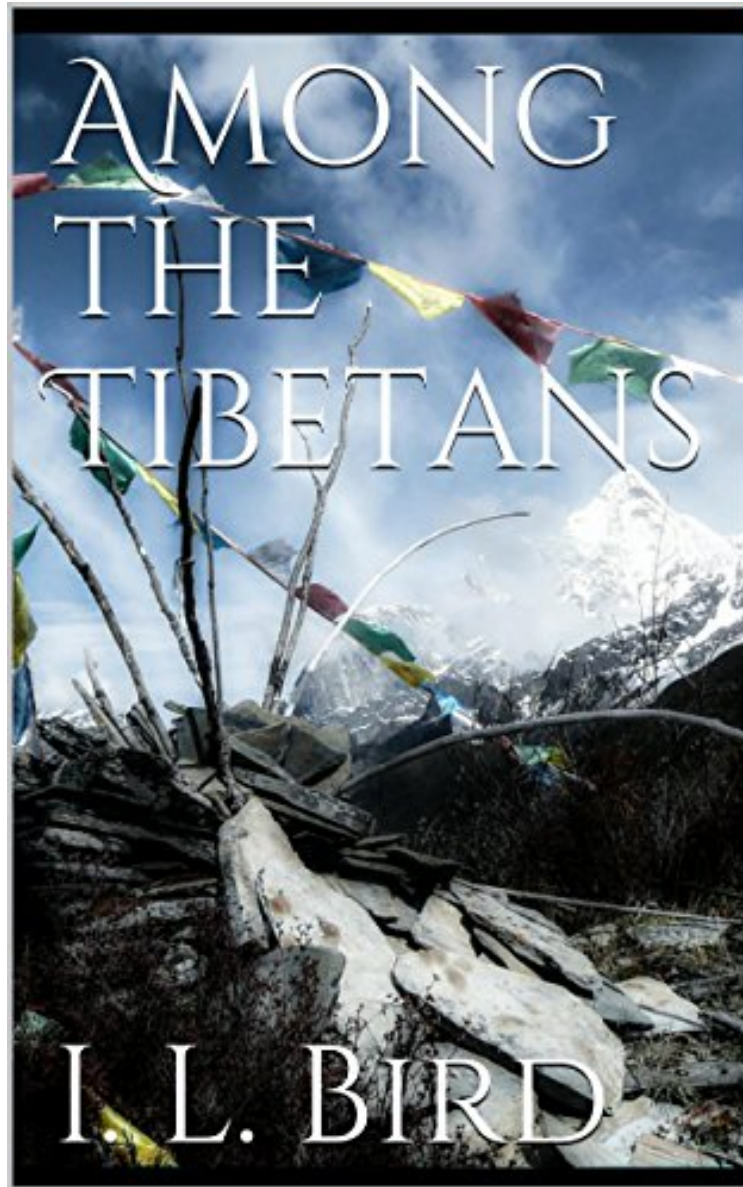


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Among the Tibetans

Isabella L. Bird

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Isabella L. Bird : Among the Tibetans before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Among the Tibetans:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Amazing TravelogueBy AndreaThere's a Kindle edition that currently sells at \$4.89 and the paperback at \$7.45. I purchased the public domain edition (because it was free) and I was enthralled by Ms. Bird's descriptions of her experiences of her four month travel by horseback from India through the Himalayas in the late Eighteen Hundreds. Bird does exceptionally well in describing the rugged, impossibly

difficult, and often breathtaking mountain passes that she traversed. My free edition did not have the sketches she made and which, I assume, are in the paid edition. On the other hand, Bird has a gift for using words to paint vivid images of the Tibetans, their looks, costumes and decorations, ceremonies, music, as well as of their dwellings, temples, and monasteries. Although much has changed, I dare say that a lot of what she described is still true of Tibet. One thing that touched me was the realization of how extremely difficult it is to go from one village to another, to ford rivers that are icy cold, deep, and are more than a mile across, and to move fully loaded pack animals along a narrow ridge that is wide enough only for a single file but there's another caravan coming from the opposite direction. Life and nature can be very cruel on such a harsh journey so it was a treat to make the same journey while enjoying the comfort my chair.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. 5 stars
By reader
Great book on the history of Tibet by a great travel author---if you like this book you will also want to read:
1. With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple (1901)
2. Lhasa and Its Mysteries: With a Record of the Expedition of 1903-1904.
3. Through China with a Camera (1899)

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Intrepid trekker
By Magmom
Isabella Bird was an amazing woman who travelled all over the world for her "health," establishing hospitals where she could and always writing letters to her sister back in England. The letters were published and, like other women travelers of the late 19th century, she gained an international reputation. Her trip into western Tibet, published in 1894, is not as well known as *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, but it is at least the equal of that adventure. Bird traveled with quite a large support group but often she was the only "traveler." A look at a modern map makes the reader realize that the regions of Kashmir and Tibet she traveled through are still remote. On steep mountain paths they lost some pack animals but Isabella carried on, visiting wandering herdsmen and their families, marveling at the stark landscape, the monasteries and rendering it all in vivid detail. For the contemporary couch potato, her account is so amazing that the reader would be insane to try a similar feat--riding side saddle in a dress. There is a fairly good biography of Bird available, but for the real thing, I recommend her own accounts of her travels in Persia, Japan, Tibet and the Rocky Mountains and points in between.

At some little distance outside Leh are the cremation grounds--desert places, destitute of any other vegetation than the *Caprifolia horrida*. Each family has its furnace kept in good repair. The place is doleful, and a funeral scene on the only sunless day I experienced in Ladak was indescribably dismal. After death no one touches the corpse but the lamas, who assemble in numbers in the case of a rich man. The senior lama offers the first prayers, and lifts the lock which all Tibetans wear at the back of the head, in order to liberate the soul if it is still clinging to the body. At the same time he touches the region of the heart with a dagger. The people believe that a drop of blood on the head marks the spot where the soul has made its exit. Any good clothing in which the person has died is then removed. The blacksmith beats a drum, and the corpse, covered with a white sheet next the dress and a coloured one above, is carried out of the house to be worshipped by the relatives, who walk seven times round it. The women then retire to the house, and the chief lama recites liturgical passages from the formularies. Afterwards, the relatives retire, and the corpse is carried to the burning-ground by men who have the same tutelary deity as the deceased. The leading lama walks first, then come men with flags, followed by the blacksmith with the drum, and next the corpse, with another man beating a drum behind it. Meanwhile, the lamas are praying for the repose and quieting of the soul, which is hovering about, desiring to return. The attendant friends, each of whom has carried a piece of wood to the burning-ground, arrange the fuel with butter on the furnace, the corpse wrapped in the white sheet is put in, and fire is applied. The process of destruction in a rich man's case takes about an hour. During the burning the lamas read in high, hoarse monotones, and the blacksmiths beat their drums. The lamas depart first, and the blacksmiths, after worshipping the ashes, shout, 'Have nothing to do with us now,' and run rapidly away. At dawn the following day, a man whose business it is searches among the ashes for the footprints of animals, and according to the footprints found, so it is believed will be the re-birth of the soul.

About the Author
Isabella Lucy Bird (Mrs. Bishop) was born in 1831. She won fame in her own time as surely the most remarkable woman traveller of the nineteenth century. She published nine books about her travels, and her writing is guaranteed to produce a thirst for adventure and travel. She died in Edinburgh in 1904.