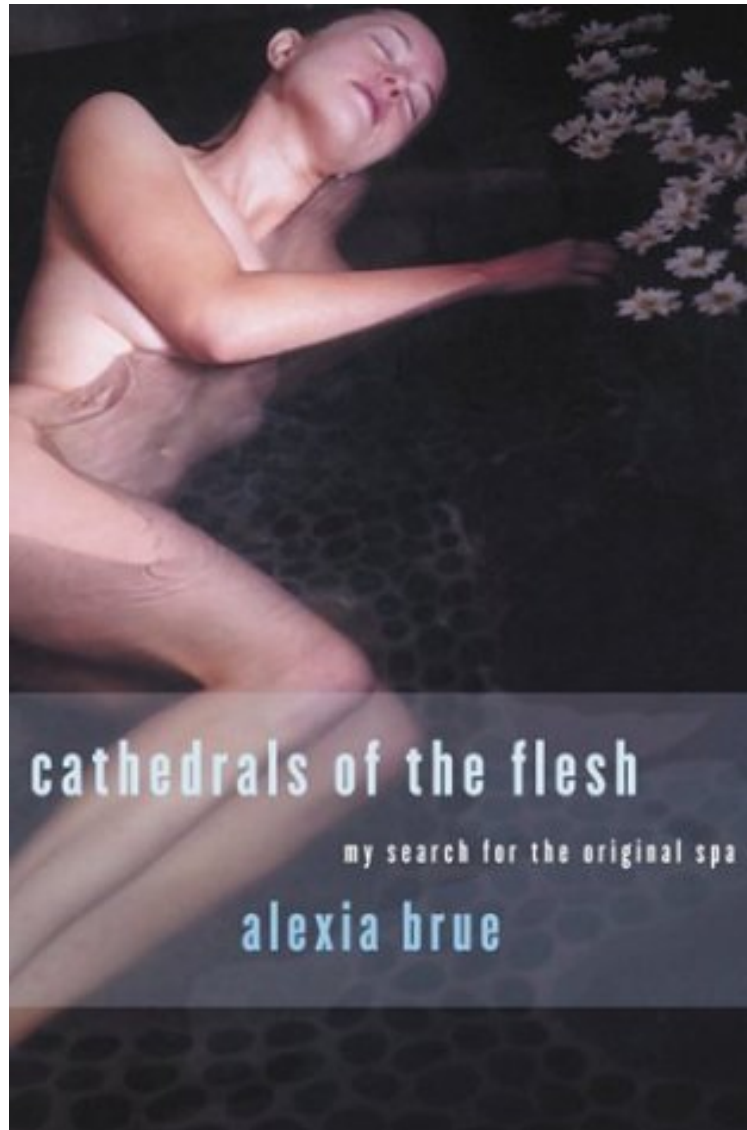


Cathedrals of the Flesh: My Search for the Perfect Bath

Alexia Brue

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#2907942 in Books Bloomsbury USA 2003-01-22 2003-01-22Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 219.96 x 23.62 x 5.72l, .1 #File Name: 1582341168256 pagesAlexia BrueSpasTravel | File size: 52.Mb

Alexia Brue : Cathedrals of the Flesh: My Search for the Perfect Bath before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cathedrals of the Flesh: My Search for the Perfect Bath:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. She does it all with a pretty clear eyeBy Rebecca ColemanAs a fan of the bathing culture the author investigates in this book, I was looking forward to a sort of travelogue through these cultures around the world. Brue offers that, exploring the banyas of Russia, hammams of Turkey, sento and onsen in Japan, and saunas in Finland. She does it all with a pretty clear eye, matter-of-factly describing some of the less stellar moments and aspects of the various baths and how similar ones compare against each other. She works in some of the

history of bathing, and although I read a complaint or two from readers about the way she worked romance into the book, as an author myself I know that editors often ask for that and many readers like it. (She kept it to a minimum.) There is a helpful list of baths at the end of the book for readers interested in exploring such places themselves. In a few ways, the book fell short. First and most importantly, she left out any mention of South Korea and jjimjilbangs, or Korean spas, which are amazing pool-and-sauna facilities that are some of the best in the world and a big part of Korean culture. Numerous large jjimjilbangs can be found in the United States and are used by Koreans and Americans alike. In the appendix of her book she makes passing reference to two public baths in South Korea, but they are not jjimjilbangs and the largest and most famous of those are not mentioned. It's a significant omission, especially given the space devoted to saunas, which are less a "bath" than these. She also glosses disparagingly over the Yunessun "spa theme park" in Japan, which is a fascinating place with green tea, wine, and coffee baths as well as themed baths from many cultures. While that place might be too cheesy for her tastes, it would be very interesting to her readers and its existence reflects something meaningful about Japanese bathing culture. The grimy, rather scary authenticity of Russian baths gets plenty of space in the book, but Yunessun is dismissed in a sentence. Finally, the Kindle version has many serious editing errors, including several paragraphs that cut off midway through and are never finished (made me wonder just how much content was missing-- it could have been a lot) and many proofreading mistakes. None of this is Brue's fault, but the mistakes are serious enough that it is fair to say that Bloomsbury is selling a damaged version of the book to readers, and with a pub date of 2010 they should have fixed this by now. I had thought of Bloomsbury as a good publisher and it was surprising to see their poor editing for this version. Overall I recommend this book to those interested in bathing culture. It is not a complete guide, but it is an interesting firsthand account and contains some good resources. Brue did a good job creating a travel narrative that is an enjoyable read.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Even Better Than a Bath
By Kenneth L. Adelman
This book's even better than a bath. Brue is a wonderful writer, but far beyond that, she's a wonderful storyteller. The quest for the perfect bath forms the plot line, but the quest makes a far richer tale than any particular bath. Even for those of us in quest of nothing more than a daily shower, this makes for wonderful reading, as Brue is witty, insightful, and above all humorous. While she acts humble as a stranger in strange lands pursuing a strange interest, she shouldn't be humble as a story-teller. She's gifted in taking a specialized field and making it lively, even delightful, to anyone who loves human nature and passions. I'd recommend it strongly -- and have to loads of people.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I really liked this book
By Sheri McCaskill
I really liked this book! Interesting, and written with an easy to read conversational tone. She even has a list in the back with places to visit. There were quite a few typos in it though.

A sensual tour of the world's great bathing cultures. People journey to Greece for the ruins, Turkey for the Hagia Sophia, and Russia for St. Basil's, but Alexia Brue travels with a different itinerary: to visit the baths. What starts off as an innocent vacation quickly becomes an obsession, as the author ventures to Turkey, Greece, Russia, Finland, and Japan to sample the range of spa cultures and bathing traditions the world has to offer. Caught up in the tide of exploration and crossing paths with fellow travelers along the way, Alexia drifts further and further away from the life she left behind in New York City. Hoping to find a thriving local bath scene, she dips into hamams, banyas, saunas, and onsen, finding both disappointment and bliss. At once deeply personal and highly informative, full of intimacies, discoveries, and unexpected twists, *Cathedrals of the Flesh* is the candid and playful account of one woman's determination to follow her passion, ultimately inspiring readers to do the same.

From Publishers Weekly
Originally undertaken as research for setting up a Turkish bath business in New York City, journalist Brue's project revealed that her cultural curiosity was greater than her entrepreneurial drive. At first, the book hews too closely to the genesis of Brue's endeavor as the opening chapters, about her initiation at various Parisian baths and her first forays in Turkey, are overshadowed by the urge to take notes for the business. But then there's a trip to Greece to visit ancient thermae—a fine excuse to meditate on the centrality of baths to classical culture—followed by an amusing stay in Russia, where skillful flogging at scorching banyas proves suffering can still be a cultivated art. It's then on to Finland and Japan, where it's clear this has become a cultural inquiry, not a business research project. Brue, who's bold enough to wander abroad speaking a bare handful of polite phrases, does get herself into the proverbial hot water on occasion—mistakenly stripping naked for a Japanese mixed sex bath, for example—but with humor and good attitude she manages to learn even from her faux pas. Her style is delightfully informal, packing in a lot of (admittedly esoteric) information, e.g., what's the physiological effect of birch twig beatings? "What sicko" invented the Japanese electric bath? And who knew how popular breast implants are with young Russian women, or that they have their pubic hair waxed down to a Mohawk? Better her than me, many readers may be muttering, but isn't that the point of armchair travel? Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From The New Yorker
This entertaining picaresque chronicles the author's mostly naked reconnaissance of the world's public baths, from cavernous marble Turkish hamams and smoky Helsinki saunas to militantly hot Moscow banyas and a New York bathhouse of dubious hygiene. Between fierce scrubbings and whippings with birch twigs, Brue stealthily observes her

fellow-bathers: jaded Russians (commenting on the decline of banyas, one says, "Stalin very bad man, so bad banyas"), fleshy Brooklynites discussing linoleum, and Romanian strippers who refuse to take off their swimsuits at a Japanese hot spring. Brue's depiction of herself as a bumbling innocent abroad isn't entirely believable, but her approach to other cultures is refreshingly humble, and her devotion to the pleasures of bathing with strangers makes a seductive case for "skinship," in which, naked together in the same water, "you do away with all the normal social barriers in life." Copyright 2005 The New Yorker From Booklist In Western cultures, where modern bathrooms resemble sybaritic pleasure domes but where the act of cleansing oneself is considered a supremely solitary pursuit, the concept of communal bathing is frequently regarded with a combination of curiosity and contempt. Yet, since the days of ancient Rome, such collective bathing environments have been considered essential to health, happiness, and, oh yes, hygiene. Ostensibly conducting research prior to opening her own Manhattan bathhouse, Brue embarked on an ambitious tour of the world's renowned, and renegade, bathing cultures. From Finland's supersanitary saunas to Russia's bacchanalian banyas and Turkey's harmonious hamams to Japan's outdoor onsens, Brue intrepidly plunges into public bathing's rites and rituals. So preposterous is its premise, yet so enchanting is its execution, that one can easily forgive Brue her youthful exuberance and unabashed enthusiasm as she treats readers to more than a steam-filled spa safari. Awash with insight into the human condition, Brue displays a knack for getting people, herself included, to "come clean" in unexpected and entertaining ways. Carol Haggas Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved