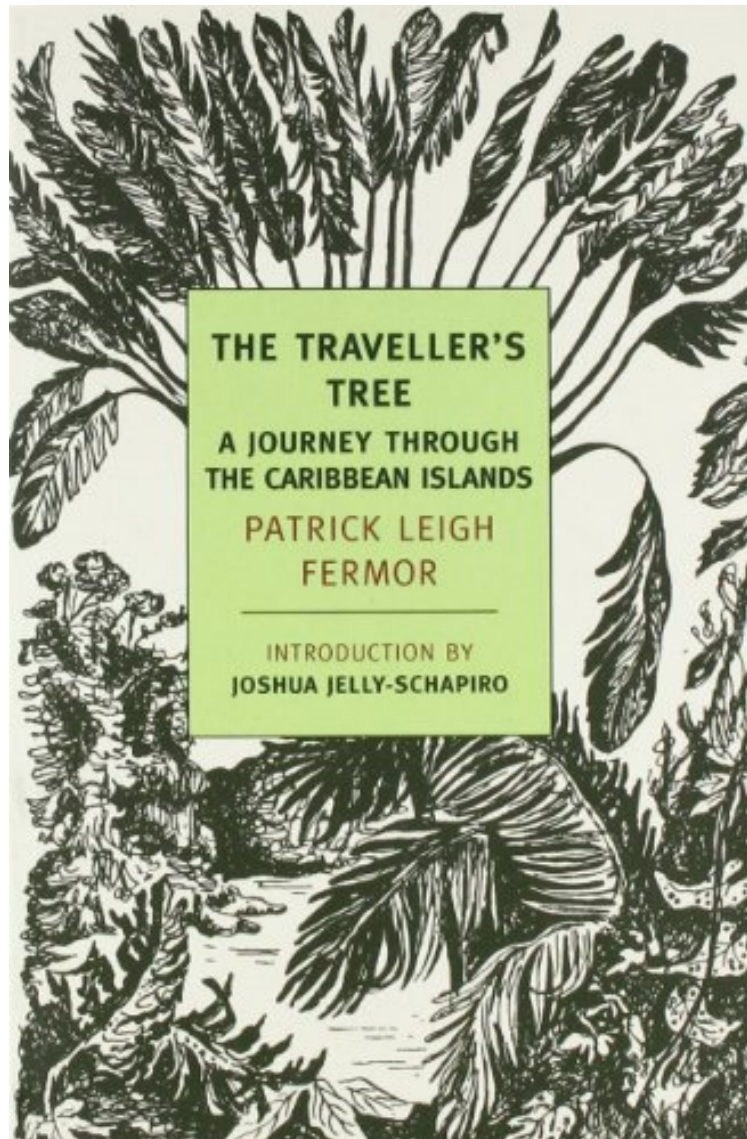


The Traveller's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands (New York Review Books Classics)

Patrick Leigh Fermor

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Patrick Leigh Fermor : The Traveller's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands (New York Review Books Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Traveller's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands (New York Review Books Classics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Portrait of the Islands of the Caribbean as They Once Were By Shoreman A very interesting and informative travel book about the islands of the Caribbean circa 1950, several of which were devastated by the 2017 hurricane. My advice is buy the book but don't plan to visit the Caribbean anytime soon. You'll have a much happier experience as an armchair traveler right now.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. a great read By kaioatey In this book, Fermor, his wife Joan and Greek friend Costa undertake a trip across most of the Caribbean, from Trinidad and Barbados to Grenada and the many Windward/Leeward islands to Jamaica and, ultimately, Cuba. Amongst the visits to the numerous more or less obscure little islands (Saba, anyone?), he barely mentions Puerto Rico and skips the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic entirely. The journey took place in the late 1940s, when many of the myriad islands were about to gain independence from their colonial masters. Fermor, a student of history, is keenly aware of the colonial and pre-colonial past, that is evident everywhere one looks - from the color of islander skin, the architecture, food, animal/plant life to the gaping silence that surrounds the memory of the original inhabitants - peaceful Arawak Indians who, living in their tropical paradise, were first slaughtered by Carib cannibals, then enslaved by the Europeans to work their sugar cane fields. With slavery never far away from the mind, we see the differences in the approach to skin color that characterize each particular island and its social habits. We hear about each island's unique history of wars between the British, French, Dutch and Spanish navies and pirates, relations between the races, and different ethnic origins of slaves (mainly from Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast and the Congos) that led to rebellions by the most warrior like (i.e., the Ashanti). The author is close enough to the 19th century to remind us of life as it used to be lived in the great houses of London and Paris, which were enriched by West Indian slave labor but also famous conflicts that drove the sea-sawing of land grabs between the British and the French. The book is full of historical digressions and scholarly distractions (a notable for Fermor's competent and rather modern discussion of Haitian voodoo). What makes it so hard to put down is his affection for the people, his interest in their lives and distaste for unnatural snobbery and pretension. Like Keith Richards after him, the man went into the (Rastafara) slums of Kingston, partied around with the habitués and lived to tell the tale. He met with the chiefs of the last surviving Caribs and the last surviving Jamaican Maroons, writing about the experiences with eloquence and gracefulness of a man who knows what counts in life. If you are about to embark to the Caribbean or if you have been there, you will appreciate this book.

35 of 37 people found the following review helpful. A Traveller's Rosetta Stone By Daniel Myers Paddy Fermor is an absolutely sui-generis person and writer. This post-war account of his travels through the Caribbean isles comes on the heels of his service with the SOE behind enemy lines in Greece and Crete where he, amongst other things, was the only agent - of whom I am aware - to capture a Nazi General single-handedly, in occupied Greece. And yet, he is anything but smug or bluff, but rather singularly self-effacing in all his writing, falling in love, or yearning to do so, with everyone and, more significantly here, every place where he sojourns and giving the people and the place centre-stage. Also, he refrains from even a hint of talking down to the reader and gives him/her conversations in the French Creole patois as he hears them, and weaves his erudition into the lush writing in a manner which involves the reader with a particular island's lore and history in a mesmerising, rather than off-putting manner. The detailed history which Fermor gives of each island is always fascinating and well-told, and helps to put the sights, sounds, smells he encounters into a deeper context, lending the reader his own deep sense of atavism such as one usually only encounters in works of great literature, such as the best of Conrad and Powys. It is quite beyond the scope of a review such as this one to attempt to impart Fermor's experience on each of the islands, or to compare or to contrast them. There is this book for that! It is even beyond the scope of this reviewer to delve the into Fermor's impressionistic, Romantic mindset, for Fermor does it much better himself describing Martinique: "We rose to leave when the rain abated, and found that the moon had broken through the clouds. The garden was a faint constellation of flowers that were only distinguishable by their pallor from the darkness. Under the dripping mango trees, tier on tier of lawn descended into the darkness. The air was warm and scented, and the forest, faintly rimmed with silver, completely surrounded this high, sloping world. The singing of some Negro women floated up from the village with the echo of the falling waves and the faint gasp of the shingle. Moments like this fill one with gratitude; not necessarily so much because of their incidental beauty, but because of the understanding they bring; they act as a Rosetta stone to a whole system of hieroglyphs. That house, those lights and voices and flowers and smells and sounds, I felt, gave me a better chance of grasping the atmosphere, the scope and mood of Creole life in the Antilles than a library full of memoirs and chronicles." Not to the exclusion of memoirs and chronicles, to be sure, but the reader must surely succumb to the poetic nuances of Fermor's prose to grasp this enchanted Rosetta stone and develop a sixth sense as to places and people in the reading of this unique labour of love.

In the late 1940s Patrick Leigh Fermor, now widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's greatest travel writers, set out to explore the then relatively little-visited islands of the Caribbean. Rather than a comprehensive political or historical study of the region, *The Travellers Tree*, Leigh Fermor's first book, gives us his own vivid, idiosyncratic impressions of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, Barbados, Trinidad, and Haiti, among other islands. Here we watch Leigh Fermor walk the dusty roads of the countryside and the broad avenues of former colonial capitals, equally at home among the peasant and the elite, the laborer and the artist. He listens to steel drum bands, delights in the

Congo dancing that closes out Havanas Carnival, and observes vodou and Rastafarian rites, all with the generous curiosity and easy erudition that readers will recognize from his subsequent classic accounts *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water*.

"Leigh Fermor exults in the otherness of the far-flung place . He demands nothing from those countries save an opportunity to slip quietly under their skin." Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker* "Being a natural romantic, Leigh Fermor was able to probe the hidden recesses of this mixed civilization and to present us with a picture of the Indies more penetrating and original than any that has been presented before." Harold Nicholson, *The Observer* "Before mass-market guides like *Frommers* and *Lonely Planet*, travelogues were tourists main resources outside Europe. For the 1950s Caribbean, Patrick Leigh Fermors *The Travellers Tree* was the bible." *The New York Times* "Still the best piece of travel writing on the Caribbean." *The Guardian* Praise for Patrick Leigh Fermor: "One of the greatest travel writers of all time" *The Sunday Times* A unique mixture of hero, historian, traveler and writer; the last and the greatest of a generation whose like we won't see again. *Geographical* The finest traveling companion we could ever have . . . His head is stocked with enough cultural lore and poetic fancy to make every league an adventure. *Evening Standard* If all Europe were laid waste tomorrow, one might do worse than attempt to recreate it, or at least to preserve some sense of historical splendor and variety, by immersing oneself in the travel books of Patrick Leigh Fermor. Ben Downing, *The Paris About the Author* Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915-2011) was an intrepid traveler, a heroic soldier, and a writer with a unique prose style. After his stormy schooldays, followed by the walk across Europe to Constantinople that begins in *A Time of Gifts* (1977) and continues through *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986), he lived and traveled in the Balkans and the Greek Archipelago. His books *Mani* (1958) and *Roumeli* (1966) attest to his deep interest in languages and remote places. In the Second World War he joined the Irish Guards, became a liaison ofcer in Albania, and fought in Greece and Crete. He was awarded the DSO and OBE. He lived partly in Greece in the house he designed with his wife, Joan, in an olive grove in the Mani and partly in Worcestershire. He was knighted in 2004 for his services to literature and to British-Greek relations. Joshua Jelly-Schapiro is a doctoral student in geography at the University of California, Berkeley. He has written for *The Guardian*, *The Believer*, *The Nation*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The New York of Books*, among other publications. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The Caribbean as Fermor experienced it in the 1940's was a world of incredible fusions and contradictions that didn't exist anywhere else in the world - the mix of indigenous, African and European cultures, the juxtaposition of American advertisements with ancient cannibal practices, the incredible richness of the natural environment coupled with the decaying state of the colonial cities. Although Fermor had travelled extensively, he found the West Indies to be unlike anything he could have imagined, and each new experience is a surprise. This book is a pleasure to read, full of excitement and rich sensory experience, as well as beautifully written. Fermor's first view of the islands demonstrates the elegance of his language: "To port, pale green islands were floating on the water, but the main body of Grande Terre...lay in shadow on the starboard side between us and the dawn. It was just possible to descry the waves of black vegetation and the lakes of mist entangled in the treetops where the country dipped. In the space of a few minutes the sunrise melted from violet into amber, from amber into scarlet, from scarlet into zinc and from zinc into saffron. The dark vegetation became a line of giant, pale green parsley, which hovered a hundred yards away in a fluttering cumulus that nothing appeared to tether to either land or sea." Language, religion, costume, geography - the author inquires into everything, and because of this natural curiosity, he gets himself into some interesting, and often funny, situations, like being chased around the beach by a blindfolded man with a divining rod. Equally interesting, though, are his descriptions of the specific melding of cultures that has occurred exclusively in these islands: "The afternoon was baking and shadowless, and the town seemed only with an effort to remain upright among its thoroughfares of dust. It was as empty as a sarcophagus. The French guide-book describes it as a great centre of elegant Creole life in the past, hinting at routs and cavalcades and banquets of unparalleled sumptuousness. Acts of God must have fallen upon it with really purposeful vindictiveness, for not by the most violent manhandling of the imagination could one associate a chandelier or a powdered wig with this collection of hovels. Not even a dog was to be seen. But behind a tall crucifix stood a cemetery of such dimensions - Pere Lachaise and the Campo Santo gone mad...These acres inhabited by the dead, these miniature hails and palaces and opera-houses, were, it occurred to me, the real town, and the houses falling to ruins outside the railings were in the nature of a negligible suburb." He is generally respectful of the cultures he encounters, and describes the dining habits of cannibals without batting an eyelash: "The victims were prepared while still alive, by cutting slits down the back and sides into which pimentos and other herbs were stuffed. After being dispatched with a mace, they were trussed to poles and roasted over a medium fire, while the women busied themselves turning and basting, and catching the lard in gourds and calabashes, which they allowed to set and then stored away. They would eagerly lick the sticks where the gravy had fallen. Often the meal was half roasted, and then half boiled. Some of the meat was eaten on the spot, the rest was cut up and smoked and also prudently put by for lean or unpatriotic periods in the future. But there was a symbolical aspect to these banquets. They were considered to seal a military victory, to put it for ever beyond question. De Rochefort reports that a Carib prisoner, while being made ready, would jeer at his captors, saying that, although they would soon be eating him, he had already swallowed so

many of their family or tribe, and was so thoroughly nourished on their neighbours and kin, that they would virtually be eating one of their own people. This kind of language would continue until the final blow was delivered. It never failed to exasperate the company, and to cast an atmosphere of dejection over the whole meal." That is the beauty of this narrative - it is just one tasty morsel after another.