



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism

Linda Johnsen , Jody P. Schaeffer (Illustrator) , David Frawley (Foreword by)

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Presents the history, customs, and beliefs of Hinduism, describing the mysteries and myths that sustained its growth over the centuries.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism for online ebook

Amy Langston says

This was the first of the Complete Idiot's guides that I read, and this book got me hooked. The author, Linda Johnsen, is a Western convert to Hinduism, and she does an excellent job of explaining Hindu thought to a Western audience. Many Westerners find Hinduism confusing and mystifying, and the way it was taught to me it sounded like Hinduism doesn't have any true sense of unity in thought and belief. Johnsen's book taught me that there is a little more consistency than I had thought, and she covers so many topics in a readable, personal, and humorous way. Her own enthusiasm and love for the religion bleeds off the page, giving an intimate view of Hinduism. I did gain more appreciation for the contributions of Indian thought and development to the world.

She covers most topics related to Hinduism in brief in each chapter. This book is breadth over depth, but it brought all the topics together to show how they're all connected. If I have any complaint about the book, she didn't adequately address the problems with the caste system. This is something Westerners will criticize about Indian society, and I was hoping for a frank and honest description of the caste system. But in the part of the book that dealt with this, she was more defensive of it and seemed to say that Westerners aren't in a position to criticize it because they don't grasp the ideals that shape Indian society. I felt this important and sensitive subject could've been handled better.

That said, I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about Hinduism.

Narendran Thangarajan says

This book is written with a western (as mentioned in the book) reader in mind and gives comparisons with Christianity and Islam to help understand Hinduism better. So if you are a westerner and curious about what Hinduism is all about, this book is for you.

I was born a Hindu, and maybe that's why I never got the opportunity to look at my own religion in an objective sense. So the reading of this book was merely an experiment on myself on how much I know and don't know about Hinduism. Consequently, most of the contents in the book were already known to me and verifying my own mental models of what Hindus believe in, who they worship and how they live. But otherwise, this book is very, very informative and presented in an enjoyable format. The book is well-researched, and gives a concise and yet internally consistent version of Hinduism -- i.e. if you read the entire book, you may not find two concepts which are conflicting. I liked that aspect of this book. Also, some ideas like looking at life, death and reincarnation as sitting on Ferris wheel and going up and down was very interesting. This is the best Hinduism 101 book I can think of.

Franklin Hurst says

awesome

Kevin Yee says

A solid introduction to Hinduism.

Ashley says

I used to be a little off-put by the concept of an Idiot's Guide, especially on subjects that weren't something I felt like you break down and teach in stages, like grammar or plumbing, but I have a few of this series now, and I've found them to be very well researched as well as nicely written. I never at all feel talked down to or like concepts are presented too slowly. Also, in the case of this book, the subject matter is presented sensitively and comprehensively by someone with both a vast knowledge of and love for her topic.

Rob says

This was a really good read. I had originally gone looking for some of the actual Hindu holy books. But, discovering that they were a bit hard to find, I grabbed this one for an introduction to the religion. It was a good decision. I learned a lot, and the author's style was friendly, easy to follow, and enjoyable. She made a few comments about other religions that seemed a bit over-broad, creating a few unfair comparisons. But only a few in a nearly 400 page book. Most of the book is not a "comparative religions" book, anyway. She minimized the "this is how Hinduism compares to..." aspect, and focused on the "this is what Hinduism is" angle, which I really liked.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who is wanting to explore this religion, especially if you're coming from a blank slate like I was.

Naomi Ruth says

I was a little worried about this book when I saw that its author was not from India, however, Linda Johnsen did not disappoint. Because she is from the West but has spent a great deal of time in India and studying this religion she does a wonderful job of bridging the gap between the two mind sets. Her writing was clear, engaging, and informative. I have read The Bhagavad Gita, selections from the Yoga Vasistha, and The Upanishads, but after reading this book I understand them so much more. I have a much better understanding of what Hinduism is and what the different philosophies are. I am so pleased with this book and am happy to own it.

Czarny Pies says

The Complete Idiot Guides on religions have the great virtue of presenting how religions are practiced in a contemporary North American setting. Their goal is always to help a new practitioner understand what his

faith involves will entail a practical level. They consistently shy away from theological controversies that have no significance on how one actually practices the faith.

It is no accident that the author of the Complete Idiot's guide is an adult convert. The basic goal of the publisher is to assist the outsider in entering the religion. The person who practices a different religion also benefits from this approach also as it clearly explains the strong points of the religion and what is involved in its practice.

Hinduism is much harder for a Christian to understand than either Judaism. Islam has the same God as Christianity. Judaism has the same God also and its Pentateuch is the old testament of the Christian Bible. Hinduism has a different god and sacred texts that are dramatically different in nature from those of either Christianity, Islam or Judaism. Given the enormity of the task, Ms. Johnsen does a superb job in explaining the beliefs, sacred texts and practices of Hinduism to a reader who has no background in the area.

Ms. Johnsen's book is of tremendous value to anyone wishing to learn more about the strengths of Hinduism and the appeal that it has for reasonable people!

Ellie Syverud says

Great book for quick learning/chock full of information in easy to read format

Davis says

Hey guys, did you know how great Hinduism is? Like, so great! Older and better than any other tradition - after all, it's what all other religions were like before Christianity and Islam and the stamping out of pagan traditions.

That was basically the book. It was absolutely awful. The author was so full of how great Hinduism is, and the bias completely showed through in her work. Also, she mentions all of these special things, for which I couldn't find *any* corroborating evidence for online. And, over half of her etymology facts were completely wrong - all found by a quick Google search! Not to mention her writing style. The author really needs to learn to not use so many exclamation points.

This book does get greater than one star because I guess it did introduce me to the very basics of Hinduism and their beliefs. But the bias of the author and the ridiculousness of the unverified claims completely ruined the book. I had to push myself to finish it, especially since the author lists no sources for these things, apart from "I was told", etc. Also, the inclusion of a Further Resources section warrants it to get above a 1-star review - hopefully they won't be as awful and as biased and as factually incorrect in places as this book.

Conclusion:

Just get the books from the Further Reading section and read those. This book is too full of how great Hinduism is and is a completely biased look into the tradition. It does offer information on the basics, but the

author's attitude completely ruins any objectiveness that might have been found in the books. And, did you know, Hinduism is probably what all other traditions looked like? And everyone smart Greek/Muslim/etc who has ever encountered it loved it?

Shishir says

A broad coverage of a vast subject. Ranging from historical perspective to current day fads of New Age Religions. While I found this book informative and enlightening, I also found ideas that overly reinforced author's confirmation bias. Overall it is a useful guide to terms and aspects of this eternal mystical and pluralistic Religion.

Kate says

This is now a 'bathroom book' I feel like I need to put it back on the nightstand and power through it before going to India and practicing Hinduism myself ;)

These books rock - I read the idiots guide to Judaism and learned a ton and now that I am marrying a Hindu and am expected to practice I thought I would start to brush up - Hinduism rocks and is kind of the 'word' or 'definition' I have been looking for to describe my 'spiritual' beliefs but I just didn't know it - it is so spot on. weird how things come into your life and your like -- ahhhhhh?!?!?! These books make it easy to learn.

Greg says

This book was definitely informative, and broke down the Hindu religion as simply as possible. The writer was a bit too enthusiastic, though. I wish she had been more objective.

I read the iBook on my iPhone, which was a bit tedious. It would be nice to have a physical copy of this book for reference.

Nurab says

Ms. Johnsen has done a good job explaining some details of Hinduism. But there are few places where I could feel the author is infatuated with this old culture. Of course, there are good side and bad side to almost everything. I appreciate Ms. Johnsen for highlighting the characteristic of hinduism. But as before, even though I learned something from the book, I know that I do not know many things.

What made me want to read this book?

I never thought I would meet several people in the western hemisphere who are sincerely religious and could even quote the Holy book, Bible, by heart. And here I was, who knew nothing about the very religion I grew up with. I know that I know something, yet I do not know many things.

One of my coworker asked me a question about Hindu lore that I had never thought of before, “Do you believe in Hindu stories? Do you think it really happened?” Growing up in a Hindu family, I came in contact with several Hindu mythologies, deities, and stories. Yet, I never thought about this question. I took all of the stories as a legend - as in something that may have been based on real person or real event but has been fictionalized over the course of time - or as someone’s imagination trying to explain the unknown universe. Regardless of the authenticity of the story, what mattered to me was the moral of the story, the teaching behind a metaphor. For instance, in a poem the poet could be talking about open window, where he either means freedom or could literally mean open window. The interpretation of words depend on the interpreter. Thus, it never occurred to me to memorize the citations as in “Hansel and Gretel, pg 20, para 2”.

Nevertheless, encountering several passionately religious people made me curious to know more about my own background. I then took the shelter of this book, An Idiot’s Guide to Hinduism, with a hope to read about my own culture through the eye of a western author.

Kamna says

Interesting read for getting a basic idea / foundation for Hinduism. However, the author sometimes has a "Isn't that cute?" attitude toward Hindu mythologies, often skipping over the real meaning behind those myths. I also don't feel that the author is an expert on the subject of Hinduism. It would be a more meaningful book if it included interviews with Hindus (who aren't gurus, sages, etc.) to understand how the religion is practiced.
