



Book reviews Genevieve Swart

One man's day job is another's fancy



**Hotel Heaven:
Confessions Of A
Luxury Hotel
Addict**
Matthew Brace
Random House,
\$24.95

IN 2002, Matthew Brace filed his swan song report as a foreign

correspondent and flew to Bali to become a full-time luxury travel writer, starting with a review of the island's five-star hotels. He was just settling in, sipping a gin and tonic in the plunge pool at the Four Seasons at Jimbaran Bay, when the Bali bombs went off.

"Of all the times I could have picked to give up being a foreign correspondent, this must have been the worst," Brace writes. As one of few reporters on the scene, he was immediately absorbed in covering the blasts. But that story has been told elsewhere and is not the subject of this piece: instead, Brace poignantly describes how terrorism devastated Bali's hotel industry, yet staff valiantly continued to provide service as usual. "It all seemed so painfully hopeless, yet at the same time the dedication of the hotel's staff was heart-warming," he writes.

Bali is a moving, human chapter in *Hotel Heaven*, a collection of histories, interviews and anecdotes welded together by the idea Brace is an addict who needs regular luxury fixes. "It's been an arduous 10-year mission . . . globetrotting from five-star suite to five-star suite all in the name of research," he writes. Envious readers will turn a brighter shade of green on learning Brace stays free of charge. But what price independence and integrity? The author insists he can't be bought with a complimentary limo and a bottle of Veuve Clicquot and, to ensure fair and honest reviews, sneaks about hotels after midnight and asks fellow guests to share their views (a tactic that proved embarrassing in Costa Rica when a couple invited him back to their room for a different kind of sharing). Yet Brace declines to name Sydney luxury hotels that were "rude" and "generally useless" – perhaps saving them for *Hotel Hell*?

An English writer, Brace lives in Sydney, where he contributes to *The Sun-Herald* and other newspapers, and gives Australian hotels ample attention, including the Gold Coast's "unapologetically gaudy" Palazzo Versace, scene of a foray into celebrity hunting and tabloid journalism, and Sydney's

Observatory Hotel, which rates as one of the world's finest. Rather than a dry list of accommodation, the memoir is an entertaining feast, spiced with self-deprecating comedy in which Brace is the outsider in a sea of wealth and designer labels (he does have a Hermes bag but found it on a plane).

Establishments are separated into those famous for their history, clients, location, service and design ("peacock" showy or "cool cat" minimalist). Discover a world where bathtubs are big enough for an entire swingers' club, airport pick-ups have a VIP hierarchy (from Mercedes to Rolls-Royce to helicopters) and guests dream of staying at hotels where celebrity murder, suicide or sex scandals have taken place. Where will it end? At the bottom of the ocean, perhaps. The final chapter, *Future-luxe*, is a deeply fascinating account of submarine hotels planned in Fiji and Dubai.

The book is not just for voyeurs. Brace reveals luxury travel is a growing market: no longer are places such as West Hollywood's Sunset Tower and Dubai's Burj Al Arab the sole domain of princes, rock stars and rich Russians. Ordinary people, worn out by work stress, are saving up to indulge in extravagant holidays.



Sun Herald
Sunday 18/3/2007
Page: 4
Section: Travel
Region: Sydney Circulation: 507,245
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 731.38 sq.cms.
Published: -----S

Brief: HEADLINE
Page 2 of 3



Walking With The Anzacs
Mat McLachlan
Hachette Australia,
\$40

GALLIPOLI is the most famous, but many more diggers were killed on the

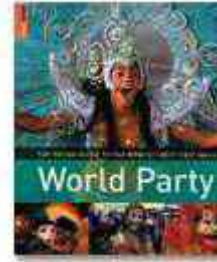
Western Front during World War I – 45,000 Anzacs died in France and Belgium. Mat McLachlan covers 14 battlefields in this guide, highly recommended for anyone planning a walking tour. McLachlan divides the Western Front into Belgium, French Flanders, the Somme, the Hindenburg Line and the Aisne – and the depth of his research is remarkable, down to the smallest details of guns captured, ditches sheltered in and valiant last stands made. Visitors will be able to look at the fertile green farmland of Belgium, for instance, and comprehend the enormity of the Battle of Passchendaele, “fought in a quagmire; a featureless moonscape of overlapping shell craters”. Clearly not a guidebook written from the comfort of home, McLachlan really has walked in the footsteps of Anzacs, and done a fine job of it.



Aboriginal Darwin
Toni Bauman
Aboriginal Studies Press,
\$34.95

INSTEAD of lifting the lid on secret places, this book reveals the hidden

history of familiar landmarks. Visit the old Darwin Oval, for example, where long before AFL took off, Aborigines gathered in the clearing to hold ritualised fights to resolve disputes. Walk along the Esplanade, once a popular camp site for the Larrakia, the traditional owners of the land and waters of the greater Darwin region. Visitors now flock to Mindil Beach for its night markets – the area was once a burial ground. “Aboriginal Darwin is both a guidebook and an alternative social history,” writes Toni Bauman, a social anthropologist. Bauman has produced an insightful and sensitive guide to Aboriginal culture, with a section on responsible travel including rules on visiting communities. For visitors wanting to open the door to indigenous culture in the Top End’s tropical city, this book is a key.



World Party Rough Guides,
\$39.95

NO need to wait for a personal invite to these parties –

gatecrashers are welcome. This colourful glossy guide celebrates more than 200 festivals around the world, with most annual events mainstream or well-known – Glastonbury, Berlin’s Love Parade and St Patrick’s Day, for example. A few wacky ones have been caught in the net. Scotland’s Common Riding “combines the thrills of Pamplona’s Fiesta de San Fermin with the concentrated drinking of Munich’s Oktoberfest”. Serbia’s Dragacevo Trumpet Festival is “the largest trumpet event on the planet”. Australia is known for two things: the Sydney Mardi Gras and the Birdsville races. An index lists festivals by country and month. Patchily written by different scribes, the guide does have a great set of festival symbols – a sneaky way of saying “drink, drugs and nudity!” without having to spell it out.



The Rough Guide To Climate Change
Robert Henson
Rough Guides,
\$24.95

PLANES’ greenhouse gas emissions have rendered the term “eco travel”

nonsensical (“take only photos, leave only carbon footprints” doesn’t have the same ring to it). Science writer Robert Henson here provides a clear, informed and balanced explanation of global warming’s symptoms, science and

solutions, drawing on decades of research and tackling questions such as “What’s the Kyoto Protocol and will it help?” Learn the difference between global warming and climate change, find how to reduce your carbon footprint and take sides in *A Heated Debate*, a chapter exploring the battle between activists and sceptics, and the role of oil companies in financing sceptical think-tanks. The book is climate-neutral, that is, publishers paid money to an offset scheme to cover the CO₂ emitted in production. The previous Rough Guide reviewed, *World Party*, has no such disclaimer.



Sun Herald
Sunday 18/3/2007
Page: 4
Section: Travel
Region: Sydney Circulation: 507,245
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 731.38 sq.cms.
Published: -----S

Brief: HEADLINE
Page 3 of 3



HE'LL TAKE IT: Matthew Brace says hotels such as the Burj Al Arab in Dubai are being sought out by ordinary folk who want an escape