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Across Vietnam

Photography by Rajesh Nair

Introduction

In this book, I present photographic sketches and impressions documenting my compelling journey across Vietnam, a captivating land so diverse in landscape and culture. With breathtaking mountains and infinite white-sanded coastline, and filled in between with emerald green rice paddies, it has no parallel in its natural beauty. This book is a tribute to its defiant people, who have resisted all odds and preserved its unique cultural heritage. Much of the photographs in the book are spontaneous portraits of people that I came across during my long travel. Others are environmental portraits of people embedded in their appealing landscape and unique lifestyle. The photographs as I see them are very unpretentious, uninhibited and ingenuous.

This was an engaging travel which took me across the country from the mountains in the north east to bustling cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, to cultural and historic centers such as Hue and Hoi An and, in the south, to the spectacular 'pearl island' Phu Quoc, in the gulf of Thailand. The book begins with portraits of the Black Thai and H'mong people who make up the largest ethnic minorities in the northeastern part of the country on the mountains of Sapa. There are photographs I took in the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, where the streets are swarmed by

thousands of buzzing motorbikes and omnipresent bicycles. By dusk the city sidewalks transform into outdoor eateries, where the air is filled with the aroma of pungent herbs and spices and of sounds of people unwinding after their hectic day.

Halong bay, a Unesco world heritage site is made up of hundreds and thousands of limestone pinnacles protruding from the waters. South of Halong Bay lies the spectacular island of Cat Ba, where I photographed some of the many floating villages nestled in the bay. Some of the photographs are voyeuristic, bringing an insight into the daily lives of the fishermen.

In the riverside town of Hoi An in central Vietnam, the narrow streets with their traditional buildings from early nineteenth century or earlier provided an enchanting canvas to capture the daily flow of life.

The book ends with photographs from the rugged island of Phu Quoc, taken while traveling across the island on a motorbike on the dirt roads. The silhouette of children against the sunset provided the perfect end to an absorbing journey through Vietnam.

Rajesh Nair

















