



### The Swimming Pool: Inspiration and Style from Around the World by Martha Baker (Thames & Hudson)

A great reference book for anyone interested in designing a swimming pool, this glossy hardback documents a huge variety of aquatic styles from all over the world. Not only does Baker explain all the design factors to be taken into consideration, she also compiles a great selection of pools under four main categories: romantic; modern; classic; and rustic. Creative photography captures all the architectural details that Baker alludes to.

### South Africa Chic: Hotels. Lodges. Spas by Melisa Teo, Ed (Bolding Books)

A comprehensive guide to the swish side of South Africa's high-end city hotels, safari lodges and rustic country inns, the well-designed yet user-friendly layout and beautiful photography of this coffee table book corresponds with its title. Divided by province, with a map as the title page of each, locales are first introduced before the 62 properties are reviewed in detail and with eloquent panache, essential facts are highlighted in a chart. Planning your next mid- to high-budget sojourn to South Africa has just become that much easier.



### Winter in Tibet by Alex O'Brien (Asia Books)

A truly chilling thriller and an unashamedly airport-use-only read! Justin Standell, a talented corporate lawyer has designed his life around serial relationships, his career, and drug-addled parties on tropical islands. When he signs on at a law firm in Hong Kong Justin meets Lila Li who takes him on a blood-tingling adventure to Macau, Beijing and Tibet. As the action shifts between gang fights and shoot-outs in Hong Kong and the peaceful mountains of Tibet, Standell uncovers the truth that binds these two cultural poles - but not without admitting his own past. What transpires will make it impossible to return to the person he was before.



### Touching Earth by Rani Manicka (Sceptre)

Exquisitely and lyrically written, Manicka portrays the ugly realities about heroin addiction, lost innocence and prostitution. Like a spider spinning a web, her story is intricately interwoven by 'the players' who come to worship in the spider's temple: "Watch them carefully. They are not all to be trusted and one or two might even be ghosts," the author warns. "This is a dreadfully sordid world we seek to enter... We must find Beauty, she made a mistake, succumbed to temptation and now lies naked and without a friend, but she endures, because a single glance of admiration from you will rouse her from the ashes of her degeneration."

Manicka's first novel, *The Rice Mother* won the South East Asia and South Pacific Region 2003 Commonwealth Writers' Prize.



### Places and History: Thailand by Julianna Malpezzi (White Star Publishers)

The latest title in the rampant coffee-table-books-celebrating-Thailand canon illustrates the fascinating history, culture, religion and destinations of the Land of Smiles, with well-written prose and adequate photography (although I think Malpezzi should have a word with her printer, as many of the images seem to lack the clarity they deserve). However, the pictures do highlight Thailand's juxtaposing landscapes and cultures rather effectively. Flicking through this colourful tome, it is easy to see why so many fall head over heels over this bewilderingly varied nation.

All titles reviewed here are available from Asia Books: [www.asiabooks.com](http://www.asiabooks.com)



## Armchair Traveller

Reviews by Greg Lowe

### The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalized World in the 21st Century by Thomas Friedman

Three times Pulitzer Prize-winning author Friedman takes a look at how the 20th Century world is fast disappearing as rapid advances in communications technology shrink the planet.

His book claims that as our ability to communicate with people anywhere on the globe increases, so does our opportunity to compete as individuals. While Friedman's technological-determinist, free market perspective is, in my opinion, flawed insofar as it fails to take account the other cultural and social aspects of globalisation, it does make one consider the positive and negative impacts that these technologies can have on the way we work at home or abroad.



### The Harmony Silk Factory by Tash Aw

Whilst on your travels and in need of a good read, you could do a lot worse than picking up Tash Aw's debut novel. Born in Taiwan, raised in Malaysia and current UK resident, Aw, 33, has written one of the first major literary works to come out of Malaysia for a considerable time. His tale follows the life of Johnny Lim, a Malay-Chinese crook, as retraced through the eyes of his son Jasper. It's a great yarn, which journeys through the quarries of the Kinta Valley, communist cadres, Seven Maiden Islands and the criminal underworld. Hard to put down and a pleasure to read; let's hope Aw inspires more young Malaysians to pick up a pen.



## lifestyle + travel recommends...



### The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel by Rachael Antony and Joel Henry

Travelling round a city or landscape while following the map of a completely different place may smack of lunacy, but such unorthodox ways of exploring our environment were just one of the activities promoted by a bunch of French radicals in the 1960s.

They called themselves the Situationists, a bunch of art-inspired anarchist revolutionaries who wanted to recreate the world as a place of pure experience, miles apart from the breakneck consumerist pace of modern urban centres.

As this is no political history lecture, I'll get to the point. The *dérivé* is just one activity put forward as a non-typical way to travel in quite a unique book. While the writing duo stop short of advocating the Situationists' goal of violent revolution, they were inspired enough to pen a book which proudly sticks two fingers up package holidays and traditional travel routes, and instead puts forward more than 40 imaginative travel experiments - Airport Tourism, Dog Leg Travel, Rent a Tourist, Trip Poker and more.

While few readers may actually make use of the concepts put forwards, they make a good read and attempt to get people thinking outside of the backpacker/Gap Year/package tourist box.

This book can be yours if you write us a letter - see page 16.