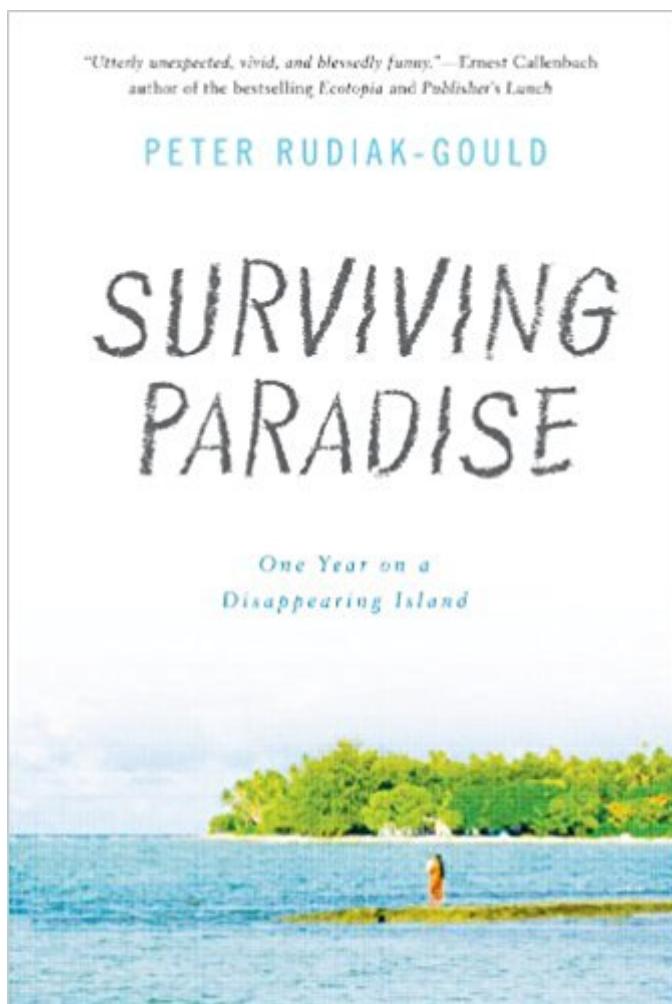


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# Surviving Paradise: One Year On A Disappearing Island



## Synopsis

Just one month after his 21st birthday, Peter Rudiak-Gould moved to Ujae, a remote atoll in the Marshall Islands located 70 miles from the nearest telephone, car, store, or tourist, and 2,000 miles from the closest continent. He spent the next year there, living among its 450 inhabitants and teaching English to its schoolchildren. At first blush, *Surviving Paradise* is a thoughtful and laugh-out-loud hilarious documentation of Rudiak-Gould's efforts to cope with daily life on Ujae as his idealistic expectations of a tropical paradise confront harsh reality. But Rudiak-Gould goes beyond the personal, interweaving his own story with fascinating political, linguistic, and ecological digressions about the Marshall Islands. Most poignant are his observations of the noticeable effect of global warming on these tiny, low-lying islands and the threat rising water levels pose to their already precarious existence. As written by Paul Theroux, *Surviving Paradise* is a disarmingly lighthearted narrative with a substantive emotional undercurrent. Â

## Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Union Square Press; 1 edition (November 3, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1402766645

ISBN-13: 978-1402766640

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 6.3 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 89 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #149,714 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Travel > Australia & South Pacific > South Pacific #345 in Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Travel #592 in Books > Travel > Travel Writing

## Customer Reviews

Thousands of miles from home and in a culture equally distant from his own, Rudiak-Gould's first night on the island of Ujae made him lonely to the point of physical pain. Yet after only a few weeks in the farthest outreaches of the Marshall Islands, the author overcame boredom almost immediately, bringing the reader along on an equally gripping journey of one year in one of the most remote, fascinating places on Earth. Rudiak-Gould, a volunteer English teacher, came to Ujae knowing little about the Marshallese language and even less about its culture. Yet as he became more familiar with his surroundings and the native tongue, he found a community that eventually

saw him as one of their own. Nearly every aspect of Ujae is dissected, from its horrific educational standards to the drastic differences in their respective social systems and the eclectic array of Marshallese food (Rudiak-Gould describes one dish as liquid flatulence). Rudiak-Gould also lets the reader in on his own personal struggles in dealing with children (and their parents) in a place where corporal punishment is encouraged. At the same time, he becomes adept at Marshallese activities like spearfishing, allowing him to contribute to a culture based on survival. Alternatively hilarious, emotional and thought provoking (Rudiak-Gould analyzes the potentially catastrophic effects of global warming on the low-lying area), the book is an eye-opening look into a beautiful yet harsh paradise far from the reaches of tourism. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"[A]n extraordinarily engaging diary-portrait of a 21st-century castaway uncovering the everyday riches, enduring frustrations, and confounding contradictions of life in a South Pacific paradise." --Dan George in National Geographic Traveler; "utterly unexpected, vivid, [and] blessedly funny." Ernest Callenbach, author of bestseller Ecotopia and Publisher's Lunch; "In Surviving Paradise, Peter Rudiak-Gould has pulled off the improbable: turning a year spent on a remote Pacific island the size of a shopping mall into a memorable, moving narrative." Tony Cohan, author of On Mexican Time and Mexican Days; "In Surviving Paradise, Peter Rudiak-Gould transcends and defies every travel-memoir cliché (i.e. "I went there to save them, but it was they who saved me"), reinventing the notion of what travel writing can accomplish. Without ever resorting to an expected thought, he turns his anthropologist's eye to his year on Ujae with humor, sensitivity, intelligence, warmth, and wit. In transporting us to this tiny island, he ultimately casts a surprising light on human nature and the ways we inhabit and perceive the world around us. From his rollicking adventures in spear fishing to his efforts to master the Marshallese language, Rudiak-Gold has written a dynamic narrative of personal and global transformation that's a joy from departure to arrival." Liza Monroy, author of Mexican High; "With an eye for humor that is fresh and surprising, Peter Rudiak-Gould lays out the delightful ironies and the vexing conundrums of life in a traditional culture on the brink of change. His voice has that rare quality of a starry-eyed romantic who has gained wisdom and perspective by immersing himself in the unfamiliar. His tales from the edge of the world are at times deeply moving, quite often stunningly insightful, and consistently hilarious. I found myself grinning by page two." Sarah Erdman, author of Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African

Village— There's magic at work here. Not until late in the book—well after he has seduced you with his humor, poetic prose, and elegant observations about life on a drowning tropical island—do you realize that the window Rudiak-Gould has been holding open and allowing you to peek through is not actually a window, but a brilliantly-disguised mirror.— Brad Newsham, author of *Take Me With You: A Round-the-World Journey to Invite a Stranger Home* — At once a travel narrative, a personal memoir, and an anthropological excursion, *Surviving Paradise* is also an utterly charming, often very funny account of a young man's surreal immersion in a relatively traditional Pacific culture. I recommend it heartily!— Lawrence Millman, author of *Last Places* — In this surprising and funny memoir, Peter Rudiak-Gould falls in love with his fantasy of the tiny Micronesian paradise where he is assigned to teach English, then runs headlong into the realities of isolation, cultural difference, and global warming. *Surviving Paradise* is a gentle, witty reminder that we live on an entirely unpredictable planet.— Dinty W. Moore, author of *Between Panic and Desire* — Fresh out of college, Peter Rudiak-Gould went looking for the biggest adventure in the most faraway place he could imagine. His boyish enchantment with mystery itself matured into a — thoughtful appreciation of the people he came to know on a primitive island. The resulting memoir is sensitive, funny and true.— Sharon Dirlam, author of *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place* —

Everyone imagines running away to a Polynesian island and living in harmony with nature and each other. That island has no mosquitoes, exquisite beaches, all the food one can eat, perfect weather, no outside influences...and on and on. This book shows a lot of this is true, a lot is wrong, and that the inhabitants of such islands are as human as you or I...in mostly good ways. And they are different, in mostly good ways. A good book to read

From start to finish, Rudiak brings us to a place most of us will never visit or understand. Thanks to the author's clear prose, well told personal narrative and insights, we are left with a great deal of information about this corner of the world. I have read this book about half a dozen times and enjoyed it even more each time.

I was excited to stumble across this book, as I had lived in Majuro for three and a half years working as a volunteer teacher and counselor for the Catholic community. While the author took me on his personal journey, it was not so far from my own and from many other stories told to me by other

volunteers arriving in this island country. In reading through the chapters, I was reminded of things I'd forgotten. Parts of his story made me laugh, parts made me sad, parts made me indignant. And other parts made me nod yes, that's so true. Accurate depiction, entertaining, and thought provoking. Makes me want to go back.

For years I have had an urge to visit a Pacific atoll and stay a while to see what life is like there. This book gives me all the detail I need and want. I will know exactly what to expect when I do make it there. The author is very realistic about his feelings and describes accurately how the natives live and how they think. You just can't get this kind of info anywhere else that I know of. Perhaps in a few of the British books about life on the islands when they ruled them. But this book gives it to you straight. You will learn that these islands are far from a paradise in fact probably the opposite. If the predictions about global sea levels rising come true then before too long these settlements won't even exist and this way of life will be lost except in books like this. I highly recommend this one.

A very interesting book about the little known Marshall Islands, their people, and how the author taught, or tried to teach, the children of Ujae one of the islands which is unfortunately doomed to disappear under the ocean. The author tells us about, not only his personal adventure, the culture of the Marshallese and also, much to be admired, he learnt in that short time their language and customs. The islanders of this archipelago have no use of a compass as they really have only two directions, the ocean side or the lagoon side of their islands. A really wonderful story of a remote part of the world and the people who inhabit this region. A really interesting read and written both scholarly and with humour.

This is an excellent and accessible work of anthropology masquerading as a story of travel, adventure, or self-discovery. The author lives on a remote atoll in the Marshall Islands for a year and experiences the "other" in a way few of us would have imagined. Along the way, the difficult and occasionally traditional experience provides a worthwhile reflection upon a Western-style of living, not only in the differences between the two but also how the lifestyle of one affects the other, from global warming to force migration. "Surviving Paradise is a down-to-earth, interesting, and helpful look at one man's experience connecting to a completely different environment and group of people, one with lessons that all of us can take to heart.

I am visiting several South Pacific countries as a typical tourist spending a few days going where

other tourists go. To better understand these countries, I bought several books, mostly by young American volunteers like this author who had spent a year or more in contact with ordinary local people. All were useful but this was by far the best. Unlike some authors who start with their conclusions and provide "evidence" to support them, Peter focusses on what he sees, feels and learns. The mostly chronological approach where he starts out realizing he knows nearly nothing and changes his views as he sees and understands more works very well. 95% of this book is about a single small island in one of about 20 countries and territories in the South Pacific. However, it helped me better understand what these places are really like and why people think and act as they do.

The author expresses a refreshing worldview and a pleasant personal touch. He likes people and takes them for what they are. Seeing these islands through his eyes is a wonderful and sometimes sad explore of a world very different from continental life. Lots to think about and enjoy.

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