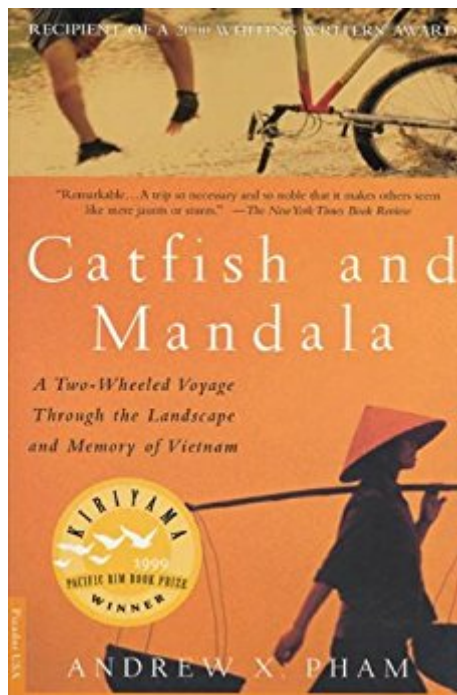




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Catfish And Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through The Landscape And Memory Of Vietnam



Synopsis

A Vietnamese Bicycle Days by a stunning new voice in American letters. Andrew X. Pham dreamed of becoming a writer. Born in Vietnam and raised in California, he held technical jobs at United Airlines-and always carried a letter of resignation in his briefcase. His father had been a POW of the Vietcong; his family came to America as "boat people." His sister committed suicide, prompting Andrew to quit his job. He sold all of his possessions and embarked on a year-long bicycle journey that took him through the Mexican desert, where he was treated as a *bueno hermano*, a "good brother"; around a thousand-mile loop from Narita to Kyoto in Japan; and, after five months and 2,357 miles, to Saigon, where he finds "nothing familiar in the bombed-out darkness." In Mexico he's treated kindly as a *Vietnamito*, though he shouts, "I'm American, Vietnamese American!" In Vietnam, he's taken for Japanese or Korean by his countrymen, except, of course, by his relatives, who doubt that as a Vietnamese he has the stamina to complete his journey ("Only Westerners can do it"); and in the United States he's considered anything but American. A vibrant, picaresque memoir written with narrative flair and a wonderful, eye-opening sense of adventure, *Catfish and Mandala* is an unforgettable search for cultural identity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An extraordinarily well-written memoir of a young Vietnamese-American who bicycled back to his roots. During the year of his strange, sad, tough bittersweet journey through Vietnam, Andrew Pham recalls his youth, his recent past, and his love for his family, Vietnam, and America. Pham weaves his life story with that perfect blend of humor-sadness-humor that has the reader laughing one moment and choking down tears the next. An excellent read!

This book speaks of one man's journey to go to Vietnam, after being raised in America (Viet-kieu). It goes into depth about his preconceptions, commitments, discoveries, challenges, and reactions of others to his presence in Vietnam. The book describes what it must've been like to try to get out of the country when it was besieged through descriptive stories of older generations. Cultural and historical background, through details of family relationships, everyday life, and differing beliefs, gives the book depth. I learned about filial relationships, friendship, etiquette, entrepreneurship, tourism, dealing with change and finding your roots.

This is a powerful and very well written book. I know Vietnam rather well (not as a tourist) and this is a rare book that gives the reader an understanding of the traumatic postwar period in this sad and beautiful country. But the book is also a chronicle of a Vietnamese refugee family and its tragic American Odyssey, and finally it is a travelogue and a book for cyclists (like me) to admire. But above all the combination of honesty and fine prose makes this a special book and so much more fulfilling than the endless sentimental and US -centric Vietnam War books that obscure the truth about this extraordinary country.

In preparation for my month-long trip to Vietnam in Jan-Feb '03, I spent quite some time on , and discovered this jewel of a book! I am most grateful to previous readers of "Catfish and Mandala" who rated this a 5-star read, and who influenced me to purchase the book; they were right - it's 5-stars all the way!!! Traveling with Andrew is an unforgettable experience! He makes you crack up in one scene, then has you drying a tear in another. You can't wait to get to the next chapter! He's an author that has me hooked - I want to read everything he's written! Although I circumnavigated the globe some 20 years ago, and have seen it all, done it all, his tales instill some fear in me about doing it again (at 51, am I too old for this?). Yet, I think I can be brave once more. Those some 20

years ago, I remember being scared to the bone just looking at the map of where I was going (Egypt, India, Thailand, Nepal...), but taking a deep breath as the plane left the tarmac from Montreal, thinking "What will be, will be", I laid back, eventually enjoying the greatest 8 months of my life! Those 8 months have served me well over the last 20 years. The tales I have shared with clients over the years, be they from India, Jordan, Egypt, Taiwan or Israel, helped me shape a balanced view of the world, and indeed contributed to fill my coffers. So here I go once again! Yes, I'll brave it one more time, scared as ever! And what will be, will be. The risk (and consequent fear) is greater this time around, with my wife and 3 young children awaiting my return. I trust that I'll live to tell the tale for another 20 years...! And those who understand the tale will know that to travel, to risk, to experience the world, and to savor all its beauty and bounty, that's wealth!! Thanks, Andrew, for giving me the courage one more time! Highly recommended reading, even if you're not going to Vietnam.

The author has experienced flight from Vietnam and the acculturation of his family into American civilization. He returns to his homeland looking for roots but, in the end, misses the diversity of the United States. His trip from Saigon to the beach and up to Hanoi gave me some understanding of this strange land I am visiting.

This book has brought back many memories. My father fled from Vietnam in the same way as the Pham family. My name is also Andrew. Upon visiting Vietnam I thought many of the same things as he traveled through Vietnam. I was also treated differently for being an American-Vietnamese (and I am also half-chinese). The biggest thing I related to in this book was the journey to learn more of yourself and to find your path. This has been one of the best books I've read in a long time and I'm glad someone suggested for me to read it.

My husband and I just returned from a tour of Vietnam and Cambodia. Our wonderful guide in Vietnam highly recommended we read this book. I wish I would have read it before our trip, but I am so glad he recommended it. Catfish and Mandala is a wonderful book for anyone to read who is interested in the Vietnam War and its aftermath. I had never thought what it would be like for a Vietnamese person who left Vietnam after the war and then returned as a Vietnamese American. Andrew Pham makes this very real and unsettling at times. His bicycle travels throughout the country bring to life many of the places that I had just visited in a completely different way. I highly recommend it.

Amazing book! This was probably one of the best reads in years! Being an immigrant myself having traveled the journey this book just really captured the journey, the emotion of having to leave the familiar and enter the unknown and the impact it has on the identities of the travelers.

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