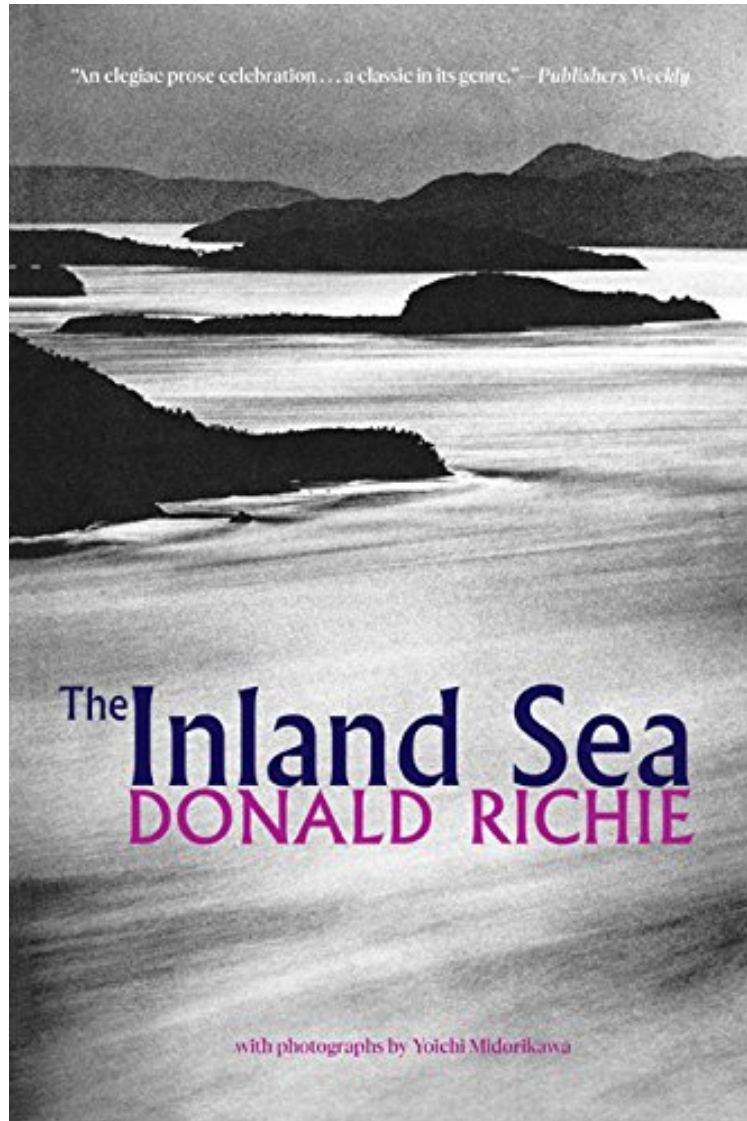


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The Inland Sea

Donald Richie

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Donald Richie : The Inland Sea before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Inland Sea:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A melancholy travelogue and insightful portrait of the Japanese characterBy Marc E. NicholsonI read this book two years ago in preparation for my first visit to Japan, with focus on Shikoku Island and on the Inland Sea which was the focus of Donald Richie's account. Mr. Richie since has died.His book is a series of short non-fictional stories/vignettes of his experiences and personal encounters with the various islands of the Inland Sea and with the everyday Japanese he encountered there...a people still straightforward in their

traditional virtues and mores when he wrote the book in 1971. The book is honestly unadorned but also poetically written (a Japanese aesthetic), as it recounts what Richie experienced and the simple but deep characters he met on his odyssey of the Inland Sea as he sought to experience the "real Japan" before it disappeared under the pressure of modernity. His emphasis on its impending doom lends the book an overarching but beautiful sense of melancholy. The other dominant and melancholy theme is of a man who made a lifelong commitment to Japan (Richie spent nearly all his adult life there), but who claims often in the book never to have felt truly a member of its society and who asserted that no Westerner ever could. In short, a man without a country. So the book is suffused with a beautifully written pathos portraying not only an environment and tradition being eroded by modernism, but of an individual's sense of ultimate alienation from a society he had chosen, loved, and understood, but could never fully attain. I don't think one can understand that sense of alienation and pathos without knowing, as the early readers of this book in the 70s/80s did NOT know, that Donald Riche was gay in an era when that made one an outsider, if not an outcast, in a key area of life. I hope he found a rich emotional life in his adopted Japan and I suspect he did, but I don't know, and that leaves me wondering how much this book is not just a lament for bygone Japan, but also a lament for his own sense of being not just a cultural but also a sexual outsider. In any event, this is a superbly written book, with many truly acute observations on the Japanese character which stand the test of time and are worth reading by any visitor to Japan. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Classic Richie, Still Valid Today By Patrick Mc Coy I had originally read and enjoyed some excerpts from Donald Richie's *The Inland Sea* (1971) in *The Donald Richie Reader* (2002). I have always thought that Richie has done some of the best writing about Japan from a foreigner's perspective and have been sympathetic to many of his opinions about Japan and the Japanese. After reading his journals last year after his death, I decided that there were several complete works that are worthwhile searching out and reading and this was at the top of the list. However, there are still several others to explore. It is at once a travel memoir, a love letter to a region and way of life that no longer exists, and a meditation on life in a strange country that he was not born in but elected to live in despite the fact it would never truly accept him. Richie also has musing about life in Tokyo versus the country, puritanism, the individual's place in the world, and the things he appreciates about living in Japan. He also makes some revelatory observations about his marriage and sexuality. Some of the experiences he has with locals have to be read between the lines and are not explicit admissions of couplings, but obviously are. There was an interesting scene where an old woman in Miyajima tells Richie a story about a boy who is excommunicated from the village for cutting the fishing nets—an act synonymous with barn burning at the turn of the century in America. Here are some of the more interesting observations that I largely agree with and find true even today some 40 plus years later: So the people are indeed backward, if this means a people living eternally in the present, a people for whom becoming means little and being everything. Words make you visible in Japan. Until you speak, until you commit yourself to communication, you are not visible at all. You might travel from one end and, unless you open your mouth or get set upon by English-speaking students, be assured of the most complete privacy. But to believe this is to disregard a great truth that all of Asia knows: appearances are the only reality. Japan is the most modern of all countries perhaps because, having a full secure past, it can afford to live in the instantaneous present. I answer as best as I can, aware—as one is always in Japan—that I have ceased being myself. Rather, I have become—once again—a Representative of My Country. The white man who goes native in Samoa or Marrakesh, the Japanese who goes native in New York or Paris—this is possible, but it is, I think impossible for anyone but a Japanese to go Japanese. Japanese loyalty. I cannot approve of it, and I certainly do not like it. Mindless devotion—whether of samurai or kamikaze—leaves me as unmoved as does the less spectacular variety from I come from. It is actually a kind of laziness. The Japanese carry it one step further. Nothing is anyone's fault. This is because no one will take responsibility for anything. Asia does not, I think, hoard and treasure life as we do. Life, to be sure, is not considered cheap, but at the same time, one does not see the tenacious clinging to it that is one of the distinguishing marks of the West. There is no tradition of anything but a politely hidden suspicion of the unknown wanderer. To be anonymous is in Japan, to be nothing. Only after your name, occupation, family, history are known do you become real. Here, I thought, is a glimpse into the real Japan. This is the way the Japanese mind works. Appearances are reality without a doubt, and if the reality is not sufficient, then change the appearances. An early symptom (of the influence of the West) was that everything somehow had to become respectable—not according to Japanese standards, where everything was already respectable, but according to the half-understood and even the dissolving standards of the West. (As someone has remarked, the Japanese have fifty-three words for "prostitute" and yet do not distinguish between "lock" and "key"—which must be a commentary of some sort upon the importance they assign to things). This nightly closing of all forms of public transportation is, I suggest, but one of the many forms that Japanese puritanism takes. Europe, America—these lands are also inferior, but their ideas and products may be put to good use if they are first run through the Japanese mill and emerge unrecognizable and therefore very Japanese. I really enjoyed tagging along with Richie on his journey to the Inland Sea and within himself. Luckily, there is more by him for me to explore. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Prepare for or Remember Japan By Reintree This is one of the best books highlighting changes in Japan over time, the history of current day customs and a great overview in preparation for or as a post-trip reminder of Japan. The writing is excellent and easy to read—it is a book that is hard to put down.

"An elegiac prose celebration . . . a classic in its genre." Publishers Weekly
In this acclaimed travel memoir, Donald Richie paints a memorable portrait of the island-studded Inland Sea. His existential ruminations on food, culture, and love and his brilliant descriptions of life and landscape are a window into an Old Japan that has now nearly vanished. Included are the twenty black and white photographs by Yoichi Midorikawa that accompanied the original 1971 edition.
Donald Richie (1924-2013) was an internationally recognized expert on Japanese culture and film. Yoichi Midorikawa (1915-2001) was one of Japan's foremost nature photographers.