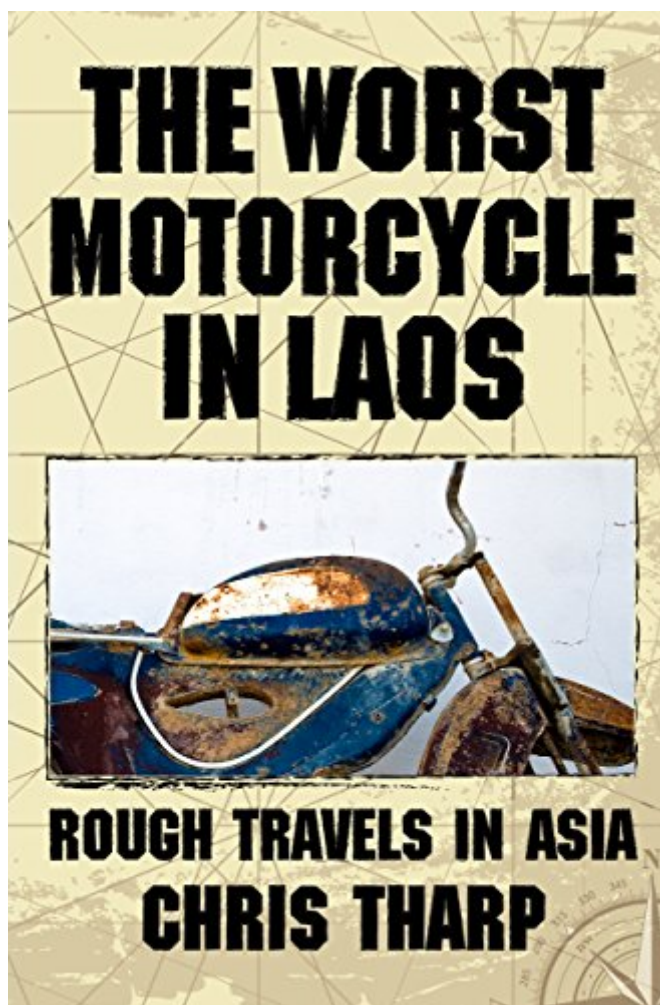


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The Worst Motorcycle In Laos: Rough Travels In Asia



Synopsis

In *The Worst Motorcycle in Laos: Rough Travels in Asia*, author Chris Tharp recounts his misadventures in countries across the region he's called home for the last ten years. He takes us to the back-alley restaurants of Vietnam on a quest to eat cobra; to the neon streets of Japan, where he goes on tour with a jazz band, gets lost in the depraved depths of a comic book shop, and nearly causes a riot at a punk rock bar; to far Western China, where he narrowly misses a terrorist attack and endures a harrowing drive on the world's highest highway. Whether losing his lunch on the boat ride to the disputed Dokdo islets, surviving a bus wreck on a Korean highway, eating chicken embryos in the Philippines, or riding a dilapidated motorbike through the dirt tracks of Laos, Tharp delivers his tales with a mixture of honesty, wit, and humor that will inspire readers to strap on a backpack and hit the road.

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Customer Reviews

Having read Tharp's first book "Dispatches From The Peninsula", I can honestly say that this is a better read, and a much more cohesive book. Sections of his first book seemed a little jarring and

almost thrown in as an afterthought, although they offered the promise of much more exposition. Here's he's gone and done it. Tharp's style is perfect for the book: immersive, but not exhaustive. Informative, but not overly so as if to hit you over the head with facts. He entertains without pandering to those with a fetish for gratuitous travel horror-stories. The stories are all told very matter-of-factly, but with enough self-deprecation and honesty to keep you both enthralled and still wanting more. Although technically a linear read, you can pick it up, throw a rock, and whatever chapter it hits can be read without missing anything you've skipped or ruining what you've yet to read. It's the kind of book that every chowderhead at O'Hare, LAX, or (insert your favourite airport here) should pick up at Chapters/Barnes & Noble while running to catch their plane, instead of some wretched vegan cookbook. Absolutely recommended for any travel reader/writer.

After reading Tharp's *Dispatches from the Peninsula: Six Years in South Korea*, I wasted little time in buying this book. In the eyes of many, *Dispatches* got him noticed. Now people were paying attention with heightened expectations. Add me to that category of critics. I was particularly skeptical that this book could live up to what was advertised on its jacket: "Tharp delivers his tales with a mixture of honesty, wit, and humor that will inspire readers to strap on a backpack and hit the road." The thesis I present here is that this book far exceeded my expectations. But confined by space, I substantiate my claim through the following excerpt: "It was a 100cc Chinese make—a glorified scooter, really—the type of four-speed bike ubiquitous throughout Southeast Asia. The horn was burned out, along with the electric starter and both turning signals. The tires were bald. Neither the speedometer nor the gas gauge functioned. The silver-dollar-sized mirrors looked as if they had been ripped from makeup compacts and attached to the bike with safety pins, spinning freely on their mounts like reflective whirligigs. The black paint job was ancient and covered in deep scratches. The handbrake didn't work at all, and the footbrake felt as if it was attached by a worn-out rubber band. Despite its many flaws, this particular motorbike held one advantage over the one other to be had in town that day: it started." The rich description provided above demonstrates Tharp's talent and intellect as a writer. But more than that, I admire his ability to imbue his experiences with an element of playful humor: "it started." Classic. I love it. And throughout the book, Tharp uses this kind of playful humor to describe the very best and worst of his adventures. In the end, the book's jacket lived up to its promise. I jumped on Expedia and booked a ticket to SE Asia. Can't wait for the adventure to begin.

A very entertaining read- a set of travel stories in far & away places, many never dreamed of by even seasoned travelers in East Asia. I have been to a few of the places the author writes of and even those stories kept me entertained. The author, Chris Tharp, obviously eschews comfort for adventure and daring in these tales that serve as short stories. Some are funny as hell. A few times, I laughed out loud while reading. When enquired by those around me as to what was funny, I just had to reply, "You don't want to know." What's great is that Tharp really delves into historical details and hidden stories about places that obviously take some digging to get into that most passing through tourists would not get. After each story, I was left wanting more. Perhaps that was the intention- to inspire the reader to get up and make some adventures of their own. A good read!

It's difficult to write a review for this book, and that's a good thing. Don't get me wrong. This book hooked me, from the first page. It felt like Bill Bryson, filtered through a Bukowski-fueled bender. Like a good novel, the Tharp has a story he needs to show you - to tell you - and he does so quite well. He effortlessly draws you in, story after story, until a larger picture emerges. Not just of Asia, but of the author himself. Like any good non-fiction, Tharp pulls the reader into the narrative. It's such a personal perspective that I couldn't help but pull back. And then, of course, I got sucked back into the pages again. Tharp's weird, brilliant mind shines through in his writing. He's got a damn keen eye for details, and - even better - he knows exactly how much to give you on the page. He gives you the context you need, but doesn't bog you down with too much. I found myself at turns being envious of the adventures, and grateful for the simple blessings of home and nation. It's a remarkable book, from a unique voice. Ultimately, I'm throwing down 5 stars on this book because I walked away from it wanting more; more stories, more people, more history. Not because I'm not satisfied, but because I can't wait until his next book.

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