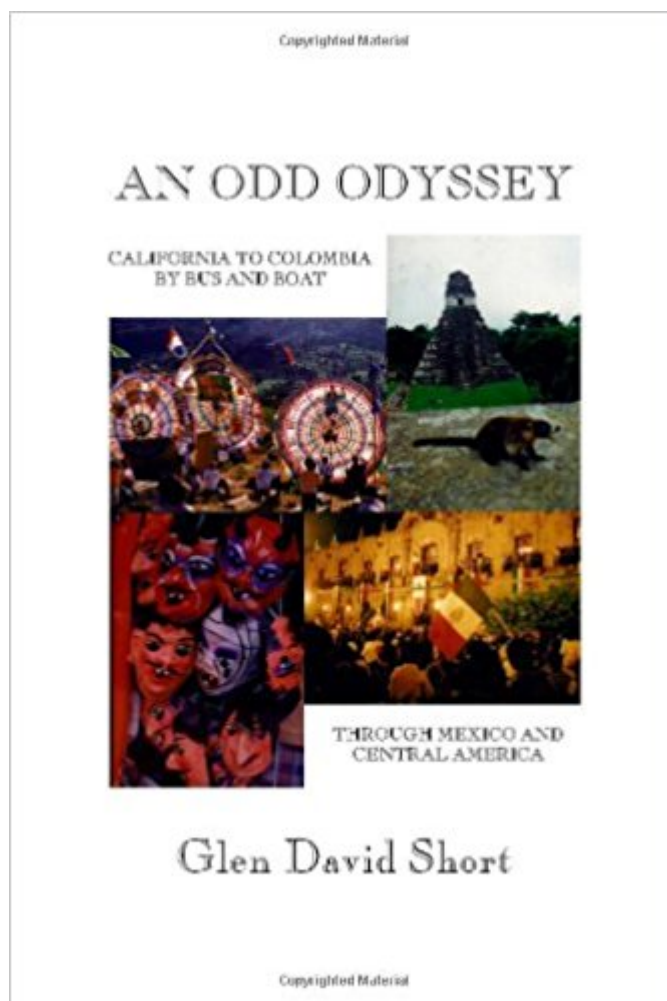


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An Odd Odyssey: California To Colombia By Bus And Boat, Through Mexico And Central America



Synopsis

This book is about the author's five and a half month journey through Mexico and Central America. It describes the places he visited, people he met, and his experiences through ten different countries during the time that Hurricane Mitch struck the region.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"... a slightly different perspective ... a lively, occasionally glib yet down to earth and honest account..." -- Reader Review, July 20, 2006

Glen David Short currently lives in the Republic of Colombia where he teaches at the British School of Cartagena.

I found this book while looking for accounts of people who had traveled through the Darien Gap overland, and this book was not one of those books but the sample chapters were interesting enough that I bought it. The sample chapters (which were generous, thank you, and a very large part of why I bought the book) are an excellent idea of what the book is like, so if you read those you will not be at all surprised by the book. I appreciated that there was very little filler, and I got some sense of what it must have been like traveling through Central America - it read more like a travel journal than anything else, which I believe was the intent. I have mixed feelings. For the most part it was entertaining, and there is some interesting history sprinkled throughout the book. I don't know if I would buy it again for eight dollars, maybe I would.

It's a little bit dated, but it was interesting and I enjoyed it. It was a good value for the price.

This book is several books in one. In addition to his varied personal experiences on the road, it includes some well researched history of the countries he visits, both ancient and contemporary. He talks about the big people in history, like Cortes, Clinton, Subcomandante Marcos, Leon Trotsky, Frida Kahlo and Manuel Noriega. He then gives equal attention to the little people he meets along the way, like the Mexican museum curator whose family had been guarding an ancient relic for several generations. He even travels to Paul Gauguin's house with a Playboy Bunny he met in a youth hostel. But he also engrosses the reader with his thoughts about his personal life, most interestingly, his romance with a Nicaraguan girl. Hurricane Mitch, which strikes when he is Guatemala and devastates the region, adds a sinister backdrop to his odd holiday, but in the end he achieves his goals despite numerous setbacks. It is a little bit like a collection of short stories, since it is written in diary form, so each day represents a new thought, and a new mini adventure. The stories about the crocodile and the monkey I almost wouldn't have believed except that he included photos in the book. I especially liked his description of his climbing of the volcano... and was left feeling it is much more enjoyable - and safer - to read his description of it than to attempt such a feat in real life.

Some years past, a colleague suggested a year of travel instead of my intended return to school. It took thirty years to fulfill that suggestion. David Short didn't require any more prompting than a dull, dirty and dangerous job. His destination, prompted by a world-traveling grandfather, became Central America, specifically, the Panama Canal. The journey lasted just short of six months and resulted in this account of his adventures. A spirited read, *An Odd Odyssey* should inspire anyone of nearly any age to pull up stakes at least once in a lifetime and venture somewhere distant. Short's account shows how richly rewarding travel can be to those willing to make the effort. There are two kinds of travel books - the "guidebook" with sights, prices, accommodation ideally suited for those seeking comfort instead of adventure. Glossy photos, usually portraying conditions found on movie sets, detailed maps, prices listed. The other type is the personal journal, which, properly done, imparts a far better sense of "being there" than does the guidebook. Short's chronicle is the second type, a vivid sharing of his thoughts, experiences, disasters, even love. The means of travel was by bus. Just finding one was fraught with hazards - timing, crowding or even just running. Once boarded, there was the issue of finding the proper seat: "Sit in the rear. Bandits will shoot through the front

window." On a limited budget the "guidebook" hotels were out of the question for Short. Many havens he found for a night's rest became adventures in their own right. Weather, ever a primary topic for travellers, added its own quirks - a major Caribbean hurricane being the most spectacular. These minor discomforts aside, Short's recital of his travels points up the many benefits of journeying solo. One of these is that you don't remain alone for long. Not every acquaintance is a welcome companion, but none are dull. They bring their lives into his view, and to ours. Short meets former convicts, travellers from Europe, Canada and Australia. Not limiting himself to fellow "gringos" he deals well with the local residents. Although a few are not as friendly as he - he's robbed twice and has the usual tangles with bureaucrats, cheating taxi drivers and sullen hoteliers. Still, he maintains his equanimity, exhibiting strength in adverse circumstances. In this modern age he can turn to internet cafes, at one point spending more on email and 'net surfing than on accommodation and food. Short is a learner, eager to know the current and historical conditions of the lands he visits. Teotihuacan, Tikal and the world's largest stone sphere. His account leads you along with him in fine descriptive prose. He shares his learning without becoming pedantic or opinionated. His judgments result of thoughtful assessment and it's easy to agree with them. The book becomes not only the tale of his journey, but a guidebook without gloss or sham. By the end of it, we envy his adventures and his ability to relate them. It's hard not to embark on a similar jaunt with the aim of duplicating his effort for your chosen locale.

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