



# The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific

*By Paul Theroux*

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**The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific** By Paul Theroux

In one of his most exotic and breathtaking journeys, the intrepid traveler Paul Theroux ventures to the South Pacific, exploring fifty-one islands by collapsible kayak. Beginning in New Zealand's rain forests and ultimately coming to shore thousands of miles away in Hawaii, Theroux paddles alone over isolated atolls, through dirty harbors and shark-filled waters, and along treacherous coastlines. This exhilarating tropical epic is full of disarming observations and high adventure.

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## **The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific** By Paul Theroux Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Despite the euphoric title, Oceania as Theroux ( *Riding the Iron Rooster* ) experienced it was only occasionally a carefree paradise. In the Trobriand Islands, celebrated by anthropologists for their supposed sexual freedom, the novelist and travel writer found prostitution and fear of rape. Samoa struck him as noisy, vandalized, with American-style conspicuous consumption. The intrepid Theroux discussed world politics with the king of Tonga, encountered class consciousness in Honolulu, mingled with street gangs in Auckland, and lived in a bamboo hut in Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides), where he investigated a cargo cult and rumors of cannibalism. In Australia he braved the Woop Woop (remote outback) to camp with Aborigines. This exhilarating epic ranks with Theroux's best travel books. It is full of disarming observations, high adventure and memorable characters rendered with keen irony. First serial to New York Times Magazine; BOMC featured alternate; QPB alternate.

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From Library Journal

The best-selling author of *My Secret History* ( LJ 4/1/89) and *Riding the Iron Rooster* ( LJ 6/15/88) spent 18 months in a one-man collapsible kayak exploring such exotic Pacific islands as New Zealand, Australia, the Soloman and Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, Easter Island, and Hawaii. Never a kind-hearted chronicler of place, he sets out on this voyage in an especially dour mood, leaving behind a failed marriage and expecting to be diagnosed with cancer at any moment. Soon after he escapes the crowded towns of Australia, however, he starts to lose some of his harsh edge and enjoy his travels, which ultimately heal him. A brilliant storyteller with an eye for the absurd, Theroux takes the reader to little-known places where time seems to have stood still and people lead simple lives totally unrelated to 20th-century America. Highly recommended for all libraries. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 2/1/92.

- *Lisa J. Cochenet, Rhinelander Dist. Lib., Wis.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

The peripatetic author of *Riding the Iron Rooster*, etc., etc., ventures with a collapsible kayak to the remote and scattered islands of the South Pacific. With a farewell to his marriage, and loneliness at his back, Theroux begins his extraordinary mission in New Zealand's Fiordland ("As long as there is wilderness there is hope"), moves on to Australia (a continent "terrified by its own emptiness"), and then to Melanesia, Polynesia--Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tahiti, New Guinea's Trobriands, etc.--and, finally, Hawaii. He paddles the sea, he says, in the wake of myth-makers Melville, Stevenson, Gauguin, Maugham, and the Frenchman Captain Bougainville, who, in 1768, believed he'd found not only the Garden of Eden but Venus when a "barebreasted Tahitian girl" climbed into his ship from a canoe. To keen-eyed Theroux, the Polynesian islands are "pleasant and feckless" but far from paradise. Even Gauguin's Marquesas are "dramatic at a distance" but "close up--muddy and jungly and priest-ridden." Traditional islands are "riddled with magic, superstition, myths, dangers, rivalries and its old routines." Always interesting are Theroux's encounters with archaeologists who have disproved Thor Heyerdahl's popularizing theories about Polynesia. Sifting through human and animal bones, they study a still-mysterious people who carved some 800 stone statues on Easter Island and who boasted navigational skills that sent them migrating during what was Europe's Dark Ages. A sense of being beyond the reach of civilization comes when, in his intrepid kayak, off Easter Island and between the rock-battering surf and the Pacific, Theroux removes his headphones, "hears the immense roar of waves and the screaming wind," and is terrified. A vast and contemplative book, seeing the "Pacific as a universe, and the islands like stars in all that space." Informative not only for the voyager, but also for those

wanting a new perspective on the Western continents of home. (Sorely lacking a map.) -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Milford Garrett:**

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#### **James Fitzgibbons:**

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