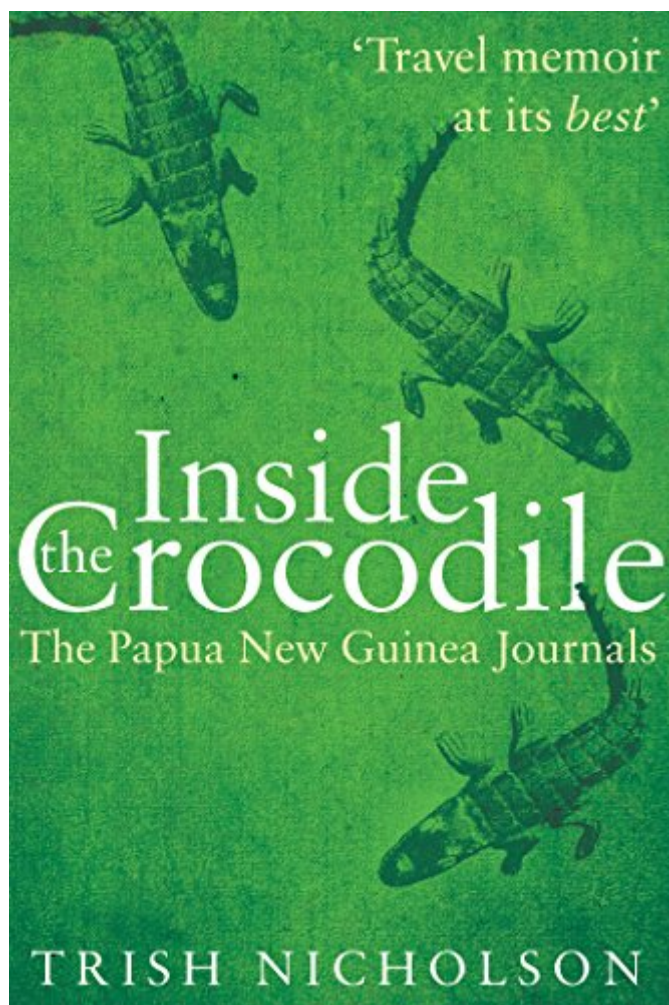


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Inside The Crocodile: The Papua New Guinea Journals



Synopsis

In the wilds of the most diverse nation on earth, while she copes with crocodiles under the blackboard and sorcery in the office, Trish Nicholson survives near-fatal malaria and mollifies irascible politicians and an ever-changing roster of bosses – the realities of life for a development worker. With a background in anthropology and a successful management career in Europe, five years on a development project in the remote West Sepik province of Papua New Guinea more than fulfils Trish Nicholson's desire for a challenge. In extreme tropical conditions, with few only sometimes-passable roads, travel is by a balus – an alarmingly tiny plane, landing on airstrips cut with grass knives and squeezed between mountains. Students build their own schools, babies' weights are recorded in rice bags and women walk for days, carrying their produce to market. Physically tested by dense jungle and swaying vine bridges, Trish's patience is stretched by nothing ever being what it seems and with eyes usually meaning no. Assignments in isolated outstations provide surreal moments, like the 80-year-old missionary in long friar's robes revealing natty turquoise shorts as he tears away on an ancient motorbike. Adventures on nearby Pacific islands relieve the intensity of life in a close-knit community of nationals and a cosmopolitan mix of expat characters. Local women offer friendship, but their stories are often heart-breaking. More chaos arrives with Frisbee, the dog she inherits when the project manager leaves, along with other project expats. Tensions increase between local factions supporting the project and those who feel threatened by it – and stuck in the middle is Trish. Her emotionally engaging memoir *Inside the Crocodile* is full of humour, adventure, iron determination and... Frisbee the dog. It is beautifully illustrated with colour photos of Trish's time there.

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Customer Reviews

Ms. Nicholson's book is both entertaining and very well written. She quickly draws the reader in to the challenges and rewards of her posting in Papua New Guinea, bringing to life on the pages a fascinating part of the world. What most impressed me about her book is the sensitivity with which she avoids getting caught up in the competing stereotypical narratives which tend to dominate such accounts: either the "wonderful Westerners bringing wisdom to backward lands" or "the terrible Westerners destroying the paradise they are visiting." Her vivid and unflinching accounts extend her sympathies in all directions, and end up giving an unusually balanced picture of the complex interaction between Western and traditional ways. Nicholson never preaches, but her book provides much basis for reflection. (I've traveled in PNG and have done development work elsewhere, so it was refreshing to read such a realistic account.) But most of all, it is simply a very engaging read, written by an impressive lady. You'll have a hard time putting it down, as you wonder what adventure or setback she will encounter next. Strongly recommended.

Before I read Trish Nicholson's travel memoir about her time as a development worker in Papua New Guinea, I have to admit that I knew very little about the country and its people. But the idea of an experienced social anthropologist and business professional taking on a five-year development project in this remote area of the world intrigued me on several levels. How does one leave the security of a well-established career and travel to the far reaches of the earth, into unknown and underdeveloped territory, to put skills to the test? And how does one survive in another culture without the amenities and social networks that seem to be necessary to not only survive but thrive and grow. The author takes us unflinchingly into her experience, not sparing any details about the rugged terrain, fraying vine bridges

across rivers; tiny, rickety, old planes that land in between mountains and carry her even deeper into uncivilized places ;and corrupt local politicians who thwart her efforts to bring organization and progress to the area. The reader is immersed in a culture where students build their own schools, babies' weights are recorded in rice bags and women walk for days to sell their produce at markets. Against the backdrop of this cultural immersion, is a personal story of close friendships forged by a common purpose to bring change and improvement to this underdeveloped area. One of my favorite characters is Frisbee, the dog who steals Trish's heart and provides a source of comfort to her. We feel her pain when due to her required travels she is forced to leave Frisbee with a friend. Trish captures the human experience with humor and passion. Her writing is descriptive and engaging. I was right there with her as she faced one obstacles after another's bouts with malaria, the extreme weather conditions, irascible politicians, saying goodbye to close friends, working with the locals to build a school. Interspersed throughout the text are quotes from the locals in their Pidgin language, which brings the reader even closer to the experience. A glossary is provided for quick and by the time I was halfway through the story, the foreign words were flowing. The author answers the questions I posed in the beginning. Through this story, I learned that Papua New Guinea is considered to be "the most culturally diverse nation on earth". Her vast experience, combined with her resilience and amazing spirit of adventure helped her to not only reach her goals to bring change and progress to a remote region of the world but also helped her to grow personally. It is in this transformation that this story which stemmed from her daily journaling, is such a worthwhile and inspirational read. She delivers on all counts - cultural enlightenment, personal growth and adventure. I highly recommend this fascinating travel memoir to anyone who enjoys reading about another culture and wants to enter into an adventuresome experience.

This account of Dr Trish Nicholson's five and a half years in Papua New Guinea in the late eighties and early nineties is absolutely fascinating. Using her extensive diaries as the basis of her narrative, she takes us from a chilly wind-blown Scotland to her arrival and consequent culture shock in tropical, humid Papua New Guinea. Nothing daunted, however, she uses her great people skills plus the help and friendship of fellow expats such as Jim, PNG colleagues like the marvellous Clarkson, Vero and Martha, and Frisbee the Hound Dog to find her way in the maze of PNG life and bureaucracy. Her job was to reorganise, restructure and give training to the Department of Personnel Management in Sandaun as part of a project financed by the World Bank. However, this was not a challenge for the faint hearted. So many personnel lived in remote areas, and the records

were such a mess, it even involved paying staff who were already dead! In her task, I was often amazed at her ability to survive the mind-numbing procedural complexities combined with the sometimes petty and anarchic disregard for truth and transparency of those entrenched in the system. Fighting ongoing Malaria, dramas such as pay-back killings, vengeful jealousies and corrupt practices, it took more than Trish's strength to cope. Towards the end of her stay, she became dangerously ill with Malaria. Nevertheless, she builds wonderful friendships with her PNG colleagues and earns immense respect for her courage and pluck in tackling almost anything that comes her way. This includes a three day hike through dense and inhospitable bush that would have sent me scurrying for home about one hour into it, particularly the idea of crossing bridges made of rotting rope or vine over deep river gorges. There are delightful side characters, such as Sebby, who gate-crashed seminars and scribbled on blackboards intended for training notes. Frisbee the fly-everywhere dog also adds a special canine touch to the story. The book is quite long and very detailed, but this serves to underscore the chaotic situations Dr Nicholson, or rather 'Tris' had to unravel. I found it completely absorbing and was easily able to transport myself there into the time, period and place. I was also glad she provided a glossary of Pidgin terms at the end and enjoyed the photos that gave visual reality to some of the characters and situations. All in all, this is a wonderful journal, a great memoir and a riveting read.

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