



Ghost Train to the Eastern Star: On the Tracks of the Great Railway Bazaar

By Paul Theroux

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Ghost Train to the Eastern Star: On the Tracks of the Great Railway Bazaar By Paul Theroux

Paul Theroux returns to the transcontinental expedition that made *Great Railway Bazaar* a classic of travel literature and realizes—in rich, anecdotal detail—how much the world has changed.

Half a lifetime ago, Paul Theroux virtually invented the modern travel narrative by recounting his grand tour by train through Asia. In the three decades since, the world he recorded in that book has undergone phenomenal change. The Soviet Union has collapsed and China has risen; India booms while Burma smothers under dictatorship; Vietnam flourishes in the aftermath of the havoc America was unleashing on it the last time he passed through. In *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*, Theroux re-creates that earlier journey. His odyssey takes him from eastern Europe, still hung-over from communism, through tense but thriving Turkey into the Caucasus, where Georgia limps back toward feudalism while its neighbor Azerbaijan revels in oil-fueled capitalism. Theroux is firsthand witness to it all, encountering adventures only he could have: from the literary (sparring with the incisive Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk) to the dissolute (surviving a week-long bender on the Trans-Siberian Railroad). Wherever he goes, his omnivorous curiosity and unerring eye for detail never fail to inspire, enlighten, inform, and entertain.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, August 2008: Way back in the dark pre-Internet, limited-air-travel world of 1975, the way to get from Europe to Asia was by train. A young and ambitious writer named Paul Theroux made his literary mark by taking the 28,000-mile intercontinental journey via rail from London to Tokyo and back home again. His book, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, became a travel-lit classic. Thirty years later, an older, wiser, and even less sanguine Theroux decided to retrace his steps. The result is *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*, a fascinating account of the places you vaguely knew existed (Tbilisi), probably won't ever go to (Bangalore), but definitely should know something about (Mandalay). Get on board Theroux's fast-moving travelogue, which features some of the most astute commentary on our distorted notions of time, space, and each other in the age of jet speed, broadband connections, and cultural extinction. --*Lauren Nemroff*

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Paul Theroux has polarized critics with his latest travelogue. His sense of adventure, candid descriptions, and evocative prose notwithstanding, some critics took issue with the unbridled narcissism suffusing the narrative. Others lavished praise on the best-selling author, and the *Los Angeles Times*, summarizing the two sides neatly, called Theroux “a compelling writer who is essentially unlikable.” Despite this opinion and complaints of unimaginative generalizations and a tendency towards repetition, Theroux immerses readers in the alleys and shadowy corners of squalid cities that many are unlikely to see for themselves. He is a close observer of the unfamiliar and the strange while charting the simultaneous evolution and degeneration of the world itself. “Theroux’s real work is not about travel,” reveals the *Rocky Mountain News*, “it’s about the progress of the soul.”

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Realizing that many travel writers never retrace their steps, Theroux decides to travel as he did in his landmark book *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975): east, across Europe and Asia, by train. Taking detours due to political unrest—Iran refuses a visa, and Afghanistan seems risky—he still manages a reasonable approximation: Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan, and, finally, back across Russia, on the Trans-Siberian Express. Some places are hardly recognizable, while others seem not to have changed at all. (In the former USSR, he sees scenes that look authentic to czarist times.) As thoughtful and observant as ever—his unerring skill as an interviewer despite the somewhat difficult personality he presents to readers remains a fascinating paradox—this trip finds Theroux reflecting not only on changes to the landscape but also to himself. And where in *Dark Star Safari* (2003), Theroux seemed out of sorts, upset with tourists and aid workers alike, here, headed east through a West-looking world, he’s in heaven despite—or because of—the lack of creature comforts. A wonderful book infused with the insights of maturity, this succeeds on many levels while also doing what the best travel writing can’t help but do: make the reader want to hit the road. Moreover, it’s a reminder that in this age of increasingly homogenous urban centers and easy air travel, those who really want to discern national differences should stay on the ground. --*Keir Graff*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edward Christensen:

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