

AN IMPOSSIBLE MISSION: SEARCHING FOR PARADISE

LOOKING FOR PRINCIPLES AND CLARITY IN THE HEART OF CENTRAL ASIA

After a personal crisis, Arita Baaijens departs for the Altai Mountains in southwestern Siberia, said to be home to the legendary Shambhala, an earthly paradise in a maze of glaciers and ravines. The tireless voyager travels on horseback across snowy mountains and through dark forests which are the haunts of wolves and bears. On the road she meets biologists, shamans, and prophets, but paradise remains elusive, even after years of searching.

She becomes intrigued by the locals' faith in sacred nature and wonders how the landscape and the mind influence one another. How fantasy differs from reality. And if science has a monopoly on truth. An unexpected twist in her quest for paradise not only turns the explorer's life upside down but also puts it back on track.

'Searching for paradise revolves around a loss, a longing for something man once possessed and has lost. That is also true of me. The fact that I no longer even know what the missing piece of the puzzle looks like or what to look out for on the way is paradoxically a big advantage. According to an incomprehensible but universal law, not knowing increases the chance of discovery. As I daydream, my eyes wander from the notebook into the distance, beyond the aeroplane window, where the horizon dissolves into endless cornflower blue.'

Press on *Quest for Paradise*:

'Baaijens has taken a magnificent trip and with this book she does credit to the inhabitants of the Altai Mountains.' – *NRC Handelsblad*

'Searching for the unknown, Baaijens travels on horseback through the magical Central Asian landscape. The result is a colourful travelogue and a must read for any nature lover.' – Eva Huson, *One World*

'Baaijens seems to have been born in the wrong century. She is strong, stubborn, and gutsy. It is fun to read about a woman who is more than a match for many men when it comes to outdoor living, camping, daredevilry, and conquering steep canyons and swirling rivers on horseback. (...) Baaijens is able like no other to describe the delight of meeting all these extraordinary people, all those forgotten valleys full of Old Believers and stooped women of nature in wooden cottages, all those sandy paths, swimming in all those icy mountain lakes, all those swirling mountain streams with water of ever-changing colour, and all those fields crammed with orchids. Her route is also circular, through four countries, all of which you will get to know better.'

– *Nederlands Dagblad*



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ARITA BAAIJENS (born 1956) is an explorer, biologist, and writer. Her previous books include *A Rain of Eternal Fire* and *Desert Nomads*. She won international recognition and awards for research into the significance of landscape and is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and fellow of the Explorers Club. She received the Women of Discovery Humanity Award in 2014 and Traveler of the Year 2014 Award.

FOR A PARADISE THAT DOESN'T EXIST

ARITA BAAIJENS

'BEAUTIFUL, IMPRESSIVE BOOK ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY.' – VPRO BOEKEN