

LUCIANO DEL SETTE

Although he has lived for many years in Rome, Luciano del Sette is originally from Torino. I met him at Club Livingstone, a travellers' association, on Corso Vinzaglio. He had just returned from Indonesia, on which he had done an exceptional guide, written immediately, with the information blended with anecdotes and encounters. Then came the 'Clup' guidebooks- the fabulous series never longed for enough!- from Thailand and Brazil, countries in which Luciano had spent seven months.

In the year 2000 he gave life to a beautiful magazine for travellers, one of a kind, that unfortunately lived a short life, Sandokan.

For many years he has written for 'Manifesto', and his weekly supplement 'Alias'. He is also author and presenter of Radio 3.

Is there a country that you have wanted to visit in a certain moment of its history and it wasn't possible for you to do so?

Considering that, from a certain point in my life and my career, it was the events and stories that took me to the countries in which I had to go to, my own personal map has many white zones, many places of which I could have written the 'Hic sunt leones' from ancient Rome. This is due to my, possibly debatable, decision to take into consideration to stay in one place long enough to have at least an impression. I repeat, an impression. For it is only one who has been born and always lived in a city or a village who can truly say they know it. The others, the "foreigners", even though they have been there a long time, will always hold an imperfect perception. A few weeks stay cannot permit you to express opinions and lapidary certainties. After six months in Brazil and a return which took another couple of months, the only thing I was sure of bringing back with me on my return to Italy was my passionate love for the great South-American.

Having said that, I would have liked to have seen China before they wiped the slate clean. But to transform this journey, it was mid-eighties of the last century, amidst a spring of professional earning, it was difficult to be correlated to my experience and my capacity back then. At the beginning of the 90's I had studied an itinerary to cross Mongolia. But in those days I would say that to put it into practice could have been complicated, it sounded like an euphemism. Between bureaucratic obstacles, the difficulty to communicate with the people, the non-existent means of transport for a foreigner, uncertainty of placement, too much time and money would have been wasted in preparation and with the risk of coming back with little or nothing from the experience. I regret not having gone to China and Mongolia, possibly more the latter for the adventure that lay beneath.

Is there a country (or more countries) where you would never want to go? And one (or more) where you'd never want to return, preferring to remember it as it was when you were there?

There shouldn't exist places where, one should never want to go. I believe it's more a question of attraction and of interest. Even an 'ugly' country is an experience, a harsh comparison with a strange and maybe hostile reality, a kind of challenge that could either pull or push you away. I recall that, at one point, also here we are talking a few years ago, an idea came to me to go to Bulgaria to complete, amongst others, the route of the monasteries (beautiful!) Those who I told, would ask with a look of almost disgust, what on earth was I doing. The same goes for Albania, Romania, the 'communist' East is sad. Just like in the places I would never go back to, preferring to keep the memories, it is necessary not to prevail against ones own 'exotic' egoism, the

wish for everything to remain perfect and ideal for the tourist that each one of us is. There doesn't exist one nation, therefore one society or culture, that doesn't pay the price, often also high, to progress. In the best meaning of the word. So why deny others all that we have, starting from a house with a door and windows, or from a television? The problem is balance, difficult to maintain, challenging to put into practice, uncomfortable because it's hard to find. It has been masterfully taught to us by the great anthropologist Levi Strauss. Progress is a word that interests millions of people, the profit made from progress interests only a certain group, a clan, a political party, or a monarch in power. Perhaps I have simplified too much, but I believe in summary the difference and imbalance consists of this. An eloquent example of the destructive power of progress, where beneath its mask hides a profit-hungry monster, is the island of Bali. In the space of a few decades it has transformed from an authentic paradise into a touristic hell, from a structure perfect and economical for the society to a bazaar squeezed into every profit-making possibility, from jealous guardians of their religious traditions to actually making profit out of them, from the cradle to the grave for a marvellous culture. Drugs, theft, prostitution, the continuous noise from cars and motorbikes, the expensive resorts put on their feet by the designers and managers of the VIP world have all arrived. The airport of Denpasar spews out dozens of millions of holiday-makers each year. And for them the mock funereal ceremonies and fake dances in trance begin. I could go on much further down the list. But I'm not up-to-date on the latest, negative, novelties. In December of 1981, when all that I have mentioned was unfortunately already reality, I swore to myself that I would never set foot in Bali again. I have never broken that vow. For thirty years, of Bali I know nothing more, and there's nothing I want to know.