



Geisha: The Life, the Voices, the Art

Jodi Cobb , Ian Buruma

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Here, brought vividly to life, is an icon of Japanese culture and custom—the geisha in her role as human work of art and perfect woman.

A hundred years ago geisha numbered eighty thousand; today there are a thousand at most. Happily, Jodi Cobb is able to show us—before they vanish—both the ceremonial world of the geisha in Tokyo and Kyoto and their private world as few outsiders have ever seen it.

Many of the older women we meet here were forced into this world by hardship; the young women were drawn to it by their dream of a romantic life or their love of traditional arts. We see geisha in their daytime routines: fine-tuning their breathtakingly lavish wardrobes; perfecting the art of makeup; training maikos (apprentices); and preparing for annual dance performances.

But as we watch the geisha at night, as they entertain (for huge sums) at private parties, their art takes a different form. Their purpose is to provide a dream—of luxury, romance and exclusivity. As the men sit at dinner, geisha position themselves at their elbows to serve them sake and delicacies and practice a brilliantly honed art of conversation. As the alcohol flows and the guests relax, geisha play party tricks and sing songs. Geisha have for centuries studied the male ego. They tend it like a garden—and we watch men bloom.

This long-hidden world is revealed here both in superlative photographs and in a fascinating text that includes the voices of the geisha themselves. These women have created a life of beauty, making themselves an embodiment of Japanese culture, tradition and refinement—a life that is captured exquisitely in this remarkable book.

Geisha: The Life, the Voices, the Art Details

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From Reader Review Geisha: The Life, the Voices, the Art for online ebook

Lauren says

A book in which the value lies more in the introduction than the photographs - if you want to learn about geisha without reading a full-length book, this is where I would go. Cobb writes clearly and concisely without sounding too "academic." Only about 50% of the photos are what I would call spectacular, but then again this was published in the mid-90s... Overall a great starter book on geisha.

Ricky German says

I like picture style coffee table books, but I'm really picky about what I grab. I usually look for unlikely pictures, ones that are behind the scenes shots, or candid shots and this book is full of them. It's neat to see these performers as people. The text is pretty informative, too. It's the book for someone who likes Japan, Geisha's or clothing.

Anna Tatelman says

Great information, gorgeous photos, and truly insightful, personal quotes.

Trouble says

It's a bunch of pictures of geisha and maiko with mostly-accurate captions. You could probably do better on Photobucket. The one strength of the book is that it shows several older geisha, and you don't usually get to see the wrinkly ones online. Very interesting how the makeup works.

Erica says

The pictures are quite nice. The problem for me was that much of the text spoke about Tokyo Geisha and many of the images were of Kyoto Geiko. It was a bit of a disconnect for me.

Paris Steinbaugh says

Beautiful pictures and interesting information on MODERN Geisha/Geiko. Though I wish there would have been some captions for the photos. And there were also some pictures of Oiran/Tayu, but distinctions were not made between the two for some reason... Geisha/Geiko and Oiran/Tayu are two completely different professions. Although I am interested in both, a newcomer to this history would probably not recognize the significant differences.

Kathleen says

Enlightening!

Sissi says

a beautiful photo book

Patricia says

This book is mostly photos but also text about Geisha, including interviews with them and their clients. A good book for those interested in Geisha.

Sandy says

Beautiful photos. Interesting stories.
