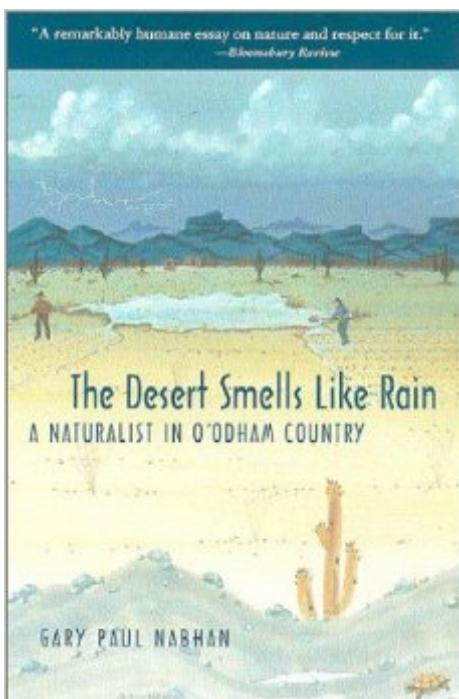


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The Desert Smells Like Rain: A Naturalist In O'odham Country



Synopsis

Longtime residents of the Sonoran Desert, the Tohono O'odham people have spent centuries living off the landâ "a land that most modern citizens of southern Arizona consider totally inhospitable. Ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan has lived with the Tohono O'odham, long known as the Papagos, observing the delicate balance between these people and their environment. Bringing O'odham voices to the page at every turn, he writes elegantly of how they husband scant water supplies, grow crops, and utilize wild edible foods. Woven through his account are coyote tales, O'odham children's impressions of the desert, and observations on the political problems that come with living on both sides of an international border. Whether visiting a sacred cave in the Baboquivari Mountains or attending a saguaro wine-drinking ceremony, Nabhan conveys the everyday life and extraordinary perseverance of these desert people in a book that has become a contemporary classic of environmental literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Nabhan gives us two perspectives on the O'odham. First, his training as a botanist exposes us to the O'odham use of wild species, both plant and animal. He also introduces us to ecology of the desert by showing how human use of an oasis interacts with its use by birds, providing details on population numbers and species. As a bonus he analyzes how the O'odham diet may relate to their diabetes. Second, he gives us a brief introduction to O'odham ethnography, and readers will find his description of the O'odham wine drinking (fertility) ceremony interesting although I would have

appreciated his setting of the ritual in its larger context i.e. Mexico. Although the ceremony today is rare, or kept secret, it was common in the 1950s. For a fictional account of one based on numerous ethnographic accounts see, IN SAGUARO'S SHADOW.ernestschusky.com

My wife and I found it interesting how the Tohono O'odham used rainfall alone to successfully subsist in the desert. We were also fascinated with the knowledge and use of herbs to maintain their physical well-being and to ward off disease. We found some of the folk tales amusing. Having lived in the Tucson area, we found we could identify with the book. We thoroughly enjoyed it. The author did an excellent job of capturing the essence of the Tohono O'odham (Papago) culture and lifestyle.

Being a winter resident of this area of Arizona I learned a great deal about the Indian culture. Despite the book's having been written in the early 80's it is relevant today as the impotence of water conservation becomes greater than ever. I sent the book to my grandson, an environmental engineer senior, for the discussion of Indian agriculture was so interesting and informative.

My favorite Nabhan book, as a desert grasslands dweller, just the title spurs my imagination.

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