

Stranger country by Monica Tan

Summary

'Will I ever really belong to this country? As a Chinese Australian? As a non-Indigenous Australian? . . . I was 32 years old and barely knew the country of my birth. It was time to change that.'

What happens when a 32-year-old first-generation Australian woman decides to chuck in a dream job, pack a sleeping bag and tent, and hit the long, dusty road for six months?

Thirty-thousand kilometres later, Monica Tan has the answer, and it completely surprises her.

In mid-2016, Monica left Sydney, unsure of her place in Australia. As a Chinese Australian city slicker, she couldn't have felt more distant from powerful mythologies like the Digger, the Drover's Wife and Clancy of the Overflow. And more importantly, Monica wondered, how could she ever feel she truly belonged to a land that has been the spiritual domain of Indigenous Australians for over 60,000 years?

Stranger Country is the riveting account of the six months Monica drove and camped her way through some of Australia's most beautiful and remote landscapes. She shared meals, beers and conversations with miners, grey nomads, artists, farmers, community workers and small business owners from across the nation: some Aboriginal, some white, some Asian, and even a few who managed to be all three. The result is an enthralling and entertaining celebration of the spirit of adventure, a thoughtful quest for understanding and a unique portrait of Australia and all it means to those who live here.

Discussion questions

1. Would you like to take a trip like this? Why? Why not?
2. Tan set out to explore the country itself and to seek more familiarity with the Indigenous peoples and their cultures. What did she actually discover?
3. What does the "real Australia" and "real Australians" look like?
4. After writing this book Tan took her learning to share in her teaching of young people in the city, teenagers often with migrant backgrounds who may also have felt they didn't belong. What do you think was the lesson that she had to share with them?
5. The story is very affirming in terms of Australia having long been a multicultural country. Do you think that we still need to sort out how best to work with that rather than against it? Is Australia a successful multicultural country?
6. "Tan's research on the different Aboriginal groups was impeccable and the journey flowed beautifully, until she sought out Australians of Chinese descent. That's when the tone of the memoir shifted to a negative narrative on the ills of colonisation to the point of blatant

discrimination against all non-Chinese and non-Indigenous Australians". Do you agree with this reviewer's view of the book?

7. Six months of living with the bare necessities is not an easy thing to do. What are your bare necessities