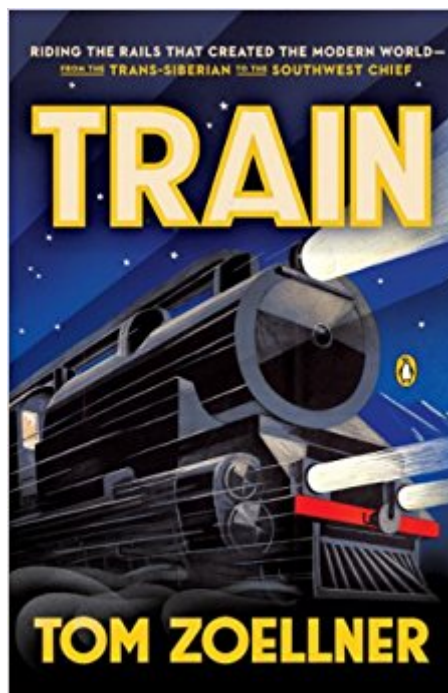




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# Train: Riding The Rails That Created The Modern World--from The Trans-Siberian To The Southwest Chief



## Synopsis

An epic and revelatory narrative of the most important transportation technology of the modern world. In his wide-ranging and entertaining new book, Tom Zoellner—coauthor of the New York Times best-selling *An Ordinary Man*—travels the globe to tell the story of the sociological and economic impact of the railway technology that transformed the world—and could very well change it again. From the frigid trans-Siberian railroad to the antiquated Indian Railways to the Japanese-style bullet trains, Zoellner offers a stirring story of this most indispensable form of travel. A masterful narrative history, *Train* also explores the sleek elegance of railroads and their hypnotizing rhythms, and explains how locomotives became living symbols of sex, death, power, and romance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Despite ebbing enthusiasm for passenger rail travel in the U.S. these days, train companies remain major players in transporting consumer goods from coast to coast. Also, as veteran journalist and unabashed train fanatic Zoellner emphasizes in this exuberant celebration of these mammoth wheeled machines, both commuters and businesses overseas are still heavily dependent on trains, especially in countries like China, where rail service continues to expand almost exponentially. As a convenient excuse for research, Zoellner toured several of the world's most notable rail lines, including a north-to-south trek in Britain, a journey up corkscrewing tracks in the Peruvian Andes, and a jaunt on Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway. In between colorful anecdotes from his travels

that include snapshots of contemporary commuters in countries from Scotland to India, Zoellner provides a wealth of fascinating historical details, such as the mood of astonishment that greeted the first trains in nineteenth-century England and the grim duty the railroads undertook during both world wars. An absorbing and lively reflection on an enduring marvel of modern industrial technology. --Carl Hays --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Praise for *Train*:  
"Tom Zoellner's writing is never less than engaging; in *Train* he has made himself a veritable Walt Whitman of rail travel. It's a great read."  
"Richard Rhodes, Pulitzer prize-winning author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* *Train* is such a pleasure to read, elegant, deeply informed and smart, full of knowledge-bearing sentences, and prose so companionable and rich in insight that it is as if its author were at your shoulder, taking you along with him. What an enjoyable journey. I will never hear the far off moan of a train in the night without thinking of it, and I know of no higher praise one can give a book. Tom Zoellner is quickly making himself a reputation as a man of wide and eclectic interests, and oh, my! Can he write!"  
"Richard Bausch, author of *Peace* *Spirited and bighearted...Zoellner enlightens us about an industry that's hiding in plain sight.*"  
"San Francisco Chronicle *Highly entertaining, lucid and perceptive....It's a train lover's celebration of the great epic story of rail travel itself.*"  
"Los Angeles Times *This is one of those all-too-rare books that have so much to them.*"  
"The Washington Times *[Train] is a gracefully written, densely detailed meditation of trains' past, present and future....[P]art travelogue, as he rides seven train that shaped the modern world; part personal memoir, as he describes the people he met along the way; and part history of trains, from their origin to their impact on societies around the world and their vital role in the fast-forward 21st century.*"  
"LA Weekly *An absorbing and lively reflection on an enduring marvel of modern industrial technology.*"  
"Booklist *Train makes for fascinating reading. The author's easy, breezy style will keep readers chugging along.*"  
"The St. Louis Post-Dispatch *Zoellner illustrates how the modern era was ushered in and strapped in place by railroads, and how trains' the reality and the idea' continue to shape the world as we understand it. Train is by turns lyrical, powerful, romantic, transporting, and rich.*"  
"Phoenix New Times *[Train], rich with history and local color, is a mesmerizing read for anyone interested in the impact of trains on the environment, politics, economics, and daily life around the world today.*"  
"Library Journal *Enchanting and informative.*"  
"New York Post *[Train] is an absorbing round-the-world journey.*"  
"BookPage

The author takes us along on his rides of half a dozen world-famous longdistance train trips, in each case providing the historical context of the railroad's role in that country, the cultural/economic/political significance of that railroad or of that particular route, and so on. The result is part travelogue and part history, neither part comprehensive, but certainly entertaining, especially for fans of rail travel. Supporting Theroux's assertion that railroads are microcosms of their countries, part of the interest is that the journeys could not be more different because of their history and cultural embedding: the trans-Siberian railway, the new Chinese high-speed line to Tibet, the Indian Railways, the journey crossing the US from Chicago to LA, etc. Zoellner pays particular attention to the economic and cultural significance of these runs. Without railroads, the extractive industries that drove colonialization and expansion in the USA, South America, and India would not have been possible, nor would the efficient movement of millions of prisoners to concentration camps in Nazi Germany; and the author concludes the Chinese have similar aspirations to "colonize" Tibet and thereby permanently end any discussions of its independence. At the same time, the very trains that were the ultimate symbol of British colonialism in India now represent unprecedented mobility for its masses, and the trains that served as symbols of white oppression in the antebellum American South soon became the vehicles that transported free blacks to Chicago in search of a new middle-class life. The author is at his best when he doesn't try to affect Paul Theroux - it's not clear he's found his own voice, since the historical parts of the narrative are written in a quite different voice than the travelogue parts. He should stick to his natural voice; he's a good writer. Overall enjoyable, but if you're looking specifically for travel writing (as opposed to a historico-travel collage), Paul Theroux focuses more on the "human interactions" side of travel (and this author admits as much).

When Zoellner had to cut short one of his railroad journeys due to circumstances beyond his control, I was disappointed but not nearly as much as he was. I was expecting this book to be a first hand account of the state of international railroad lines with colorful places and characters thrown in along the way. This book is certainly good at that. Many of Zoeller's fellow passengers stories have a bittersweet quality to them. But what was a pleasant surprise was the wonderfully written history of the rails. The back stories of the movers and shakers as well as the working grunts was highly entertaining. The author also addresses the social changes brought about by the railroad in ways you would never imagine (in one country the tracks have literally become a dumping ground). Your enthusiasm for bullet trains in the U. S. might be tempered after you read about the how costly it is to build high speed rail, the ugliness that train trestles would present in city environs and the story of

how the Northeast Corridor Acela Amtrak line never lived up to its full potential.

An enlightening mix of historic overview of the rail lines covered, including political climate, details of the physical infrastructures (equipment, rails etc), conversations with fellow passengers, employees and management and travelogue. The. Author gives the reader the best and the worst of each line. I read The book, and then sent three copies to friends with strong railroading interest.

A book titled "Train" that is about more than trains -- using modern-day train journeys as a vehicle, Tom Zoellner invites us into the social and cultural history that evolved along with railways around the world. In a "jet age," one needs to be reminded that a more definitive marker of the modern age would be the arrival of railroads, the opportunity to travel faster than one could using any "natural" means. But the journeys are not just about iron rails and history, but about people. Those who have traveled the lines Zoellner journeys will find familiar markers in modest, evocative detail, but moreover we are invited to political, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions out of which the railways' rights-of-way were crafted. In a time when most people in the United States think of rail travel with nostalgia, the reminders of its essence in most other countries as a mode of human transport, national identity, and commerce necessity rings true.

The book is more a travel-log than a travelogue..and if you're looking for the nuts-and-bolts engineering of railway equipment, look elsewhere. Tom Zoellner takes the reader into the culture of railways literally around the world. In so doing, Zoellner helps us understand the what's and the whys of trains: who built them, who used (and uses) them, and why. In short, there is a lot of insight imparted to the reader. But, to me, the book is a an absolute delight to read. Zoellner has a deft command of the idiom and a wonderful turn of phrase that from time to time puts me in mind of (dare I say it!) Charles Dickens! If you love trains and travel or the just occasional glimpse into the life of the thoughtful old person in the seat accross from your own, then Train is the book for you.

I thororoughly enjoyed this book. Like Theroux, Zoellner takes a series of train rides around the world. He engages with his fellow travellers, but unlike Theroux he goes deeper into the egineering and development of railroads. The writing is top notch. There is a significant editing glitch. On a southwestern train ride to LA, Zoellner wakes up in the San Bernardino train station, and then proceeds over the Cajon Summit to LA. In fact San Bernardino is below thw Cajon summit. This is a surprising error given that Zoellner teaches in LA.

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