



Geisha: The Remarkable Truth Behind the Fiction: The Secret History of a Vanishing World

Lesley Downer

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Ever since Westerners arrived in Japan, they have been intrigued by Japanese womanhood and, above all, the geisha.

This fascination has spawned a wealth of extraordinary fictional creations, from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* to Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

The reality of the geisha's existence, though — whether today or in history — has very rarely been addressed.

The real, hidden history of the geisha — and the contemporary reality of this intensely private and disappearing world — is here fully and brilliantly explored by an award-winning writer.

Lesley Downer describes the history of the practise, one which is endangered in the modern era.

By speaking to geishas and those who spend time with them, the author gives a well-rounded portrait, which is at times unsettling and at others enthralling.

'Lesley Downer has taken the essential truth of geisha culture — its mystery — and peeled it away layer after layer like an onion. I highly recommend her engaging and enlightening examination of this little-known world' – Arthur Golden, author of *Memoirs of a Geisha*

'A fascinating book...packed with riveting detail' – The Times

'Downer skilfully builds up a picture of the lives of geisha set against the Japanese attitudes towards sex and marriage...The detail is fascinating...an enthralling account' – Literary Review

'A comprehensive and revealing personal and historical account...full of swashbuckling, romantic stories' – Sunday Express

'Fascinating and fluent...Downer manages to tease the most extraordinary stories from scores of geisha...To evoke their words with such clarity is nothing short of stunning' – Mail on Sunday

'I read with mounting rapture...Lesley Downer has created a masterpiece in subject and mood; her style suits the restrained elegance, what geisha call "shibui", of her subject' – Spectator

'Lesley Downer...has achieved something remarkable in her part-history, part-reportage exploration of the Geisha world...Her book is shot through with cultural comparisons that anchor her explanations in the western reader's experience...Downer provides what may be the most accessible, entertaining and amusing sexual history of Japan and western perceptions of Japan now available' – Scotsman

‘It is a testimony to Downer and her fascinating book that she penetrated their little-known world and gained the trust of Japan’s best-known and least understood figures’ – The Big Issue

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Lesley Downer was born in London. Her father was a professor of Chinese, which stimulated her passion for China, Japan and Asia. After a Masters in South Asian Studies, she lived in Japan as a Westerner gaining a true appreciation for womanhood in her new home. She published a memoir, *On the Narrow Road to the Deep North*, which was turned into a documentary film.

Lesley Downer also presented a BBC TV series on Japanese cooking, and wrote *The Brothers*, about a wealthy Japanese family. As well as her well-received book on geisha, she has written about one specific geisha, Madame Sadayakko, and several works of fiction, including *Across a Bridge of Dreams* and, in 2013, *The Samurai’s Daughter*.

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