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Italian Ways: On And Off The Rails From Milan To Palermo



Synopsis

“So inviting you might find yourself tempted to give the experience a whirl and ride the Italian trains yourself, book in hand.” —Liesl Schillinger, New York Times Book Review
Tim Parks’s books on Italy have been hailed as “so vivid, so packed with delectable details, [they] serve as a more than decent substitute for the real thing” (Los Angeles Times Book Review). Now, in his first Italian travelogue in a decade, he delivers a charming and funny portrait of Italian ways by riding its trains from Verona to Milan, Rome to Palermo, and right down to the heel of Italy. Parks begins as any traveler might: “A train is a train is a train, isn’t it?” But soon he turns his novelist’s eye to the details, and as he journeys through majestic Milano Centrale station or on the newest high-speed rail line, he delivers a uniquely insightful portrait of Italy. Through memorable encounters with ordinary Italians — conductors and ticket collectors, priests and prostitutes, scholars and lovers, gypsies and immigrants — Parks captures what makes Italian life distinctive: an obsession with speed but an acceptance of slower, older ways; a blind eye toward brutal architecture amid grand monuments; and an undying love of a good argument and the perfect cappuccino. Italian Ways also explores how trains helped build Italy and how their development reflects Italians’ sense of themselves from Garibaldi to Mussolini to Berlusconi and beyond. Most of all, Italian Ways is an entertaining attempt to capture the essence of modern Italy. As Parks writes, “To see the country by train is to consider the crux of the essential Italian dilemma: Is Italy part of the modern world, or not?”

Book Information

File Size: 2492 KB

Print Length: 288 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (June 10, 2013)

Publication Date: June 3, 2013

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00AR354EC

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #69,127 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #1

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Customer Reviews

Disappointing, especially since I enjoyed his soccer odyssey, A Season with Verona. Italian Ways is a depressing travelogue that would make any reader avoid all Italian trains. It's ultimately an extremely negative report card on the Italian railway system. For that matter, a very unflattering report on the Italians he encountered along the way as well. Seems like the author needs to get out of the country for a while.

If you love trains and Italy you will enjoy this book. The author describes towns around train stations. You literally travel around Italy.

This got so repetitive and boring and drug out. I didn't finish it. Too much Italian in it that wasn't translated.

This is a really interesting book about Italian culture that is exhibited during railway travel. His experience of Sicilian trains did prepare me for my hosts telling me not to use the railways. It is another in the line of explaining Italian culture through a particular aspect as he did in Neighbours, Education, A Season with Verona. I did not give the fifth star because some of A Season with Verona was reused and it rather tailed off at the end.No doubt libraries with incorrectly categorise this under railways, as they incorrectly categorised A Season with Verona under Football.

I have visited Italy three times. I learned to speak the language. But as a foreigner, the culture has been a bit hard to understand. Parks' view of Italian ways is an important contribution to understanding the country and its people.

Definitely a good book to read if you're going to Italy.

to those of us you don't think riding in close trains cars with dirty, smelly, noisy working class and

below people is a duty of the intelligentsia. The descriptions of the operations and utility of the Italian train system was fascinating. The descriptions of the odd deficiencies of the system was fascinating. The moral duty to ride in economy class with passengers that have crapped their pants? Not so much. We have to do it to prevent global warming, apparently. It never occurs to Tim that he should live and work in the same Italian city and not several hundred miles away as he does. Viola! No multi hour daily train commute, no carbon!

If you have spent a fair amount of time in Italy you will appreciate the author's insight. This is a clever way to observe Italian society. The train car is a microcosm of a disjointed country. There is nothing in the U.S. to compare with the experience of riding the Italian trains and the author does an excellent job of describing the experience. I also read the author's personal favorite of his own books which is about soccer. I tried but I could not read it. It is very soccer-ish so if you are into that you would enjoy that book. The author uses his knowledge of his adopted country, Italy, to explain the world of professional European soccer.

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