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Empty Quarter: A Photographic Journey To The Heart Of The Arabian Desert



Synopsis

Aerial photographer George Steinmetz, shooting from a motorized paraglider, has created an unparalleled portrait of Rub' al-Khali, or "the Empty Quarter," the largest and most likely the hottest sand desert in the world. Although only a fraction of the size of its giant neighbor, the Sahara, the Empty Quarter's punishing terrain has rarely been captured on film, and never from such a striking perspective. Old maps, satellite images, and a dose of Arabian hospitality enabled Steinmetz to travel where few have ventured. He reveals in his photographs a true wilderness, without a single permanent human habitation or known point of water, preserved by its harsh climate and extreme remoteness, as well as a fascinating tradition of a hardy people living at its edges. For experienced travelers or explorers and for those who have never heard of the Empty Quarter, entering the heart of the Arabian Desert is truly the ultimate experience.

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Customer Reviews

George Steinmetz has been a regular contributor to National Geographic and GEO magazines for more than 20 years. He has won numerous awards for photography including two first prizes from World Press Photo, as well as awards and citations from Pictures of the Year, Overseas Press Club, and the Eisenstadt Awards. He is the author of Abrams' *African Air* and lives in New Jersey.

As Steinmetz says, the Empty Quarter (the interior of the southern Arabian peninsula) was first seen by Europeans long after they had visited the South and North Poles. It isn't much easier to visit

today. But visiting just the coastal areas of the UAE, Oman, Yemen and Saudi is like trying to understand the USA after just visiting NYC, LA, Miami and Seattle. Go inland 100 miles from say Dubai and you are in a very very different place. From travelling around the edges, I was expecting a lot of empty. I wasn't expecting the people and wildlife who live there now - and ruins which show people have lived there for a long time. The book benefits from Steinmetz being a celebrity photographer. Otherwise he would not have got permission and support from the Saudi government and others. Most of us could never get to these places let alone take great photographs.

I like coffee table kind of big portfolio books. Whenever I open cover of book, I leave home and begin travelling around the World.

perfect, highly recommended

George Steinmetz is an unbelievable photographer and writer. I love all his work and this one is very much up to his high standards. A different perspective and an awesome subject make this a must have book.

I have long been an admirer of Steinmetz's work, but "Empty Quarter" is his best ever in my opinion. The photographs could only have been made from his low flying powered hang glider. That perch and Steinmetz's eye have produced stunning images.

Fabulous photography.

Having lived in Saudi for 17 years (early '80s to 2000) and traveling deep into the the "Rub many times, these are the most beautiful photos I have ever seen and will remain in my Saudi collection of books forever. My photographs are all as we trekked by land, over sand dunes, snapping every critter that scared the crap out of us. Never have and never will see a more beautiful sky at night or wake so such silence and peace and joy. The heat was unbearable, but we had learned beforehand to tolerate and be prepared -- thus, we were obviously "bearable for the 104 degree temps). Thank you for a lovely book!

There are instant classics of travel that stand as monuments to the genre: "West with the Night," "A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush," and Wilfred Thesiger's Arabian Sands" are three I grew up with. But

the title of one of the most spectacular travel books of all time should go not to a book of words, but to George Steinmetz's book of photographs of the "Empty Quarter"--a vast, largely uncharted sea of sand spilling from Saudi Arabia into Oman, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates. Strapping a motor to his back and suspended from a paraglider, Steinmetz, who was clearly mesmerized and haunted by the exploits of early British explorers such as Thesiger, flew over areas off limits in more ways than one to tourists or journalists. The long introduction--which spins off a tale of intrigue about how George managed to parlay his own lifetime wish to document the world's deserts--involves a Saudi astronaut, GEO magazine, the National Geographic, and a French paraglider expert; and after numerous side trips you realize that this only happened because of one man's insistence on following his dreams. Those who have followed Steinmetz's career will recognize the low level aerial perspective which he uses to its fullest effect in this book. Unlike other aerial photographers, Steinmetz could more aptly be described as being suspended above his subject, often flying at less than 25 miles an hour, at altitudes seldom over five hundred to a thousand feet. Limited in distance by only by a few liters of fuel for the paraglider's motor, Steinmetz spent months crisscrossing the desert, photographing in areas which may never again be photographed in this way. Ironically, his journeys to this "world apart" began soon after 911; yet as George writes, in some ways that may have opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed. Unlike his first book, "African Air," Steinmetz's love of photography supersedes his love of "flying," and almost supersedes his love of the desert; and he is wise here to spend much of his time on the ground, whether it's getting marooned on the side of a giant dune, or photographing gas flare towers at the edge of this universe of sand, or sheiks with falcons on their wrists racing into the wind, or simply abstract arrows on long roads and intersections going off to nowhere, or everywhere. It is tempting to make comparisons, or to use metaphors, to think of Icarus or at least Philippe Petit in the documentary "Man on Wire." But that would be pretentious, and it is best to simply think of "George" as George, of a man crazy enough to get arrested not once but three times in Iran, and who has crashed in China, and soared with birds over Antarctica. And who has produced this inspiring, glorious book that shows in detail a world that until now has remained hidden from our eyes.

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