

By Graham Bond

LAND OF HOPE AND BEAUTY

"Daniel J Groshong's *Timor-Leste Land of Discovery* is a testament to life and liberty in the world's newest nation," writes Timor's Foreign Affairs Minister in an afterword to this glorious coffee-table tome. With similarly weighty comments from the likes of Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan sprinkled throughout, *Land of Discovery* reminds readers that the 192 pages of mesmerising photography – full of warmth, vitality and fun – must be seen against the story of a nation's struggle for freedom. The result is a book that is not only profoundly beautiful but also deeply moving.

Timor-Leste's abiding allure is a miracle in itself. Having survived centuries of exploitation by Portuguese colonisers, the island endured a devastating three-year stay by Japanese troops during the second world war. It was annexed by a belligerent Indonesia in the 1970s, leading in turn to a brutal and bloody occupation that only came to an end in 2001. These historical facts are recorded in brief at the back of this book, and it's where they belong. For this is a book that documents the true joy of the land that has survived.

Land of Discovery is no seductive slice of travel mystique. Authenticity abounds on each and every page, from the shot of a man boiling water for coffee in an abandoned mountain chapel, to images of villagers clutching their prize cock-fighters shortly before a bout. With separate sections on the Urban, Sea, Coastal, Inland and Mountain landscapes, Groshong treats us to the best of the island's human and geographic attractions without creating a holiday brochure slideshow. Staring out from the pages are faces

scarred by struggle, eyes filled with hope and expressions of enduring determination.

That the book feels like a documentary study is no great surprise. In his 20-year photographic career, Groshong has spent time documenting conflict – Somalia and Afghanistan included – as well as environmental issues for Greenpeace. But though journalistic in tone, there's an artistic richness. *Land of Discovery* is a genuine treasure, a visually gorgeous book that pays tribute to the beauty of the natural world and the indomitable spirit of the Timorese.

Photographs by Daniel J Groshong, available for USD 40 from www.tayophotogroup.com

