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Adventure, Romance And War In The Far East: The Iris Hay-Edie Diary: A Historical Memoir



Synopsis

Adventure, romance and war in the Far East is a fascinating true story based on the diary and memoir of Iris Hay-Edie, an attractive and free-spirited Scottish girl who grew up in the glamorous French Riviera during the 1920s. Suffering under her strict mother, she ran away from home and never turned back. Iris leads us on an enchanted journey around the world and through the Far East to what were then remote colonies of European empires during the 1930s. Reaching Hong Kong, she falls in love, but soon after, the Japanese invade the island and bomb her new home with her and her young family inside it. Opting to escape prison camp, they flee across China, over the Hump of the Himalayas, to India, Kashmir and beyond. Her outgoing and positive personality captivates the reader, and her old photos and postcards add an extra dimension of interest to this historical account of her extraordinary life as a rebellious, independent woman in a bygone era of colonial powers and decadence, of the brutal war in the Pacific, and of the growth of the Far East into the powerhouse that Asia is today.

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Customer Reviews

Justin Wheeler, through access to his grandmother Iris Hay-Edie's diaries, numerous photographs and news summaries of the times, has done a wonderful job depicting her glamorous,

global, heart-rending, terrifying and always extraordinary life spanning most of the 19th Century. Daughter of an English diplomat and his chillingly-portrayed socialite wife, Iris's childhood alternated between boarding schools and various grand chateaux in the south of France, complete with ghosts. Lonely and virtually abandoned along with her two older brothers and denied any semblance of a normal family life, Iris could have grown up a bitter woman. Instead, her wryly matter-of-fact attitude and advanced survival skills served her well from the time she was left alone at the age of four to take care of the screaming fits of the maid's baby, to the siege and invasion of Hong Kong by the Japanese in 1942, shelling and bombardment, and her escape by air with her Norwegian husband and two small children over the Himalayas to India. In between, Iris lived a life with few limits, spanning the heights and the depths, always pushing boundaries, open to new experiences, the joy of chance acquaintances, and adventures on at least four continents. Throughout there is the nostalgic glamor of a world gone by: Did people really live like that? It's hard now to imagine. I particularly empathize with the bravely down-to-earth voice of a young child growing up in a daunting world, applauding her victories and achievements, and delighting in the happiness of her two marriages. She certainly deserved it!

I picked up this book to browse the prologue and before I knew it I was half way through the book. This is a compelling story of a young woman who lived in dangerously exciting times and found herself more than a match for whatever came her way. Iris was an inveterate adventurer who never dwells on her hardships but always finds magic and beauty and fun at every opportunity. How she managed to escape the Japanese invaders by fleeing through China, keeping her very young children alive and fed, and still writing in her diary is beyond me. It was a sad day when I finished Iris' diary and memoir and had to go back to my tame life....

The Iris Hay-Edie Diary Iris tells us that, when she was a little girl, living with her mother near Monte Carlo, her mother, who loved to gamble in the Casino, would leave her sitting outside in the Café de Paris all by herself with her crochet work. There she watched the elegantly clad ladies and gentlemen going in, and later when they came out, trying to guess which ones had lost their fortunes and would commit suicide. She also wished that when she grew up she would be an adventurer and travel to the farthest and strangest places. Born in 1909 to wealthy upper class parents, she spent most of her youth in France, first living alone with her younger brother in a haunted gothic castle on the Côte d'Azur and later in Paris in the company of artists and writers. Aged 21, she managed to escape from her mother's suffocating control and with £7 in her

purse, eventually reached Hong Kong where her elder brother worked. There she met and married a Norwegian, the main love of her life. She describes vividly the horrors of the Japanese capture of the colony, the excitement of her escape with her husband and two small children, their journey across bandit infested and war-torn China, their stay in India in the waning years of the British Raj, their brush with Gandhi's non-violent Quit India movement, their arrival back in war stricken Europe, and her final post-war years, first in the South of France and later in Jamaica. Iris died in her hundredth year, having achieved her girlhood wish of finding adventure in the farthest and strangest places, all vividly and movingly portrayed in this memoir. Great scope for a movie!

What an amazing personal account of a most resilient adventure seeking woman. I found the book to be a "page turner", enthralled to continue with Iris as she recounted incredible unexpected circumstances, which she seemed to take in stride...the beautiful descriptions of her love of her husband & children...and generally her unflappable & exuberant love of life. The historical facts of life & war & becoming refugees filled a void in my world history that I appreciated & found very informative. I think this would make a wonderful book club read as it shares a very different way of life & yet is rich with the current topics regarding the way one can become entangled with a deep love, the way one rears children, embracing excitement & not fear...and the horror of war & how one manages day to day in the midst of chaos & the unknown.

What an adventure! I greatly enjoyed reading this memoir of life across the globe, focusing mostly on the 1930's and 40's. Iris had an unconventional upbringing (at least by my standards), but it seems to have served her well in the trials and joys that came in her life. Her trip to Hong Kong to visit her brother and traveling around the globe in 7 months all made for great reading. Meeting her husband, life in Hong Kong as WWII approaches and then arrives in full force, traveling across China with 2 small children...again, fascinating. The historical notes that were added in by the editor really helped me place some of the diary entries in context. The photos/post cards added hugely, too. I would have loved to have met the author. I'm recommending this book to my book club.

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