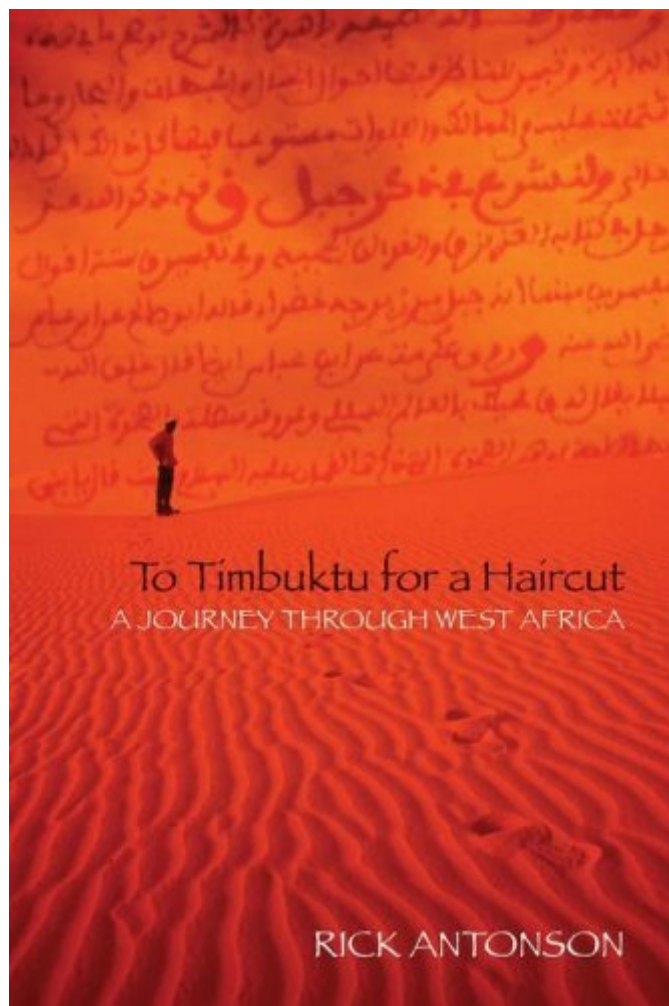


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To Timbuktu For A Haircut: A Journey Through West Africa



Synopsis

Historically rich, remote, and once unimaginably dangerous for travellers, Timbuktu still teases with "Find me if you can." Rick Antonson's encounters with entertaining train companions Ebou and Ussegnou, a mysterious cook called Nema, and intrepid guide Zak all make you want to pack up and leave for Timbuktu tomorrow. As Antonson travels in Senegal and Mali by train, four-wheel drive, river pinasse, camel, and foot, he tells of fourteenth-century legends, eighteenth-century explorers, and today's endangered existence of Timbuktu's 700,000 ancient manuscripts in what scholars have described as the most important archaeological discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls. Think Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* or Redmond O'Hanlon's *Into the Heart of Borneo* and you begin to see what kind of writer Rick Antonson is. To Timbuktu for a Haircut combines wry humour with shrewd observation to deliver an armchair experience that will linger in the mind long after the last page is read.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

We all grew up thinking of Timbuktu as a magical far away place that somehow was important in history (and that was before "Where in the world is Carmen SanDiego?"). The author is an experienced travel writer before he takes off on sort of a whim to visit this mythical city. He gives the

impression that he has traveled in out of the way places, but in the first part of the book he spends a lot of pages griping about the inconvenience and unpredictability of transportation and lodging (or lack thereof) in getting to Timbuktu. His troubles are aided and abetted by his fixer, Mohammed. The book gets better after he leaves Timbuktu, with a fresh haircut, and heads out to hike in the rugged outback of Mali. There he bonds with his guide and his cook and their families and gets to see life as it really is, not as the imagined glories of Timbuktu. Timbuktu is a place of the imagination and a place that has been ravaged from its centuries earlier glory as a center of learning and repository of valuable manuscripts. Even before reading the book, I worried about the care of these valuable ancient pieces of learning. Now, with the invasion of fundamentalists who do not value learning, I worry more (the author was there after one takeover and before another). The book raises lots of issues. For me, the most important was the role of tourism and questioning what journey one is on.

This is one of the most amazing books I have ever read. Not only is it a vacation and travel story, it is a history book on the search for Timbuktu and also a lesson on what little it takes in material possessions to have a truly meaningful life. There is a seamless integration of Rick's personal journey of discovery with the historic search for Timbuktu by various earlier explorers. Rick's vivid and penetrating description of the land and it's people places the reader right into the journey with him. I highly recommend this book to all readers regardless of their own specific list of favorite writers. An amazing journey very much worth joining Rick as he explores a world of intrigue, mystery, beauty and a way of life by people who make the most of their existence by focusing on what is truly important in one's journey through life.

Reading Rick Antonson's book on Mali took me back to 2006 and my quick trip through Mali. Having visited many of the places that Rick featured it was a great experience to witness someone who had been there before me. As a travel book I believe it to be superb and a great way to feel Mali. And lo and behold he loved the same things about the places - Mopti, Dogon, Timbuktu and Essakane - that I came to treasure. He writes very well, he experiences the real feel of the Niger River area, he captures you into his journey. And the two things that he loved most about Mali, that is Timbuktu and its manuscripts and Le Pays Dogon; his time in both locations will send me on a return trip to Mali to further experience that remarkable country. This book on Africa is as close to a real guide as anything written by Paul Theroux or investigated by Lonely Planet. I so enjoyed this book.

This brought back memories of my own travels many years ago to another part of the world. Author is a master of prose and the book contains many interesting observations about Mali and its peoples. The addendum on their current tragedies was very moving.

Mind- and life-changing - worth your time

Part history of West Africa, part travelogue, part cautionary tale, and all adventure, Rick Antonson's book, *To Timbuktu for a Haircut* makes for an interesting read. The name comes from the Berber word "tin" meaning a well and "Bouctou" meaning woman with a large navel and stands for a safe water well owned by a woman with a large navel. But the word "Timbuktu" represents mystery and adventure. Antonson decides to go there when he has some free time based on a comment his father made to him to go to Timbuktu for a haircut. Antonson gets there after a long trip by train, road and a river. Along the way he meets a variety of people. The adventure continues when he arrives. This book is fun to read and especially useful for anyone contemplating a trip to some unusual place. Preparation is important but also being able to adapt to the unexpected.

Antonson writes an excellent travel book. It is the story of his personal journey to Timbuktu and he spares the reader neither criticism of the places or difficulty inherent in the experience. He writes in a way that I felt I was riding along in his backpack "I could smell the heat, the garbage, the questionable food. I felt the sand in my mouth, my boots, and the fatigue of riding in a crowded 4x4. I also experienced his elation when he found the sites he went to see, especially the ancient manuscripts. I enjoyed Antonson's wry humour too. This is a delight to read because it is a "story" rather than a destination book. Recommended for those who appreciate exotic places, Africa, and extreme travel. I loved it.

I can't say enough about this read. I absolutely fell in love with your writing and the descriptions you used about all of your traveling, including people with whom you met and dealt with, the scenery, the history from certain eras that assisted in describing why and how you took this particular trip. I look forward to reading more of your experiences. My favorite author is Paul Theroux -- I do believe you gave him a run for his money in many aspects of your travel writing.

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