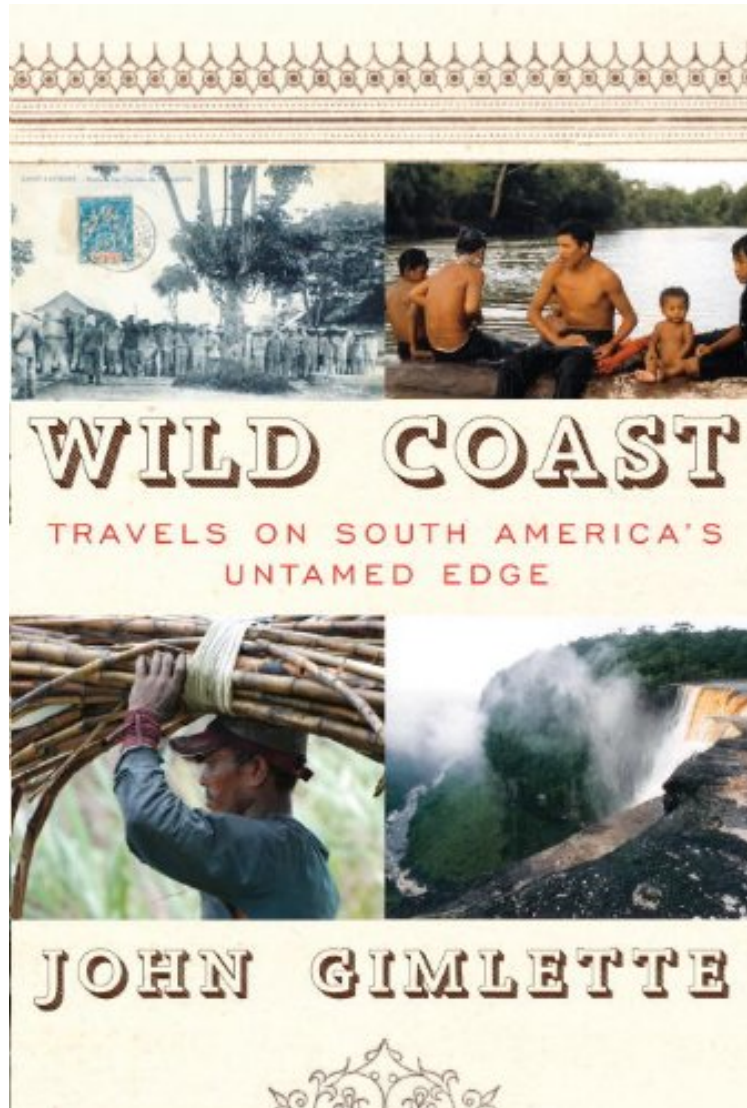


[Free and download] Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge

Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge

John Gimlette

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John Gimlette : Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wild Coast By Anthony A Interesting description of Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana. Author spends most of his time in Guyana. Particularly interesting account of the Jones Massacre. Likewise Devils Island in French /Guiana. The author's main thrust is recounting historical events which occurred in the various countries, visiting the actual sites and gaining information from the locals. This proved to be somewhat repetitive at times. Nonetheless an enlightening look at a little known area of the planet 15 of 16 people

found the following review helpful. Great book about a forgotten area of the World By Roberto I like this book. Some parts, I love 'em! Yet, it is not a perfect book, and I believe that the author enjoys picturing these lands in a darker way than they really are. I love the way the author describes the cities, the villages, and the land. I love how he creatively depicts all the characters he encounters along the way - a mixture of thieves, scums, workers, politicians that seem to blend all together in these three countries. I also loved the research done by the author before travelling to these countries, telling us a lot about the history and the "why" things are what they are today. Yet, as an anthropologist I feel that sometimes he over-simplistically tries to judge what people do. And he has a negative outlook that makes these people look more like damned souls than normal people. He seems to deny these people the opportunity to be happy and to actually enjoy their lifestyle - perhaps all the people he met had problems? Also, I can see his interest in describing everything negatively from the use of adjectives (dark, ghostly, haunted) that he often uses even for describing the pristine rain forest. But, you know, everyone has his/her biases, and they certainly don't spoil the enjoyment out of what is a welcome addition to the (poor) collection of books on Guayana, Suriname, and French Guyana. If you like travel literature, you will enjoy this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Good Read By DLC SoCala most unusual book on a little known area of the South American continent

Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana are among the least-known places in South America: nine hundred miles of muddy coastline giving way to a forest so dense that even today there are virtually no roads through it; a string of rickety coastal towns situated between the mouths of the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers, where living is so difficult that as many Guianese live abroad as in their homelands; an interior of watery, green anarchy where border disputes are often based on ancient Elizabethan maps, where flora and fauna are still being discovered, where thousands of rivers remain mostly impassable. And under the lens of John Gimlette brilliantly offbeat, irreverent, and canny these three small countries are among the most wildly intriguing places on earth. On an expedition that will last three months, he takes us deep into a remarkable world of swamp and jungle, from the hideouts of runaway slaves to the vegetation-strangled remnants of penal colonies and forts, from Little Paris to a settlement built around a satellite launch pad. He recounts the complicated, often surprisingly bloody, history of the region including the infamous 1978 cult suicide at Jonestown and introduces us to its inhabitants: from the world's largest ants to fluorescent purple frogs to head-crushing jaguars; from indigenous tribes who still live by sorcery to descendants of African slaves, Dutch conquerors, Hmong refugees, Irish adventurers, and Scottish outlaws; from high-tech pirates to hapless pioneers for whom this stunning, strangely beautiful world (a sort of X-rated Garden of Eden) has become home by choice or by force. In *Wild Coast*, John Gimlette guides us through a fabulously entertaining, eye-opening and sometimes jaw-dropping journey.

To the admirably (or alarmingly) fearless Gimlette, the Guianas remain a terrain of matchless allure . . . He has written a spirited historical, political and personal travelogue guaranteed to arouse the adventurous readers wanderlust . . . It offers a gorgeously vivid depiction of one of the last untamed places on the planet. *New York Times Book Review* An engaging odyssey . . . Gimlette shows the region to be endlessly fascinating, if often in a dark way, [and] summarizes sweeps of history with a quinine-dry wit . . . His books manage the neat trick of making the globe feel supremely vast and mysterious once again. He does this in part by writing a narrative that sounds as if it had been penned by an Edwardian explorer you can almost envision his pith helmet but also by crafting a superb traveler's tale in which yesterday has far more ballast and heft than the fleeting happenings of today. *Wall Street Journal* *Wild Coast* is the best kind of travel writing: tough-minded and humorous, but above all thoughtful. *Times Literary Supplement (UK)* *Wild Coast* is funny, intelligent, revelatory. Joseph O'Neill, author of *Netherland* Gimlette's first South American travel book, *At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig*, captured with great wit and learning the quiriness of Paraguay. He has now produced a no less remarkable portrait of the highly idiosyncratic countries known collectively as Guiana . . . *Wild Coast* is driven by extraordinary dedication, an insatiable curiosity in everything, and an enormous empathy for other people. Gimlette's descriptions of landscapes are often hauntingly beautiful, his sense of humour is engagingly deadpan . . . His book is also characterised by a thoroughness of research that puts most travel writers to shame . . . In lesser hands, such richness of texture and abundance of learning might have led to indigestion on the readers part. But Gimlette manages to steer through all the material with a great lightness of touch, skillfully weaving the personal narrative into a lucid and lively account of a multi-cultural history . . . Particularly memorable are his incisive portraits of the many crazed, tragic, and eccentric figures associated with these lands . . . All in all, *Wild Coast* is a reminder not just of the magnificent and endless strangeness of South America, but also of the way in which travel literature can still fulfil its role of bringing to life some of the world's unjustly neglected corners. *The Spectator (UK)* A completely fascinating book. It opens up a forgotten corner of the world with tremendous flair and shrewd observation. William Boyd, author of *Any Human Heart* A wonderfully entertaining account of a journey through one of the world's least-known places . . . Gimlette, an insatiably curious storyteller, revels in the strange mix of people and traditions . . . Amid vivid descriptions of torrential rivers and golden grasslands that are home to some of the planet's largest ants, otters, and fish, the author recalls encounters with a stunning variety of intriguing characters . . . Colorful and immensely readable. *Kirkus* s (starred) A few pages into his excellent new book, *Wild Coast*, John Gimlette tries to

convey the forbiddingly impenetrable nature of his subject, the Guianas of northeastern South America, a nettlesome tangle of swamp, lowlands, crisscrossing creeks and rivers so resistant to navigation or settlement that the landscape remains one of the wildest, most unknown territories on the globe . . . These are words to quicken the pulse of the armchair traveler, for whom no landscape resonates quite like the exotic, the hard to get to, the uncharted . . . Between cellphones, Google Earth, and jumbo jets, it seems theres nowhere in the world left to explore, but [writers like] John Gimlette prove that travel books still have something to tell us. The Daily Beast The pages provide a rollicking, witty and informed account of what crawls out of the Guianas jungles into the authors path. Armed with a rucksack and a keen sense of the absurd, Gimlette drives, flies and floats through Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana . . . The author has an uncanny ability to nail down his characters with a few well-chosen words . . . But the books real strength lies not in the living, but the dead . . . Gimlette brings history to life. He artfully merges assiduous research with a storytellers gift, presenting the reader with a catalogue of loveable rogues, inveterate explorers, eccentric naturalists, and idealistic romantics. These stories provide more than just a good yarn. They offer a door into the darker aspects of the Guianas past and thereby a window on to much of the present. The Guardian (UK) Gimlette leads us where few Europeans venture, beating a path through the jungle to find the juiciest tidbits of Guianas myth and history . . . This is a meaty and unusual travelogue. Associated Press About the Author John Gimlette has won the Shiva Naipaul Memorial Prize and the Wanderlust Travel Writing Award, and he contributes regularly to The Times (London), The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Independent, and Cond Nast Traveller. When not traveling, he practices law in London. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From the Introduction As far as Amerindians are concerned, the land between the Orinoco and the Atlantic has always been Guiana, the Land of Many Waters. European explorers, however, took a while to appreciate this name. On early French and English maps the region was marked as Equinoctiale or Caribana, Land of Twenty-one Tribes. To the Dutch, on the other hand, this was for a while the original New Zealand. Then they thought of a name which expressed what they felt. It had about it the promise of danger, risk, wealth and perhaps even desire. It was de Wilde Kust, The Wild Coast. Certainly nowhere else in South America is quite like it; 900 miles of muddy coastline give way to swamps, thick forest and then deep inland ancient flat-topped peaks. Its never been truly possessed. Along this entire shore, theres no natural harbour, and beyond the mud the forest begins. It covers over 80 per cent of Guiana, and even now theres no way through it. Such roads as there are stick mainly to the coast. Without an aeroplane, it takes up to four weeks to get into the interior, and there the problems begin. With such an abundant canopy, most of Guiana never sees sunlight. Perhaps its therefore no surprise that both in science and history the story of this land reads like a long, green night. Huge tracts of the interior are only vaguely described, and new species are always tumbling out of the dark. Even some of the more common ones make unnerving companions. Guiana has the biggest ants in the world, and the biggest freshwater fish. There are head-crushing jaguars, strangling snakes, rivers of stingrays and electric eels, and whole clouds of insects all eager to burrow in under the skin. To some this is hell. To others its an ecological paradise, a sort of X-rated Garden of Eden. But it is water, as the Amerindians recognised, that defines Guiana. Through this land run literally thousands of rivers (in Guyana alone there are over 1,500). These arent like the little waterways that meander through the Old World, but vast sprawling torrents that thunder out of the forest and then plough their way to the sea. Some have mouths big enough to swallow Barbados. But, even the biggest of them the Essequibo, Corentyne and Marowijne are intolerant of shipping; beyond ninety miles inland, nothing larger than a canoe gets through without being battered to bits. Once it was thought that these furious rivers all linked up, and that Guiana was really an agglomeration of islands, bobbing around in the froth. But whatever the layout, water still rules. It dominates development, trims opportunities and seals off the world. It makes islanders of tribes, and supports long-lost communities of prospectors, Utopians and runaway slaves. It feeds malaria and nurtures some of the worlds most ambitious strains of dengue fever. Damp gets everywhere, rotting buildings and feet and making steam of the air. From the very earliest times human beings have realised that their best chance of surviving Guiana is by living right next to the sea. Even now, nine out of every ten of its inhabitants live on a long, muddy strip, barely ten miles wide. Its curious, life in the silt. Most of the houses have legs, and every town is built on a grid of velvety, green canals. Meanwhile, the Atlantic Ocean here is the colour of plaster, caused, its said, by sediments harvested in Peru, washed across the continent and disgorged by the Amazon. It makes for a beautiful world, luminously lush and drenchingly fecund. Not surprisingly, its inhabitants are proud of it and give it affectionate names. In Demerara they call their land The Mudflat (and their neighbours the mudheads). But not every-ones impressed. As one visiting English yachtsman wrote in 1882, It appears a hopeless land of slime and fever, quite unfitted for man, unless it be for Tree-Indians, a low race of fish-eating savages. Naturally, this claggy, overgrown, fish-breathed coast was never immediately inviting. For years the newly emerging Europeans had steered well clear. In theory, Spain was the first to claim it (along with the rest of the western world) under the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. It was five years, however, before they sent a ship, and even then it didnt stop. Another thirty years passed before anyone tried to land, only to be eaten by the locals. After that, Spanish interest in Guiana shrivelled, and the only part they ever occupied was the north-west end, now part of Venezuela, called Guayana. Meanwhile, the Portuguese colonised the southern flanks (now the Brazilian state of Amapa), and the bit in between was up for grabs. Its this bit of Guiana the chunk in the middle that interested me, and eventually it became the setting for these travels. Its an area about twice the size of Great Britain, divided into three

unequal, roughly rectangular shares: Guyana (formerly British Guiana), Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) and Guyane Française (also known as French Guiana). They are sometimes referred to usefully, if a little inaccurately as The Guianas, and form the only part of the South American mainland that was never either Spanish or Portuguese. What's more, they've totally resisted the influences of the continent all around, never knowing salsa or tango, Bolívar, machismo, liberation theology or even the liberation movement. In fact, independence for two of the Guianas arrived only some 150 years after the rest of the continent, and even today Guyane remains a département of France. It's almost as though the giant at their backs has never existed. Even as I write, there isn't a single road that leads from the Guianas into the world beyond. The story of how this oddity came about is surprisingly bloody. After the Spanish lost interest, it looked, for a moment, as though England might quietly acquire this coast. In 1595 Sir Walter Raleigh propagated a rumour that there was a city of gold here, that the women were biddable and cute, and that there was a fat partridge draped on every branch. Although these claims were rather obviously over-puffed, there was plenty of interest. First off, in 1597, was a barrister called John Ley, although he never planned to settle. Plenty of others did. But insolvency killed off most of their ideas, and ridicule the rest. Even the Pilgrim Fathers briefly toyed with the idea of planting New England here in Guiana (before a more sober assessment prevailed). Eventually, however, in 1604, colonisation began, with a settlement of English gentlemen in what is now Guyane. Most were dead within the year. Their colony, however, heralded the beginning of a murderous game of musical chairs. For the next two hundred years, the three great European powers France, Britain and Holland scrambled around on this coast, snatching colonies and killing the previous incumbents. These wars always began and ended in Europe, and there were nine in all (First Dutch, Second Dutch, Grand Alliance, Spanish Succession, Jenkins Ear, Austrian Succession, Seven Years, American Independence and Napoleonic). At the end of each round no one was where they'd started, and the coast was in ruins. Modern-day Guyana changed hands nine times, Suriname six and Guyane seven. All three were seized at one point (1676) by the Dutch, and at another (1809) by Britain. Even today, the Guianas as I'd soon discover still reel from the impact of this antique chaos.