing at night, the funny shapes one can make while nibbling on a lotus root. Tiny details abound: words wrap around buildings, flow down stairs, and make up the exhaust coming from an airplane. Dotted everywhere are mementos of Chavouet's trip—fruit stickers with Japanese characters, the many parking tickets he received, maple leaves, and squished mosquitoes from a trip to the park. And the people. Oh, the people. Chavouet's wry humor is best when he's drawing the residents and tourists who inhabit Tokyo. There are the pretty girls of Shibuya with their Vuitton bags, a woman out walking her pet pig, a grinning teen

with a jumbled mass of “freestyle” teeth.

Chavouet, a graphic artist living in Paris, received the Ptolemy Prize at the 2009 International Festival of Geography for *Tokyo on Foot.*

The book will make readers with wanderlust wish to drop their everyday responsibilities and trek through a foreign city. It will appeal to the armchair traveler who yearns for a bit of the exotic, the wanderer who wants to someday visit the Land of the Rising Sun, and, indeed, anyone who appreciates the marriage of grit and beauty, self-deprecating wit, and losing oneself in good pictures for a while.

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