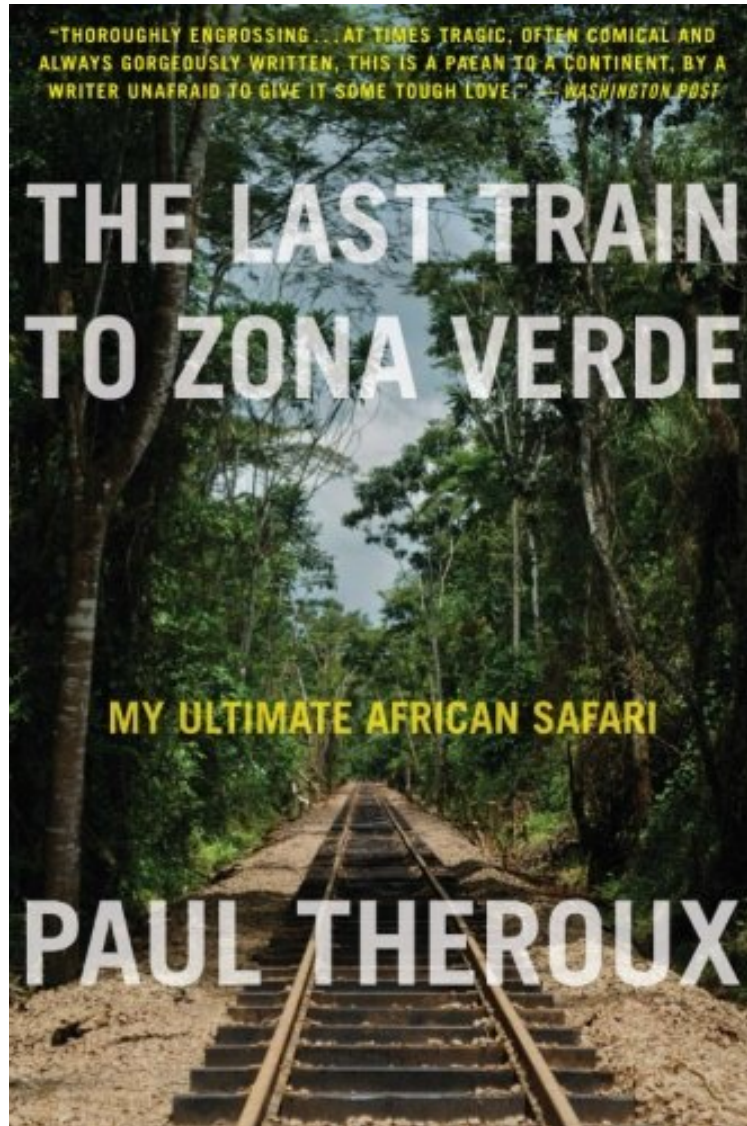


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## The Last Train to Zona Verde

*Paul Theroux*

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#140236 in Books Paul Theroux 2014-05-13 2014-05-13 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x 1.00 x 5.311, .65 #File Name: 054422793X368 pages The Last Train to Zona Verde | File size: 64.Mb

**Paul Theroux : The Last Train to Zona Verde** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Train to Zona Verde:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Trip to the End of the World By MJTravel 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 ascendancy 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. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Horatio, Listen UP By Conrad Johnson 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. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Saved his worst for the last! By Vishwanath Chidambaram 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

"Theroux is at his best when he tells [peoples] stories, happy and sad . . . Theroux's great mission had always been to transport us beyond that reading chair, to challenge himself and thus, to challenge us." Boston Globe Paul Theroux's best-selling *Dark Star Safari* chronicled his epic overland voyage from Cairo to Cape Town, providing an insiders look at modern Africa. Now, with *The Last Train to Zona Verde*, he returns to discover how both he and Africa have changed in the ensuing years. Traveling alone, Theroux sets out from Cape Town, going north through South Africa, Namibia, then into Angola, encountering a world increasingly removed from tourists' itineraries and the hopes of postcolonial independence movements. After covering nearly 2,500 arduous miles, he cuts short his journey, a decision he chronicles with unsparing honesty in a chapter titled *What Am I Doing Here?* Vivid, witty, and beautifully evocative, *The Last Train to Zona Verde* is a fitting final African adventure from the writer whose gimlet eye and

effortless prose have brought the world to generations of readers. "Everything is under scrutiny in Paul Theroux's latest travel book not just the people, landscapes and sociopolitical realities of the countries he visits, but his own motivations for going where he goes . . . His readers can only be grateful." Seattle Times If this book is proof, age has not slowed Theroux or encouraged him to rest on his achievements . . . Gutsy, alert to Africa's struggles, its injustices and history. San Francisco Chronicle

From Booklist\*Starred \* Having traveled overland from Cairo to Cape Town in *Dark Star Safari* (2003), Theroux intended, 10 years on, to resume the trip, this time heading north up the west side of Africa, avoiding the safe and well-trodden routes. Though he found some happy moments in the kingdom of light, the journey was to be darker, harder, and, a rarity for Theroux unfinished. He does find hopeful change in Cape Town, beautiful desolation in Namibia, and elegance in the bush in Botswana (albeit at extortionate prices). But when he crosses the border into Angola: chaos. After witnessing scene after scene of disorganization, poverty, and despair; after decrying the disconnect between the country's oil-rich rulers and its unemployed, idle citizens; after finding cities that were indistinguishable from one another in their squalor and decrepitude, he concludes there is nothing more he can learn from their suffering. Ending what seems an impossible trip, he heads for home. Ultimate in the subtitle means not best but final. As Theroux, in an autumnal state of mind, ponders his own mortality, it will be difficult for readers to imagine the world of letters without him. His ability to map new terrain, both interior and exterior, and to report from places that seldom make the news, remains undiminished. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Theroux's back-to-Africa novel, *The Lower River* (2012), was Booklist's Top of the List. But any book by the eminent author draws interest, and a national tour is planned. --Keir Graff "Thoroughly engrossing from Cape Town to Namibia to the Okavango Delta, Theroux is his inimitable, delightfully grouchy and incisive self. At times tragic, often comical and always gorgeously written, this is a paean to a continent, by a writer unafraid to give it some tough love." Washington Post "He has no illusions about the fact that he is just a passing visitor (a privileged one at that), but that doesn't make his observations, or exquisite writing, any less engaging." Entertainment Weekly (Best Book of the Year) "Theroux is at his best when he tells their stories, happy and sad... Theroux's great mission had always been to transport us beyond that reading chair, to challenge himself and thus, to challenge us." Boston Globe "If this book is proof, age has not slowed Theroux or encouraged him to rest on his achievements. Gutsy, alert to Africa's struggles, its injustices and history." San Francisco Chronicle "Everything is under scrutiny in Paul Theroux's latest travel book not just the people, landscapes and sociopolitical realities of the countries he visits, but his own motivations for going where he goes. His readers can only be grateful." Seattle Times "A rich story often laced with irony, the work of a keen observer, full of colorful encounters. Ever the astute questioner, ever the curious reporter, ever a forthright witness to history and the dilemma of the oppressed, alert to political thuggery, he chronicles the crises facing the sub-Saharan." New York Journal of Books "Theroux takes you on a rocky safari across infringed wilds, disenfranchised poverty and coven luxury. He introduces you to a boil of angry indigenous peoples and unsettled migrants you won't meet on an itinerary tour.... Go on, turn the first few pages. Then I dare you to put it down." Charleston Post-Courier "As in the best of his many books, Theroux convincingly takes you along for every manic bus ride. His wonderment is yours, whether he's contemplating eating a flyblown leg of chicken, dealing with a ferocious Angolan border guard, or deciding that this time, he's had quite enough. It's a remarkable, teeth-gritting tale" Everett Potter "His ability to map new terrain, both interior and exterior, and to report from places that seldom make the news, remains undiminished." Booklist (starred review) "Theroux's prose is as vividly descriptive and atmospheric as ever and, though a bit curmudgeonly, he's still wide open to raw, painful interactions between his psyche and his surroundings." Publishers Weekly (starred review) "In this intensely personal book, Theroux honestly confronts racism, stigma, privilege and expectations... Reading this enlightening book won't only open a window into Theroux's mind, it will also impart a deeper understanding of Africa and travel in general." Kirkus (starred review) From the Back Cover "Theroux is at his best when he tells [people's] stories, happy and sad . . . Theroux's great mission had always been to transport us beyond that reading chair, to challenge himself and thus, to challenge us." Boston Globe A decade ago, Paul Theroux's best-selling *Dark Star Safari* chronicled his epic overland voyage from Cairo to Cape Town, providing an insider's look at modern Africa. Now, with *The Last Train to Zona Verde*, he returns to discover how both he and Africa have changed in the ensuing years. Traveling alone, Theroux sets out from Cape Town, going north through South Africa, Namibia, then into Angola, encountering a world increasingly removed from tourists' itineraries and the hopes of postcolonial independence movements. After covering nearly 2,500 arduous miles, he cuts short his journey, a decision he chronicles with unsparing honesty in a chapter titled *What Am I Doing Here?* Vivid, witty, and beautifully evocative, *The Last Train to Zona Verde* is a fitting final African adventure from the writer whose gimlet eye and effortless prose have brought the world to generations of readers. "Everything is under scrutiny in Paul Theroux's latest travel book not just the people, landscapes and sociopolitical realities of the countries he visits, but his own motivations for going where he goes . . . His readers can only be grateful." Seattle Times If this book is proof, age has not slowed Theroux or encouraged him to rest on his achievements . . . Gutsy, alert to Africa's struggles, its injustices and history. San Francisco Chronicle [AU PHOTO] PAUL THEROUX's renowned travel books include *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*, *Dark Star Safari*, and *The Great Railway Bazaar*. His acclaimed

novels include *The Mosquito Coast*, *Hotel Honolulu*, and *The Lower River*. "