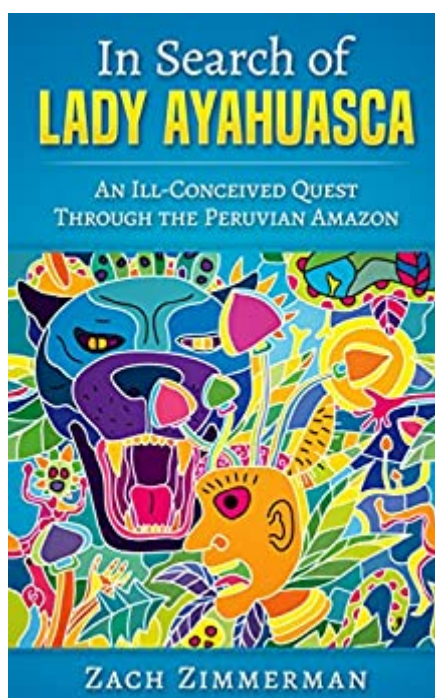


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In Search Of Lady Ayahwasca: An Ill-Conceived Quest Through The Peruvian



Synopsis

Zach Zimmerman struggles with long-term commitment. After dropping out of the University of Southern California and moving to Peru for seven months, Zach ultimately discovers that, in every respect imaginable, he's broke. No money. No plans. No purpose. Of course, if he were normal, this is the point when he'd beg his parents for a flight home. Instead, Zach decides this is the appropriate time to venture alone into one of the deadliest and most unpredictable regions of the planet: the rainforest. See, according to some guy Zach met in the south of Peru—a guy with a distinct fondness for psychedelics—there exists a spirit of the jungle, and this spirit has a name: Lady Ayahuasca. Local legend holds that Lady Ayahuasca is a divine mother, an omnipotent presence that guides all those who seek her counsel to their true, enlightened paths. Zach, a devoted skeptic, puts little stock into the proposed existence of jungle spirits, yet is nevertheless intrigued by their growing popularity, particularly among New Age travelers, and expects at the very least to find some level of excitement in a land of such great unknown. What Zach doesn't expect to find is the tarantulas and alligators and shamans and native Indian tribes and pretty Chinese girls and eccentric characters that, chaotic and random and dangerous as they may appear, all seem to be leading him somewhere, until, in the end, Zach discovers (well, let's not leave any spoilers here). Though at its outset, *In Search of Lady Ayahuasca* is a humorous examination of the abstract, seemingly incredulous beliefs we humans are drawn to, at its heart it's about a young man struggling to find his own way in a world of beaten-down paths. Zach Zimmerman's guile and self-deprecatory humor make his journal hard to put down, and his insightful stream of consciousness regarding the nature of skepticism and spirituality will have you reflecting inward as you laugh outward. Plus, it's only like a hundred pages.

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Customer Reviews

I had a great time reading this brief travelogue about a young man's journey through Peru in search of the fabled Lady Ayahuasca. To capture my interest, a travelogue has to be more than just a linear journey from point to point with descriptions of scenery, customs, and bland traveler anecdotes. You can get that from Fodor's travel guides. I am looking for unique view points, epiphanies, explosions of amazing beauty, intimations of metaphysical truths. It helps if there's a thematic element: something that makes the various stops and destinations more than just random beads along a chain. Humor helps, as does the singular perspective of an author who is seeking to find more along the way than conversation pieces that have no inner relevance. Best of all are the revelations that come to a narrator seeking to find himself. The title, *In Search of Lady Ayahuasca*, provides the first clue that we are in for more than a dispassionate journal of things seen and heard. The narrator, in the middle of seven months of wandering through Peru, is searching for the legendary Lady Ayahuasca, a nature spirit who seldom makes herself seen. When she does appear to a traveler, that person's life will be forever altered by the strangeness and the majesty of the truths that she imparts. The narrator's approach to this quest is an oddly scientific one. He is not so much interested in gaining the perspective-shattering wisdom of the forest. He is more interested in knowing whether or not the spirit goddess even exists. The imagery is colorfully and sensuously presented, with the sights, sounds, the smells conveyed by a narrator who is keenly observant of the exotic imagery he is passing through. Likewise the characters are shrewdly viewed, evaluated and dissected by an observant and worldly mind that is rarely taken in by the ruses and theatrics of natives who view the travelers as fat partridges lining up for the plucking. The travelers themselves are subjected to an even more intense sarcastic scrutiny. Most of them fall into several classes of misguided visionaries embarked on an endless journey of spiritual enlightenment or the attainment of heightened self-awareness. The narrator peels their pretensions and false pride away like layers

of an onion, often making hilarious observations that strike the reader with the force of truth. The narrator does not spare himself in these mental de-constructions. The humor - and there is humor present in almost every interaction between the characters - is self-directed as often as it's aimed at others. This book is hilariously funny. As the travels proceed down the river in a cargo boat, the narrator continues to meet natives and travelers of every description. They arrive at the largest city in Peru that is only accessible by boat. The narrator falls in with a couple of attractive women from Shanghai, and they embark with a tour guide to several lodges deep in the jungle, and even mingle with indigenous Indians who are said to avoid contact with travelers (but it soon becomes apparent that they are only too familiar with travelers and do a lucrative business in trade with them). The narrator is convinced that he will have to go to the furthest outposts of the wilderness to have a chance to meet Lady Ayahuasca. After a night of heavy drinking at a forest lodge, the prettiest of the Chinese women begins to show signs that she would not be reluctant to share some carnal indulgences with the narrator. While he has suggested he is interested in this young lady throughout his narrative, nothing happens, and the next day the Chinese women go their own way. It suddenly occurred to me, the reader, that during the whole narrative, the narrator avoided personal contact or involvement with the various people he met. He was strictly an observer, not a participator. The last journey was a trip to a self-proclaimed shaman who operated a back-woods resort where the featured activity was daily indulgence in a narcotic drug also called Ayahuasca. The travelers to this resort, from various countries around the world, were searching for spiritual enlightenment rumored to be associated with the use of this drug. The narrator was here again only to observe, not participate, and mused that he might be the only traveler to the resort who came with no intention to indulge in Ayahuasca. None-the-less, the narrator did have a revelation during this visit. I won't be a spoiler as to the nature of the revelation and how it relates to the existence or non-existence of Lady Ayahuasca. But I will strongly endorse this book. It is entertaining, wittily told, and hilariously funny.

For anyone interested in not traveling through the menacing landscapes of the Amazon and embedding yourself with an international group of spiritual seekers and misfits high off their gourd, but rather reading about such riveting exploits from the comforts of home, this book is ideal. Written by a promising millennial heir to Bill Bryson with a sprinkling of Jordan Belfort's outlandishness, for good measure this travel journal is as insightful as it is funny, as philosophical as it is accessible, and as sincere as it is iconoclastic.

I am surprised how much I enjoyed this book as the author is a millennial and I am a baby boomer.

His journey for self discovery takes many interesting twists and turns as he navigates his way through inhospitable terrain, amusing characters and the pain from losing a brother. He skillfully depicts many laugh out loud observations and occurrences but is very introspective as well. I am sure that younger readers will love this book but this old guy did too.

This book is was an amazing read. Mr. Zimmerman is seeking meaning in life through an adventure along the River. He is unaware of the actual existence of Lady Ayahuasca, but he has been told she exists and could potentially help him find his purpose. The things he encounters while on his voyage, will keep you on the edge of your seat. Also, his sarcastic and witty humor throughout the book will guarantee a few laughs. Simply could not put this book down. I read it in one sitting. Great read. Only bad thing was that it was a rather quick read. I look forward to seeing what else Zach has in store for us in the near future.

Well, it's an exercise in writing, really, not a full book. The author can write for sure, but aiming at cuteness, he tries too much. His cursing is excessive. His book doesn't bring any real revelations or insights about Ayahuasca. To write a book about this powerful entheogen without trying it himself? Give me a break. And there are grammatical mistakes in the book. In other words: there are much better books on the topic.

While this book may concern an "ill-conceived" journey, the book itself was excellently conceived. In this quickly-paced take on a travelogue, Mr. Zimmerman takes the reader on a whirlwind journey through Peru, looking for a mystical spirit. The story is told with equal parts humor and introspection; you will find yourself laughing hysterically at the manner in which this author can turn a phrase. However, this levity is equally balanced with genuine pathos, and Zimmerman is a master at blending the two. Also? It's 99 cents, man...when was the last time you made an intelligent purchase with that amount of money? Bargains like this don't just come waltzing along every day. Just buy the %#&@ thing.

It's a great read. I've read a lot of Bill Bryson's books. I love Bill Bryson. This guys writes like how I would imagine Bryson would write if Bryson were 21 today. It's funny, honest, observant, and with the right amount of complaining that makes for a good travel journal. The book almost makes me want to travel to the jungles of Peru myself. I say almost because I have a healthy fear of spiders which, unlike the author, I want to keep.

I downloaded this book out of curiosity and to have a variety of reading for a trip that entailed long flights. I never got to it on my trip which was a good thing as once I started it - I just had to continue reading to find out where Zach's search led. The writing style is lighthearted and unique. Zach's journey rang true - I never felt like I was being manipulated as some writers do. Well done Zach - looking forward to your next book!

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