



Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Capetown

By Paul Theroux

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In *Dark Star Safari* the wittily observant and endearingly irascible Paul Theroux takes readers the length of Africa by rattletrap bus, dugout canoe, cattle truck, armed convoy, ferry, and train. In the course of his epic and enlightening journey, he endures danger, delay, and dismaying circumstances.

Gauging the state of affairs, he talks to Africans, aid workers, missionaries, and tourists. What results is an insightful meditation on the history, politics, and beauty of Africa and its people, and "a vivid portrayal of the secret sweetness, the hidden vitality, and the long-patient hope that lies just beneath the surface" (Rocky Mountain News). In a new postscript, Theroux recounts the dramatic events of a return to Africa to visit Zimbabwe.

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Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Capetown By Paul Theroux Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"You'll have a terrible time," one diplomat tells Theroux upon discovering the prolific writer's plans to hitch a ride hundreds of miles along a desolate road to Nairobi instead of taking a plane. "You'll have some great stuff for your book." That seems to be the strategy for Theroux's extended "experience of vanishing" into the African continent, where disparate incidents reveal Theroux as well as the people he meets. At times, he goes out of his way to satisfy some perverse curmudgeonly desire to pick theological disputes with Christian missionaries. But his encounters with the natives, aid workers and occasional tourists make for rollicking entertainment, even as they offer a sobering look at the social and political chaos in which much of Africa finds itself. Theroux occasionally strays into theorizing about the underlying causes for the conditions he finds, but his cogent insights are well integrated. He doesn't shy away from the literary aspects of his tale, either, frequently invoking Conrad and Rimbaud, and dropping in at the homes of Naguib Mahfouz and Nadine Gordimer at the beginning and end of his trip. He also returns to many of the places where he lived and worked as a Peace Corps volunteer and teacher in the 1960s, locations that have cropped up in earlier novels. These visits fuel the book's ongoing obsession with his approaching 60th birthday and his insistence that he isn't old yet. As a travel guide, Theroux can both rattle and beguile, but after reading this marvelous report, readers will probably agree with the priest who observes, "Wonderful people. Terrible government. The African story."

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From Library Journal

Theroux groans his way through Africa; the first single trip since *The Pillars of Hercules*.

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From Booklist

Theroux returns to East Africa--he taught in Uganda and Malawi in the 1960s--both because he wants to see if there is hope behind the horrific headlines and because he wants to drop off the map for a while. He discovers that in Ethiopia the ivory trade is alive and well; in Uganda, Makerere University still hasn't recovered from the despotism of Idi Amin; and in Zimbabwe, absurd land seizures continue unabated. The countries are poorer than he last saw them, while beset by the same intractable problems of corruption and violence. Most men he meets have spent time in prison. Besides frequent rumination on what it means to be a traveler, readers know they can expect a stimulating exploration of history, geography, politics, and society from Theroux, an intellectual with dirty fingernails who's expert at getting the first-person story. He can be caustic toward less-enlightened travelers who want simply to enjoy themselves, and to aid workers, whom he sees as universally self-serving. It's a shame that someone who strives so mightily to understand Africans can be so dismissive of his own people. A traveler who sympathizes with the downtrodden would do well to remember his own privileges of time, money, and education. Nonetheless, his book contains page after page of eye-opening and insightful observations. And for those of us who might squander our two weeks off on a predictable cruise, Theroux's vantage point from the dusty road is very useful indeed. *Keir Graff*

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Users Review

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