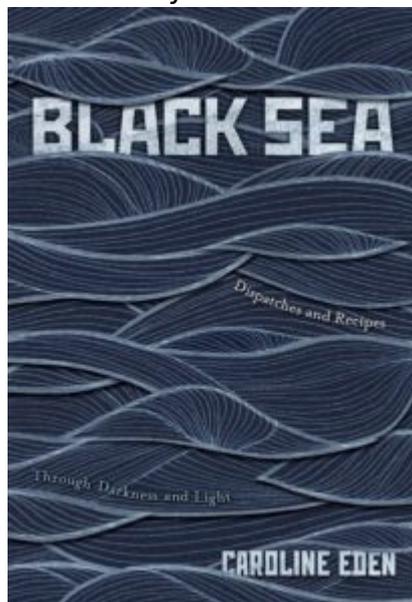


# [Review: Black Sea: Dispatches and Recipes, Through Darkness and Light](#)

written by Guest Contributor | December 17, 2020



*Black Sea: Dispatches and Recipes, Through Darkness and Light* by Caroline Eden

Quadrille Publishing, May 2019

[Bookshop](#) / [B&N](#) / [Amazon](#)

280 pages – Non-fiction

The Black Sea has lived in my psyche forever. Being of part Ukrainian heritage, my Father would often talk about Ukraine's geography, how the 'Chorne More' (Чорне Море – Ukrainian translation for the Black Sea), dominated the coastline and how it influenced the way of life for Ukraine as well for its neighbours.

It was when I visited a Bulgarian resort near the port of Varna a few years ago that the Black Sea really came to life for me. Much darker than its Mediterranean counterpart, more slate grey rather than sparkly Tiffany blue and a good few degrees cooler, I contemplated its seemingly inhospitable manner as the seaweed wound itself around my feet as if warning me not to go in any further.

After my visit, I discovered Caroline Eden's book *Black Sea* and hoped this would give me more knowledge about the area. It documents Eden's travel notes from her journey, from Ukraine to Trabazon, the people she met, her interactions with them, alongside recipes she collated from each destination, and a brief historical description of each place. It explores how the sea has accommodated trade, merchants, invasions, immigration as well as being a seafood supplier for coastal resorts.

Amongst the history documented, it also includes how the fusion of religions is apparent in many of the destinations featured, including Odessa (now in Ukraine, historically Russia), where the Orthodox congregations rubbed shoulders with a Jewish diaspora. I always thought of it as a working port in the main, but with the likes of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Mark Twain all passing through, I can now see it was a magnet historically for the rich and famous to experience opulence and affluence to the point where the Yiddish phrase 'living like God in Odessa' became commonplace.

For most, Turkey is renown as a holiday destination for sunseekers, but Eden peels back the gloss from the initial layer seen by tourists and describes Turkey's complex history, including why the red and black tassled hat (fez) ceased to be worn but yet remains synonymous with the country. Descriptions of rich agricultural offerings such as mulberry bushes growing abundantly fill the mind. A surprising chapter appears describing a buoyant tea growing industry that started in the 1920's where seeds from the Caucasus mountains were brought to Turkey and plantations were created. The hot air flowing through from Central Asia with damp winds cascading in from the Black Sea and fertile soil creates ideal growing conditions. It is estimated that up to 10% of the world's tea harvests come from Turkey.

Punctuating her writing are stunning photographs of the vistas, the buildings, the food eaten and candid pictures of the people she met as well as of course the Black Sea itself, which brings her words to life and creates an overwhelming urge of wanderlust to visit its shores. Similarly, Eden's first book *Samarkand* written with Eleanor Ford, has a comparable emphasis but instead focuses on the former Soviet states, Central Asia and the Causasus region. Highlighting the Silk Road trail including the breath-taking photographs of the mosaic architecture of Uzbekistan untapped by mass tourism but yet aching to be explored.

Her new book, *Red Sands*, which is due to be published in November 2020, takes a deeper look into more of Central Asia from the edges of the Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan through its neighbouring countries (informally referred to as the 'stans), showcasing the countries' heritage, tales and recipes.

When the opportunity arises to visit a Black Sea destination again, and I venture back in for a paddle; when the salty, brine water washes between my toes, I will have a different perspective and a deeper respect for this stretch of water. This is all thanks to Eden's dispatches which has provided the incentive for me to find out more and to keep an eye on how the countries touched by the Black Sea will evolve in the future.

*This review originally appeared on [Writing.ie](http://Writing.ie)*

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