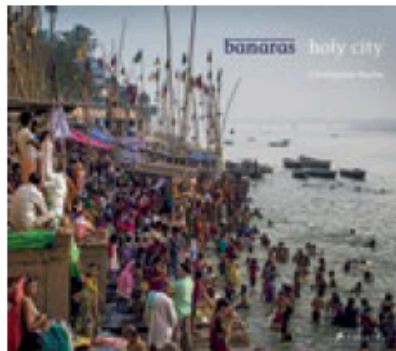


OUT THERE



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Banaras: Holy City

Christopher Roche

Prestel

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Hardback, £40

An enduring interest for travel photographer Christopher Roche is exploring people's need for spiritual fulfilment – wherever they live in the world and whatever faith they believe in. In his latest book we see Roche's curiosity for this subject unfold; here he visually describes one of the holiest cities in Hindu culture, Varanasi – also known as Banaras – on the banks of the Ganges in northern India.

Roche's pictures draw us into this blindingly colourful, wonderfully chaotic and deeply spiritual world. Most of his images are of scenes captured from the ghats of the Ganga Maa – the steps that lead down to the holy river. He tells us the story of the millions of pilgrims who arrive each year to see the city's 23,000 temples, and also the stories of those for whom the city is to be their

final resting place, where their cremated bodies are thrown into the Ganges. Despite the evocative power of the scenes, Roche admits in his introduction that photographs cannot truly capture or reveal the subject; it has to be experienced.

An informative foreword by prominent scholar Klaus K Klostermaier gives us a brief yet insightful account of the city's ancient history – such as detailing the holy figures reported to have visited (including Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism – and its turbulent and bloody past with other religions). Varanasi is an eye-opening subject, and Roche has delivered beautifully observed photographs to match.

To see more of Christopher Roche's work, see his Landscapes of Devotion feature on page 44 in this issue.

Left Daily life begins along the ghats. Banaras has over 80 ghats, or landings, reaching from Assi Ghat in the south to Adi Keshava Ghat in the north.

Right A common practice is the devotional ritual of scooping up holy water from Ganga Maa and offering this nectar of immortality to departed ancestors.