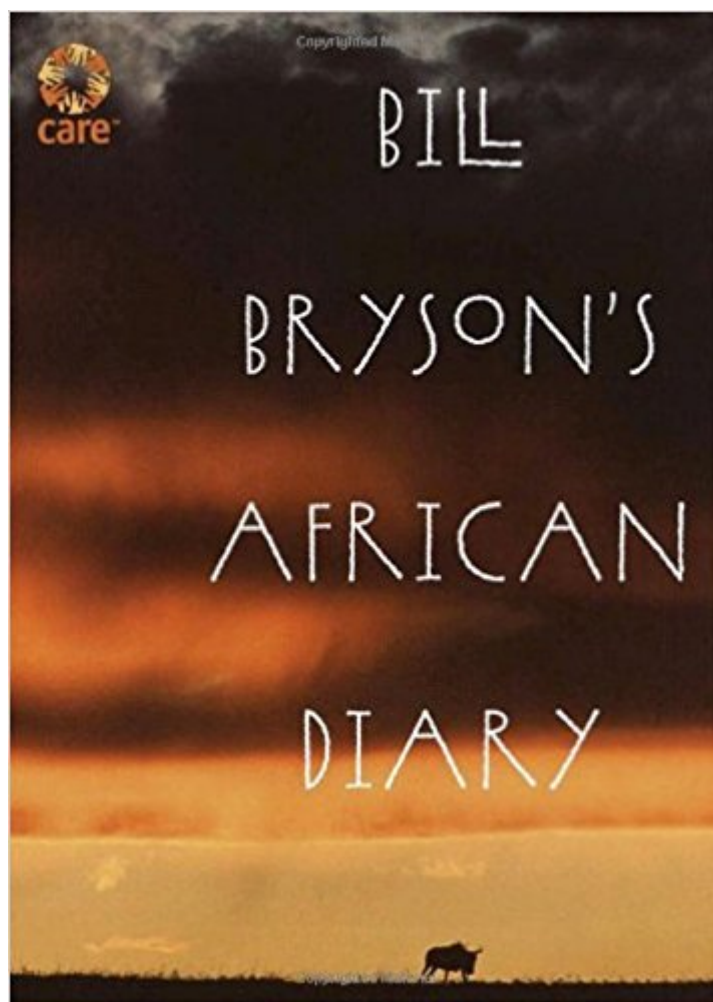


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Bill Bryson's African Diary



Synopsis

“Here is a man who suffers so his readers can laugh.” Daily Telegraph
Bill Bryson travels to Kenya in support of CARE International. All royalties and profits go to CARE International. Bryson visits Kenya at the invitation of CARE International, the charity dedicated to eradicating poverty. Kenya is a land of contrasts, with famous game reserves and a vibrant culture. It also provides plenty to worry a traveller like Bill Bryson, fixated as he is on the dangers posed by snakes, insects and large predators. It is also a country with many serious problems: refugees, AIDS, drought, and grinding poverty. The resultant diary, though short in length, contains the trademark Bryson stamp of wry observation and curious insight.

Book Information

Hardcover: 49 pages

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Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (218 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #64,251 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > History > Africa > Kenya](#) #40 in [Books > Travel > Africa > General](#) #60 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Africa](#)

Customer Reviews

Bill Bryson is a fantastic travel writer, and made this very very short book (only 49 pages!) still fun to read. I definitely wish it had been longer, but as all of the book's proceeds go to charity (specifically CARE, a wonderful organization that spends its money wisely and helps those in impoverished countries help themselves), I don't really mind. The book recounts his all too brief time in Africa (eight days), where he tours the east African nation of Kenya. He visits some of the areas in Kenya in the most need of CARE's help, such as the Nairobi slum of Kibera and the eastern refugee camp of Dadaab, filled with Somali exiles. It is quite sad to read about the horrible conditions many of these people face (wait till you read about what a flying toilet is), but heart warming to see that many are still hopeful and that all is not lost. It would seem that many of these people are good people; all they need is a chance....it was still fun to read and parts were hilarious. I enjoyed his early thoughts

on Africa, such as the initial conversations with those who convinced him to go to Africa that except for the "diseases and the bandits and the railway from Nairobi to Mombasa, there's absolutely nothing to worry about"! I enjoyed reading about that railroad, which Bryson writes has a tradition of killing passengers and has even been named the Lunatic Express, though Bryson rode it without any serious mishap. Also lots of fun to read was his arrival in Nairobi; expecting the sunny little country town in "Out of Africa," Bryson was amazed to instead find traffic, high rise buildings, bill boards - as he puts it, Omaha! His description of a harrowing single-engine plane ride was very funny as well. A fun little book, one in you can read in an hour or two.

Despite the book's trim offerings, I sat in a lawn chair and decided to give Bill Bryson and CARE (a humanitarian organization) the benefit of the doubt. How can you fault a writer or publisher who decides to give up time, comfort, and potential profit for the sake of a charitable organization? In his vintage manner, Bryson had me laughing in the opening chapter. He pulled me into his excursion to the Dark Continent with promises of adventure. This, I thought, is pure Bill-iance--using warmth and disarming revelation to ambush me with cold, hard facts. Quickly, the thought faded. This African diary is mild on adventure, lightly flavored with humor, and boasts only a few chunks of worthy information. It's truly the sparsest of diaries. I applaud this book and its goals. If, however, you are looking for thirty minutes of Brysonian entertainment, this hardcover carries a hefty price for its content. Buy it, instead, as a relatively small donation to good work being done halfway around the globe.

I came to Bill Bryson because "A Walk in the Woods" seemed like an interesting book. It was, too. But not as good as it turned out to be after hearing him read it. I've since bought every one of his travel books AND listened to all of them on CD. Hearing the way the Bryson reads his books will give you insights into the way that you should in turn read them: the inflection, the pace, the tone, everything. Taking that voice to his new work made me laugh all the more, and touched me tremendously. To hear his utter despair when he's told about the bandits; or to shudder with disgust as he learns about street kids asking for money or they rub...[edited for]...in your face; or his perfect contentedness when seeing an artifact that few in the world have ever seen makes this book a classic Bryson tome. And for all the profits to go to such an organization as CARE, well, that's the icing on the cake. I am disappointed that it was only about 50 pages, though. Not close to an hour of reading and so not enough juice. But the book, besides going to a great cause, is amazing. In 50 short pages, you'll have a clear picture of what CARE is accomplishing, you'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll

learn, and you'll help a worthwhile organization. Do yourself and the world a favor: Buy this book. Then do yourself and Bill Bryson a favor: Buy the rest of his books. You won't be disappointed.

Bryson answered the call to help out the international relief organization CARE by accompanying them to Kenya and writing this brief diary. The heart he showed by volunteering (along with the publisher Broadway Books) to donate 100% of the proceeds is impressive, however, the heart he put into the writing is not so much. As always he shares his fears and shortcomings in a humorous way, but the gravity of his surroundings seemed to have moistened his wit more so than usual. He too briefly writes about a number of potentially interesting characters who would have been better served with a more thorough (and undoubtedly Bryson-esquely funny) description. This brevity neglects the human face of the very people CARE is trying to help. Nonetheless, Bryson still captivates, and though not up to par for him, this book would make a great stocking-stuffer for your favorite do-gooder and at the same time help those who need it most.

I promised myself I wouldn't write a review because I work for CARE and went on the trip to Kenya with Bill Bryson. However - His undertaking was phenomenal. Breaking off from his current writing project to travel to an unknown continent for 8 days, make sense of it, write up 10,000 words (that's how many we felt we could ask him to undertake, he actually wrote 12,000) in two weeks, and turn it round in time for a Christmas book. Admire that, but also admire the motives and the results of this short but sweet volume. There are classic Bryson moments, humour and a well structured view of a country on the verge of great change. Believe me, your (\$\$) is making a huge difference to people's lives. And the book on your shelf can be a gentle reminder of your generosity and compassion. Thank you and all purchasers!

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