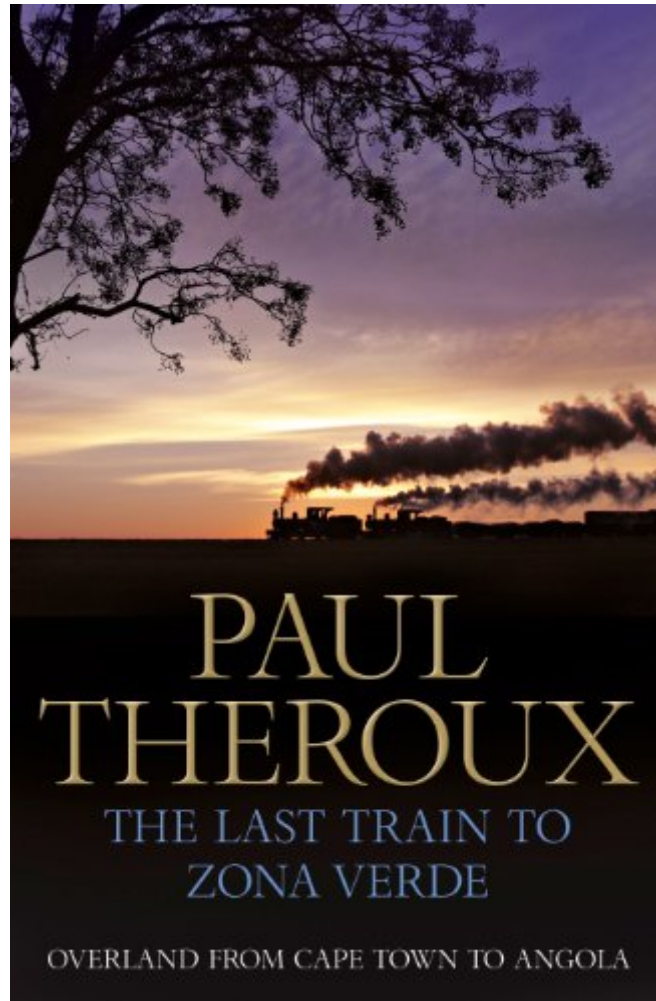


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The Last Train To Zona Verde: Overland From Cape Town To Angola



Synopsis

The Last Train to Zona Verde is an ode to the last African journey of Paul Theroux. 'Happy again, back in the kingdom of light,' writes Paul Theroux as he sets out on a new journey though the continent he knows and loves best. Having travelled down the right-hand side of Africa in Dark Star Safari, he sets out this time from Cape Town, heading northwards in a new direction, up the left-hand side, through South Africa and Namibia, to Botswana, then on into Angola, heading for the Congo, in search of the end of the line. Journeying alone through the greenest continent in what he feels will be his last African journey, Theroux encounters a world increasingly removed from both the itineraries of tourists and the hopes of post-colonial independence movements. Leaving the Cape Town townships, traversing the Namibian bush, passing the browsing cattle of the great sunbaked heartland of the savannah, Theroux crosses "the Red Line" into a different Africa: "the improvised, slapped-together Africa of tumbled fences and cooking fires, of mud and thatch", of heat and poverty, and of roadblocks, mobs and anarchy. A final African adventure from the writer whose gimlet eye and effortless prose have brought the world to generations of readers, The Last Train to Zona Verde is Paul Theroux's ultimate safari. Praise for Paul Theroux: 'Always a terrific teller of tales and conjurer of exotic locales, he writes lean prose that lopes along at a compelling pace' Sunday Times 'One needs energy to keep up with the extraordinary, productive restlessness of Paul Theroux ... [He is] the most gifted, most prodigal writer of his generation' Jonathan Raban 'His ability to sum up a city or a people in a few lines is undiminished' Daily Telegraph Paul Theroux's books include Dark Star Safari, Ghost Train to the Eastern Star, Riding the Iron Rooster, The Great Railway Bazaar, The Elephanta Suite, A Dead Hand, The Tao of Travel and The Lower River. The Mosquito Coast and Dr Slaughter have both been made into successful films. Paul Theroux divides his time between Cape Cod and the Hawaiian islands.

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Customer Reviews

Travel with Paul Theroux is always an enlightening, but rarely uplifting, experience. He is a gifted writer whose prose unlocks vivid images and portraits of exotic places and peoples, this time in southwest Africa. In "The Last Train to Zona Verde" (a term used in parts of Africa to describe the "bush"), Mr. Theroux refuses to let the reader turn a blind eye to the desperation, hopelessness, and plight of the swath of Africa through which he journeys. And that is precisely what we can most appreciate in him. Few would go where he has gone, and even fewer could write with such elegance and veracity about the experience. Mr. Theroux was no stranger to Africa when he journeyed there for his final adventure chronicled in "Zona Verde". As a youth, he spent many years in Africa; as a traveler, a schoolteacher, and a writer. In this final saga, he makes a nostalgic return to the continent almost a half a century later for what he senses from the outset will be his final journey there. Mr. Theroux struggles with what he characterizes as his own "voyeurism of gawking at poverty". He starts out in Cape Town, eschewing the glamorous side of this fashionable town and clambering to "go slumming" in the outskirts of the city. High society and the beautiful side of life seem to bore him. He rationalizes that his desire to travel is not like other "tourists" (he calls himself a "traveler"): he is a writer looking for mutability, what has changed over time, and to opine on whether change has been for the better. He rarely seems to conclude that it has. Who, according to Mr. Theroux, is a traveler? Ideally, it is one whose journey is a laborious quest into the unknown. Mr. Theroux admonishes that reading one of his books, although stimulating, is no substitute for travel. He takes us via every conceivable mode of public transportation and on foot, dragging us through the mud, so to speak, across hostile borders. I am no armchair tourist, but I think I will skip the fly-infested chicken legs and endless garbage heaps he describes, but am happy to experience all he encounters vicariously. From sterility in the aftermath of the civil war, to the slow but steady

ascendency of the new Chinese colonialism, Mr. Theroux, undeterred by warnings and, indeed, somewhat stimulated by them, takes us on a journey through one of the most corrupt and godforsaken countries on earth - Angola. He peels back layer after rotten layer of corruption and destitution in a country nonetheless dripping in gold, oil, and diamonds. This is Mr. Theroux at his best, and humanity at its worst. Not surprisingly, Mr. Theroux is not a huge enthusiast of the multitude of NGOs and other humanitarian efforts in Africa and their attempts to raise the bar in education and living standards. He sees such efforts as largely having failed in their quest. He perceives corruption as the main impediment to success despite billions in aid poured into the continent. On his journey, Mr. Theroux finds one bright spot in remote Tsumkwee, in northwest Namibia. There he visits NGO-sponsored schools where he is invited to speak. But impressed as he is in this remote village by the cleanliness of the children, the level of their English, and eagerness of their desire to learn, he nonetheless expresses skepticism about the ability of these children to find future opportunities in their own country. Here, at least, foreign aid dollars appeared to be making some difference. Mr. Theroux is nostalgic in "The Last Train to Zona Verde", not just for his earlier days of travel, but also for his youth. "As a young man, I never entertained this idea of death in travel. I had set off for Africa almost fifty years ago with the notion that my life had at last begun." But time inevitably transmutes his perception, "During my last few long trips I often thought that I might die. I was not alone in that fear; it is the rational conjecture of most travelers I know, especially the ones about my age." With this swan song, Mr. Theroux is at his zenith as a travel writer, but also as a travel philosopher now more in touch with his own mortality. "This is what the world will look like when it ends," he writes as he nears his final destination outside Luanda, Angola. It is as though he traveled to the end of the earth to render the final strokes of his pen.

Theroux was my go to man when I was younger and on the road around the globe like him so I can't disrespect him too much. But now that I'm older and have a good biblical worldview (and I'm preparing to go to Angola myself on an extended work trip), I see that there is much more in heaven and earth that is dreamt of in his philosophy. Some choice sentences, I highlighted, but mostly I skimmed entire chapters because they were, in his words, 'crapulous'. It's like watching Anthony Bourdain on a too full stomach. You had a great run, Paul. Take to the armchair, sir, I beg you.

I was disappointed by this book. I have read almost all of his travel writings. In all of them, Theroux completes the tour that he sets out to do. There are a lot of adventures and encounters with people of different cultures. Everything is seasoned with humor. This book almost completely lacks it. There

is a whiny, self-pitying tone throughout, that grates on you after a while. Eventually he gives up the wretched tour after three countries. Maybe it is just as well! The thing that made his books entertaining, wears how he dealt with the hardships of travel: the miserable hotels, the overcrowded trains and buses, the unspeakable meals and toilets; where they were amusing challenges to overcome, they have in this book become intolerable hardships that are apparently rendering his tour pointless. With that, for me the author has become rather dull and uninteresting

Enlightening description of South western Africa, not at all what I expected. What a miserable way of life these folks live. Mr. Theroux is a bit nuts for taking the trip, even if it was to write the book. I'm not a fan of poverty travel and have no desire to go visit the places described. Makes me respect what others do to attempt to bring water and essential services to areas described in the book. Also good observations on the factors limiting NGO's and their ability to provide aid.

I love Paul's non-fiction and eagerly awaited his return to the Africa about which he has so brilliantly written, and indeed there are flashes of the wit, humor and cranky yet keen observation that is uniquely his own. But this is a thinly-stitched travelogue involving mostly paid lectures and visits with friends that Paul struggles to turn into the epic adventures of the past. Without giving away the ending, the ending makes perfect sense when you consider the level of effort and energy placed into this trip. This is the first time he disappointed me; I hope it is the last.

Classic Theroux. The sequel to Dark Star Africa from 2005. This is his last book of foreign travel, politics and sociology after nearly 40 years of keeping us excited. As with readers who mature with travel and time, Theroux is critical where needed yet still maintaining his youthful optimism where deserved. One need not have been in Namibia to want to go, nor have been in Angola to never want to go back. My old colleagues who returned to Angola after independence from Portugal in the 1970's could never have guessed that oil would have so corrupted and divided their nation, and Theroux explains it for you. Read this book.

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