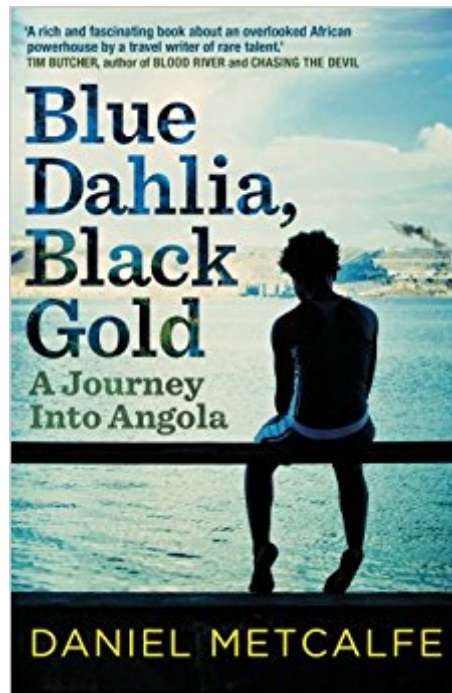




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Blue Dahlia, Black Gold: A Journey Into Angola



Synopsis

An absorbing, surprising and insightful on-the-ground exploration of one of Africa's most vibrant, excessive, important and quickly-changing countries: Angola. Since the end of its crippling 27-year civil war over a decade ago, Angola has changed almost beyond recognition. An oil-fuelled bonanza has brought about massive foreign investment and a fabulously wealthy new elite, making its capital, Luanda, the second most expensive city in the world. Today, fortunes are being made and lost overnight, and rich Angolans are eagerly buying up the assets of its former coloniser, Portugal. Fascinated by this complex nation, perched at the forefront of a resurgent Africa, writer Daniel Metcalfe travelled to Angola to explore the country for himself. Ebullient and proud, and often unwilling to dwell on its past, Angola has a large army, a hunger for wealth and a need to prove itself on the continent. But as Metcalfe also discovers, it has some of the most grinding poverty in Africa as few Angolans have reaped the rewards of the peace. Nonetheless, amid Angola's brash reality, Metcalfe finds there is a place for a traveller who isn't there to make a quick buck. Crossing the country as ordinary Angolans do, talking to tribal elders, oil workers, mine clearers, street children, he encounters a place of extremes, where cynicism and excess go hand-in-hand with great hospitality and ingenuity. Metcalfe also reveals a colourful history of pirates and slave traders, capuchin monks, syncretic Christian cults and elaborate spirit masks. This is an Angola that symbolises nothing less than a broader turning point between the continents, the repositioning of the rich developed world versus Africa. It is a land that, until now, few outsiders have managed to unlock.

Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Arrow (July 11, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0099525178

ISBN-13: 978-0099525172

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #334,636 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in Books > Travel > Africa > Coastal West Africa #828 in Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Travel #1304 in Books > Travel > Travel Writing

Customer Reviews

Out of Steppe: '[Metcalfé's] book has many virtues, the greatest of which are courage and a keen eye for detail, plus an ability to convey the essence of a place through the briefest of anecdotes' - Independent

DANIEL METCALFE was born in London in 1979. After graduating in Classics at Oxford University, he went to live in Iran and Central Asia for a year and a half, following which he wrote Out of Steppe: The Lost Peoples of Central Asia, which was shortlisted for the Banff Mountain Book Award 2009 and the Dolman Travel award 2010. Having travelled extensively in Russia, Asia and the former Soviet Union, he has more recently focused on Portuguese-speaking Africa, inspiring Blue Dahlia, Black Gold: A Journey into Angola. Daniel has written for the Economist, The Guardian, Financial Times, Conde Nast Traveller and the Literary Review. He lives in Mlaga, Spain.

This is an entertaining book written about a part of the world that is under-reported and poorly understood in the U.S. The author injects a subtle wit into the story which helps to leaven what are otherwise often very bleak circumstances.

As a resident expat in Luanda I found this book immensely interesting, informative and authentic. I would recommend it as essential reading for anyone engaged with Angola either as a resident or business partner.

An almost accurate account of life in Angola. Definitely an captivating read.

Very interesting account of travels in So Tom & Prncipe on way to Angola Really enjoyed this account of the travels into Africa.

I enjoyed the Blue Dahlia, Black Gold for the many reasons I enjoyed Metcalfe's previous book Out of Steppe: the writing is superb, a pleasure to read, and Metcalfe's wit, eye and analysis are sharp and discerning, giving the reader both an uncanny experience of the place explored here Angola, where the ludicrously high cost of living alone would deter most travel writers and a broader historical/contextual understanding of it. I find his investigative mind admirable, but most of all I delight in his sense of adventure. Among my favourite passages were his wild descriptions of riding Luanda's candongueiro whose drivers are like glue

sniffers, desensitized to all but the near-fatal thrill -- both hilarious and terrifying! At times I felt the historical information overrode the experiential part of the narrative and from this I concluded it might be impossible to experience Angola today without the legacy of colonialism and the horrific war staring you down and demanding attention. While most countries live uneasily with their past, Angola's today seems littered both by real and metaphorical land mines, all of which would be incomprehensible without the patient, thorough and lively contextualizing Metcalfe provides. This book must have been a challenging undertaking to write and I commend Metcalfe for taking it on fearlessly and delivering an excellent travel narrative: it left me troubled by Angola as it rightly should.

On the cover of the book, Nicholas Crane praises it by stating that "Metcalfe has reminded us why travel writing matters". After having finished reading *Blue Dahlia, Black Gold* I feel the complete opposite: why travel writing doesn't. I firmly catalogue this book in the "How To Write About Africa" category presented by Binyavanga Wainaina. It ticks all the boxes. The book is just that... a foreigner who soaks up some books on Angola and then travels 3 months around the country. I wonder what kind of review a book on the USA would get if it were written by some Angolan who reads a few books about the country and spends only 3 months there. Well, I can safely assume it would be superficial, perhaps out of point at times. These attributes are the bulk of the book: his encounters are of varying interest, but some are frankly pathetic: whole views on a region are based on the insights of a couple of British NGO workers, other insights are the result of a picnic with expats in Luanda's outskirts. These encounters are mixed with a healthy dose of history, which is inevitably interesting enough but is clearly written by someone who is essentially rewriting what other books already say. The result are pages and pages on the chronology of the civil war that could be straight out of a Wikipedia page (i am not saying they are, but they do feel like it to me) in the sense that there's little in terms of original insight from the author. There can't be, of course, neither can there be any worthwhile insights into Angolan society because... it is written by someone who only spent 3 months in the country. In fact, when these are attempted they are slightly pretentious. Perhaps it is travel writing at its best... Not a book about Angola but about someone's travels, nothing more. I wish I had better things to say about this book, because I enjoyed Daniel Metcalfe's previous book, "Out of Steppe", a lot. Perhaps in that case the sheer enormity and variety of the places and peoples compensated other shortcomings, perhaps I have become too critical myself with the years.

I enjoy reading travel books and this doesn't disappoint. I think some reviewers have been rather harsh. I found it a well written and entertaining account of an exciting odyssey through Angola and it's truly interesting. So much so that I think I'll spend my next holiday there. There are some photos but it could have done with a lot more.

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