

the HOTEL  
on the ROOF  
of the WORLD

*From Miss Tibet to Shangri-La*



"A hilarious account of a clash of cultures ... a comparison with *Fawlty Towers* is inevitable, but this is funnier." — *Mail on Sunday*

ALEC LE SUEUR

## **The Hotel on the Roof of the World: From Miss Tibet to Shangri La**

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# **The Hotel on the Roof of the World: From Miss Tibet to Shangri La**

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## **The Hotel on the Roof of the World: From Miss Tibet to Shangri La** Alec Le Sueur

On a par with the best of Bill Bryson and Pico Iyer, Alec Le Sueur's bestselling insider account of life at the world-famous Holiday Inn, Lhasa, Tibet (altitude 14,000 feet) pits Communist owners against capitalist manager to create a chain hotel in Shangri-La. Against all odds, heroic Tibetan workers fight with Chinese bosses who turn off the heat in freezing weather when occupancy falls below 20 percent. They struggle against Maoist bureaucrats trying to break up the first Miss Tibet beauty pageant. And they delicately remove the American Express card from the wallet of an apparently deceased guest to cover room charges. Nonstop hijinks make this one of the funniest travel books on the planet.

## **The Hotel on the Roof of the World: From Miss Tibet to Shangri La Details**

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Author : Alec Le Sueur

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Alec Le Sueur**

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## **From Reader Review The Hotel on the Roof of the World: From Miss Tibet to Shangri La for online ebook**

### **Dorien says**

Le Sueur heeft ook veel geschreven over de geschiedenis van en het huidige leven in Tibet. Dat is wel heel interessant.

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### **Eric says**

It was interesting to get the author's perspective of Tibet and Lhasa, but I felt like he was pretty removed from the whole thing, like it was a set of amusing stories that he's told a number of times to other ex-pats. But he doesn't have the flair, and held back a lot. The timeline was vague, and I had the impression halfway through that he was just telling us about his first year, but it turned out that it was of his entire 5 years there. Maybe it's the rarified air of the place, but the whole thing read quickly and lightly and kinda groundless. Almost like he wasn't really there. I can certainly understand being reluctant to get into the gritty details of one's own life. But as a result, it was a little flat. Nevertheless, it was interesting enough, and I did laugh a good bit through it.

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### **Ali says**

I don't read as many travel books as I always intend to. Those I have read I have tended to really enjoy, and on the whole this was no exception. However this is much less a book about Tibet and its people as it is about the least likely Holiday Inn in the world. Alec Le Sueur introduces us to the peculiar people who work there, visit there and the hilarious fawlty toweresque chaos that comes with them. Le Sueur seems to write with real affection for a place he spent a good deal of time in, he pokes gentle fun at some of the more bizarre misunderstandings that stem from vastly differing cultural differences, but is never cruel. It is quite deliberate - Le Sueur explains in his epilogue - that he hasn't delved deeper into the cultural political and religious aspects of Tibet - there are many other books that do that. This is therefore a fairly light, entertaining read about a hotel in one of the unlikliest places on earth.

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### **Clare O'Beara says**

Alec didn't understand that the assignment he thought of as a challenge, was seen as a hardship posting.

Even the flight was a challenge, on an industrial rather than luxury seating plan and a lunchbox of basic, awful food was served. If the food wasn't eaten it was packed up again for the next plane.

The hotel in Lhasa was the highest hotel in the world and had to comply with Chinese enforced regulations as well as local Tibetan customs and weather. The staff didn't know how to work a flush toilet or a vacuum cleaner. When the cleaner bag was full, the staff didn't know to change it. They had thought the dust went up the cord into the wall.

The hotel had to have a thirty percent occupancy before the heating would be switched on. As Alec and other staff lived there, they were keen to fill the rooms and dreamt up a Miss Tibet pageant and other gimmicks to draw media. The journalists usually had to say they had other jobs or China would not allow them into the country.

Alec got to see a good deal of the local life and had mixed feelings about the Chinese invasion. While modern standards were being brought to the impoverished, isolated people, he also thought they should be allowed to worship in the way they wished. This is an entertaining and engaging read.

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### **Jason Pyrz says**

I really enjoyed this book. When it comes to travelogue-type books, I don't usually like to read ones that were published so long ago that the places they describe are no longer the places that exist, but because this book was really about a specific place at a specific point in time, I gave it a go. I had this book on my wishlist for years, but because it wasn't published for the Kindle or available from my local library, I just never got around to buying the paperback because it was easier to just download something else from my wishlist. This was the first non-kindle book I've read in probably about eight years, and I'm glad I finally did.

I saw a review somewhere that likened this book to Fawlty Towers, if Fawlty Towers were set in Tibet. I think that's a fair portrayal. The stories within might not be as absurd as a Fawlty Towers episode, but there are plenty of stories that come close and, as a result of being true, are sometimes funnier than anything Basil Fawlty ever encountered. I also really enjoyed Le Sueur's writing style, and the personality he conveyed therein. His self-effacing, playful, and seemingly kind nature really made me like him and, ultimately, the book probably more than I would have if this were written by someone like Paul Theroux - who seems difficult to like as a person, but is able to temper that with his stories and observations.

I would definitely recommend going old school and getting this book on some dead trees. Take a break from the kindle and remember what a real book smells like. It's the only way you'll get your hands on this book, and it will be worth it.

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### **Ben says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was full of laugh out loud moments as well as sharing plenty of Tibetan cultural information.

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys both travel writing humour.

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### **LT says**

Amusing anecdotes. Not laugh aloud but as I have travelled in Nepal it feels familiar. I have read it twice.

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## **Lauren says**

Wanted to like this more but found it very dry. There's a difference between living through unusual circumstances and being a humor writer. Did keep marveling at how things worked in the hospitality industry back in the late 80s-early 90s.

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## **Mae Lender says**

Le Sueur on noor mees hotellinduses, kes mõningate kokkusattumuste leiab end ühel hetkel Holiday Inn hotelliketi kõige-kõigemas hotellis. Lhasas, see tähendab Tiibetis, eks ole. Hotell, kuhu keegi naljalt tööle ei ihka. Või kes ihkab, sel peab mingi väga totter põhjus olema, igatahes äratab see kohe kahtlust. Ja siis see nali vaikselt kerima hakkab. Ja nali, ma hoiatan, on taolises situatsioonis kerge tekkima. Esmalt juba kõik see kommunismist johtuv - täna oskame juba ka meie selle üle ju naerda. Teiseks, hotellitöö ise on väga viljakas pinnas erinevateks ekstreemsusteks. Ja no viimane, ent mitte vähem tähtis on loomulikult ekstraordinaarne asukoht. Geograafiline asukoht ja suletus on see, mis häällestab viimse piirini nii töötajate närid kui suudab aeg-ajalt üllatada ka laekuvaid turiste.

Toon vaid mõned näited. Kuidas motiveerida töötajaid (õitsvas kommunismis, ma meenutan!), kes ei tahagi ametiredelil tõusta? Vastavalt kehtivale ideoloogiale palk ju oluliselt ei tõuseks, tõuseb vaid vastutus ja muutub ülesannete iseloom. Kuidas korraldada tööd, kui vaat et kõige olulisem on "maine säilitamine", kõik muu kahvatub selle kõrval? Kuidas korraldada missivalimisi? Tiibetis! Madalhooajal! Kommunistlikule ideoloogiale sobivalt! Kuidas võidelda rottide invasiooniga, eriti kui samal ajal on ka majutujad sees? Kui palju võimalusi on menüü mitmekesistamiseks, kui varustusülemal õnnestub hankida vaid Hiina lihakonserve ja kapsast? Samas vaimus aiva edasi...

Ka keerulised olud ja enneolematu laiskus suudavad inimesi muhedalt leidlikuks teha. Esimesena selles vallas meenub kohe, kuidas hotelli kakk ei kavatsenudki jännata brüleekreemi karamellise krõbeda koorikuga (mis tõepoolest võib veidi tüütu teha olla), vaid "avastas", et kui eelmisel õhtul magustoidud sügavkülma pista, siis näituseks brüleekreem saab juba iseenesest jäise kaane peale. Noh... sama hea kui koorik, kas pole :)

Hirmus vahva raamat - aitäh, Lembe!

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## **Oggie Ramos says**

I somehow enjoyed the book although I have a lot of misgivings.

One, I feel like Alec was writing as if disembodied, talking about his experience but detached from it.

Two, the book could use some serious editing and proofreading to give the book a better structure, tighten up the pace as well as eliminate the numerous grammatical and typographical errors. The author loves to poke fun at the stilted English of the CAAC (the airline that ply the Chengdu - Lhasa route) as if he has a masterful grasp of the language (he doesn't); here are some samples of its generous share of "funny" English usage: (p. 176: "...but the only direct way to Nirvana, without passing go or having to suffer through..."; p. 152 "...our breathing became longer and our conversation stopped altogether..."; p. 269 "...so I built in an

extra margin on the tour costs to cover any price rises..."; p. 312 "...we walked down the corridor of North Wing and the noise grew stronger and stronger..."; p.230 "...where Zhang Li had poured me a cup of five-hour strong Shanghai coffee..."; p.304 "...I left him as soon as I could -- he was completely crackers..."; p.276 "...I have always been sceptical of anything that cannot be explained by strict scientific principals..."; p. 341 "...Martial Law had been and gone..."; and so many more errors especially on the last 20 or so pages where I felt the proofreader may have just given up and went home.

Thirdly, the timeline is very vague as one reviewer already noted; the author would write in chronological order one moment, then jump to another time, then skip back. A good editor could have jumped in early on and righted the direction, the structure of the book so it builds up and progresses, not wallow in one unidentified time frame then jumps into another. The book, as a whole, appears like a mishmash of experiences, then hurrying off in the final chapter to a rather hokey conclusion. How did he grow from a somewhat ignorant/innocent hotelier from Paris to a streetsmart (I hope) manager in his five years in Tibet? What aspect of Tibetan life did he take home with him (or did he remain skeptical and wary of whatever it represented?)?

Fourthly, Alec Le Sueur pokes fun at the Chinese and Tibetan cultures every chance he gets. He spent five years in Tibet but maybe, never really grew up because he deems the place inferior to the Europe he grew up in.

Fifthly, the author has a disdain for missionaries (more specifically, the ones pretending to be teachers but surreptitiously evangelizes); this was touched on twice but never really fully explained. I can only conclude that the author eschews anything spiritual -- makes fun of the Buddhist beliefs, hates the Christian covert proselytizers as well.

Having read a lot of travel books from Iyer, Theroux, Bryson, I am open to yet another author to give his perspective. However, this one is less elegantly written in comparison and apologies to the first reviewer but I think saying this badly-edited book is on par with Theroux, Iyer and Bryson is an affront to the three travel writers' mastery. It doesn't come anywhere close. Not to the flowing prose of Iyer and Theroux that transports the reader to another place and time; certainly not to the often self-effacing humor of Bryson who's not afraid to poke fun at himself.

I've already bought the book when I noticed in the back page that it is published by Summersdale, the same publisher of "The Sea On Our Left" which suffers from the same set of problems -- tighter editing, more vigilant proofreading, and better focus. I should've seen it early on but then again, it's not totally a waste of time. I only wished the author collaborated with a better publisher, with a better editor as well as a sharper proofreader. This could've been a gold mine with a better structure, better writing, more careful proofreading.

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## **Sjors says**

Generally amusing account of an expat in Tibet that manages to steer clear from controversy or the overly personal. As a long-time expat myself (though not in Tibet), recognised many typical fraught situations one encounters along the road. The end of the book would have benefitted from some more editing as there are quite a few repetitions of exactly the same sentences or even paragraphs.

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### **Alessandro Vicenzi says**

L'improbabile (e autentica) storia dell'Holiday Inn di Lhasa, Tibet, tra gli anni ottanta e i novanta, raccontata dall'interno.

A un certo punto fa irruzione sulla scena un italiano (fratello del regista teatrale Eugenio Barba) e si divora la scena in un boccone solo.

Divertente.

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### **Kimberley says**

great great book I was laughing even without oxygen

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### **Anne says**

This is an amusing account of the absolute craziness that can happen in a hotel, fuelled, in this case, by relative isolation and the clash of Communism, Buddhism and Capitalism. Although the author doesn't dwell on the Chinese disregard/destruction of the Tibetan culture, religion and landscape, it is evident and is so awful/frustrating.

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### **Maz Todd says**

A funny and entertaining book. Interesting as not many British people get to spend time in Tibet since it was taken over by China. The frustrations of the Chinese bureaucracy and of working with the Tibetans are legion.

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