

Fresh Air Fiend: Travel Writings, 1985-2000 by Paul Theroux



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ISBN: 1402516010

ISBN13: 978-1402516016

Author: Paul Theroux

Book title: Fresh Air Fiend: Travel Writings, 1985-2000

Publisher: Recorded Books (2004)

Language: English

Category: Food Lodging and Transportation

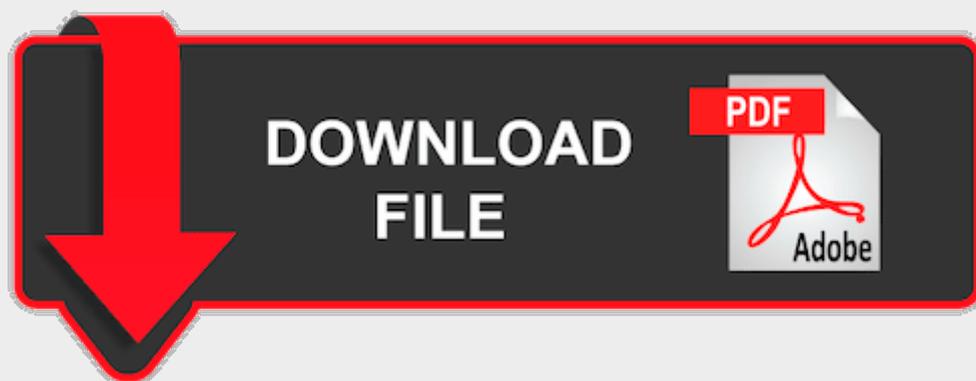
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Reviews of the Fresh Air Fiend: Travel Writings, 1985-2000 by Paul Theroux

1. Anasius

As someone first introduced to Mr. Theroux's works with "The Great Railway Bazaar" and who has savored a steady diet of his observations, insights and sardonicism since then, "Fresh Air Fiend" proves yet another palate-pleasing repaste. This is one you can nibble on here and there and see whether you can stop at "just one" in a single sitting.

By far the oddest, and most intriguing piece in this wonderful collection mocks a portion of the exceptional opening essay, *Being a Stranger*. In it, Theroux admits he has little use for the intrusion of two-way electronic communications in everyday life (revealing he lived without a phone in the English countryside for years): "Connection has made people arrogant, impatient, hasty, and presumptuous," he says, adding "... I found out much more about the world and myself by being unconnected."

This electronic aceticism (his nib pen, stolen during a burglary, he considers priceless for its memories), is a logical extension of the author's oft-stated preference for traveling solo, without a camera, choosing encounters and freezing impressions in his mind. Thus it was a bit of a shock to read the selection, "Connected in Palau," in which Theroux loaded himself up with every conceivable two-way gadget and trekked to a remote Pacific island to enact a new twist on *Crusoe*: would 'Friday' be his local guide, his brother Gene via uplink, or once again, Theroux himself, as he always seems to take solace in his own company?

"Connected in Palau" bounces back and forth from Theroux's monkeying with his gadgets in the midst of one of the most offbeat locations on earth to snapshot impressions of the habitat. Those impressions are interesting but not vintage Theroux. Did connectivity deaden Paul's powers of observation (I doubt it)? Did he deliberately engage in flash-in-the-pan descriptions of Palau to point up the dangers inherent in too much connectedness? And when he wraps up and talks about true silence finally descending upon this speck of territory, did he really mean from the lack of sound of water or from his own intrusive equipment? Finally, what price did the author personally pay in tethering himself to the global village for the purpose of writing this little morality tale when the odds of returning to Palau must have been remote?

"Connected in Palau" is just one of more than four dozen treats awaiting the reader of *Fresh Air Fiend*. It's a great way to review Theroux's travels and musings over the period 1985-2000 and revel once more in one of the past half-century's most gifted writers and social commentators. Highly recommended.

2. Fenius

I just started reading this book last night and I had to force myself to put it down and go to sleep. I actually thought about it at night and I can't

wait to read it today. I have read many, many travel writers and I can now put Paul Theroux on my list of authors to read. I was sad when I finished Bill Bryson's last book because I have now read every book he has written but now I have a new favorite author to inspire me to travel and to make me think about things I may not of thought before about certain people, places and customs.

Already Theroux has given me an insight unlike any travel writer has given me before. The way he writes is better than any travel writer I have found and it is in this exceptional writing that he conveys his thoughts to the reader for good or bad. He makes no apologies for thinking the way he does he only says, "this is how I feel". And I admire that in an author.

So far this book is more than a summation of the places Paul has been and the people he met along the way but it is an insight into himself and also his views on people in general. Most of it is his opinion of the way people act and think taking brief quotes from other authors, Freud, etc. but it somehow works. I look forward to reading the rest of his books to get the whole picture of his travels and not a series of short essays. So far this is a perfect introduction to Theroux and I highly recommend it.

3. Mr_Mole

Theroux gives us a literary delicatessen of vignettes and experiences from his writings and from personal experiences. Some of the chapters are great, some exceedingly boring. Every journalist has pieces of stories and experiences which, in themselves, would not constitute books, so they look for ways to package them in a saleable fashion. This is what Theroux has done here. This book seems to be less about his travels than about his opinions on a wide range of subjects. On the other hand, we learn a lot about this able and prolific author and how he thinks. It was a worthwhile read, but I did a lot of chapter skipping.

4. Drelajurus

You know that word, 'raconteur' - one who excels in telling stories and anecdotes. Paul Theroux is a raconteur. Oh, an erudite raconteur, a brainy man who has moved around the earth seeking out novel experiences.

This man sits across from you at a lunch table and begins telling of one time in China - one time on Cape Cod - one time in England - one time on Palau -

He has your attention; you become engrossed.

This book is from half-a-dozen years gone by, and more. The thought will cross your mind, "This China he is telling of - China probably is not like that now." No matter. The story is compelling; each story is compelling.

"Fresh Air Fiend,' will endure in memory.

5. Tekasa

An early collection of travel essays covering both foreign and domestic locations, "Fresh Air Fiend" is also a collection of small self-discoveries. "Become a stranger in order to discover the self," Theroux says. That ability to let go of the familiar and to simply observe and report without prejudice, insofar as humanly possible, may explain how Paul Theroux has become one of the pre-eminent travel writers of our time.

6. Adrietius

This book gives you a good insight into the writer's life and motivations. Why he wrote things when he did. So people who are familiar with his work will enjoy this. He also mentions books and writers that inspired him and so I discovered other writers that I enjoy reading now. I would recommend it to Theroux fans. His insights into foreign cultures as well as his own his wonderful entertaining and enlightening.

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