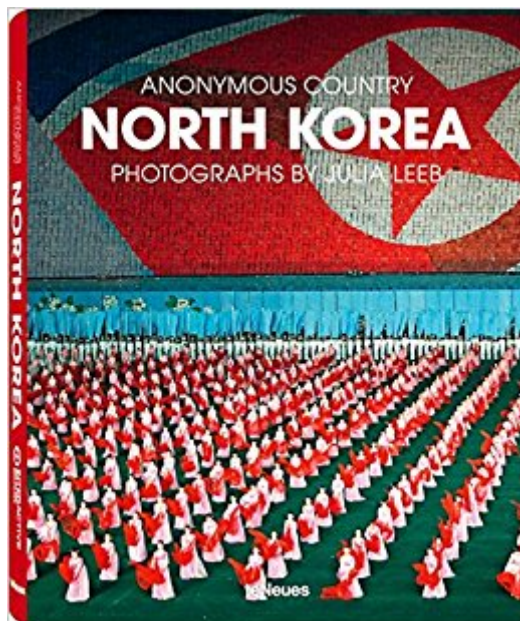


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North Korea: Anonymous Country



Synopsis

North Korea certainly wouldn't come first on a general list of dream destinations. Nevertheless, the country exudes an eerie fascination. It's a mystery, an anonymous country isolated from the rest of the world. With two friends, German photojournalist Julia Leeb made a journey to better understand the country and its people. The result is a spectacular illustrated volume that offers a riveting look at its architecture, culture, and society. Readers get to immerse themselves in an unknown world. We witness celebrations for the 100th birthday of the country's founder, Kim Il Sung, and follow hundreds of North Koreans as they participate in an Arirang (Korean folk song) synchronized dance spectacle. But even the "quieter" impressions evoke emotion in the viewer: an excited bride, a mother with child--everyday scenes that are somehow quite different. These multi-layered images linger in the memory long afterwards, even when you have already put the book aside.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an amazing work. I heard about it on NPR and pre-ordered the book. I am fascinated by NK, its leadership, philosophy, and culture. I am confounded by the horrific stories of the few that have escaped the grasp of its prison camps. I pray daily for the people of NK, their liberation, and peace in the region. Leeb has done an amazing service for us. This book is more than a glimpse into North Korea. It captures the heart and soul of the people. As I admire their architecture, cities, and geography I look deep into the eyes of Leeb's subjects. I ponder if they are curious about life of the outside of NK as much as I am curious about their life on the inside. I have read so much on NK I thought at first to mention that the narrative is light comparably in this work. However as I have

returned to the pages day after day I am haunted by a narrative in photography that words cannot match. This book is a treasure.

A beautiful book HOWEVER.....the ink gave off such strong vapors that it gave me a headache. If you purchase this item, let it air out for a few days before perusing the photos.

The pictures are great. So is the introductory essay telling the story of the trip.

we could see more photos of inside people's houses.

I really don't enjoy writing nasty reviews, but this book REALLY deserves it. Where do I start? I suppose the images are the best starting point. What you have here (with perhaps five exceptions out of 100+ frames) is a tedious series that feeds into every cliché we already know about NK. Take my word for it, you have seen almost all these pictures in one form or other before, and there is nothing, NOTHING new or revealing in this selection. There are photos of monumental architecture, duly shot by every tourist who goes there, far too many photos of an evening spent at mass games (casting no new light on them and already thoroughly documented by umpteen photographers before her,) and photos purporting to be of 'daily life', which show us nothing of daily life in NK whatsoever - in actual fact what they do show is a bit of Pyongyang. Most importantly, there are almost no photos of locals, much less a portrait, and very, very little that hints at the humanity of your average North Korean (which, contrary to popular perceptions, certainly exists). On those extremely rare occasions when there is a frame of a local, she writes in the caption that the image was taken at great risk to herself, which is utter rubbish. Even worse, there is simply no visual language to this collection. I have no sense of Leeb's personality at all, no sense of subtext, no sense of humour, nothing. They are tourist snapshots, no more no less. And I am coming from some experience, having been all over North Korea quite a number of times. On that basis I have the advantage of being able to identify every single location where Leeb's pictures were taken, namely, Pyongyang (the vast majority), Nampo (not many), Sariwon (not many) and Kaesong/the DMZ. Apparently she went to Mt Myohang as well, which is likely since it is on most standard tours. The point, however, is that loftily calling a book that consists almost entirely of Pyongyang images 'North Korea' is like taking photos of New York and calling the book 'America'. It's laughable. Now, if you look at a map of NK, you will quickly establish that based on the book's images Leeb visited but the tiniest part of the country, and limited herself to the basic cookie-cutter tour (tours are compulsory

there). There is nothing from provincial NK proper, much less from further-flung regions where travel is considerably more gruelling than the little circle she undertook. And why do I harp on about this? Well, she states in her essay at the beginning that she and the two people with her spent 'several weeks' in NK, and she has said elsewhere that she travelled 3000 km within the country. Well based on her images in this book there is nothing whatsoever to support this. There is no way she spent several weeks doing the standard five day tour, nor is there any way that she somehow clocked up thousands of kilometres doing a loop that covers a few hundred. She is at pains in her introductory text to depict herself as a courageous freedom-fighter, yet the reality is something rather more insipid I'm afraid. So she is having us on. This is the emperor's new clothes of 'photojournalism' (as she calls it), preying on the general ignorance of the buying public about NK. I find this somewhat ironic I have to say, since the end result is that she is equally as guilty of spinning lies to her buyers as the regime she wants to criticise. Anyway, I could go on about this at length (indeed I already have). My advice: do not fall for this fraud. If you want to see pictures of NK, just type it into Google images, or better still look up David Guttenfelder or Eric Lafforgue. Just steer clear of this book, which should never have hit the shelves (shame on you TeNeues!)

Fantastic inside to North Korea!

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