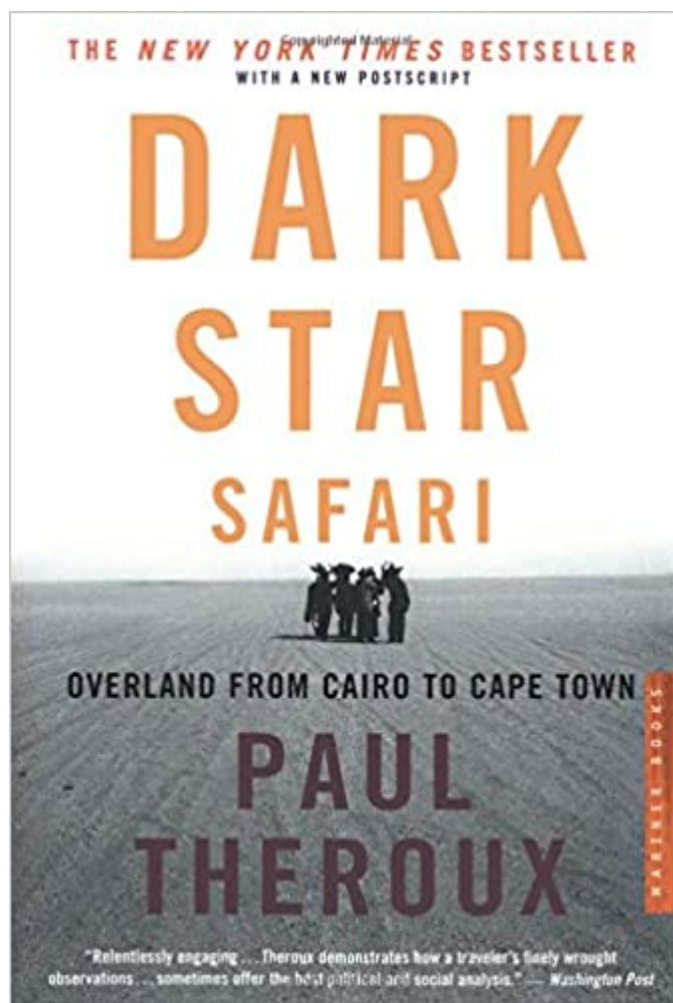


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# Dark Star Safari: Overland From Cairo To Capetown



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"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 rankle and beguile, but after reading this marvelous report, readers will probably agree with the priest who observes, "Wonderful people. Terrible government. The African story." Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Theroux groans his way through Africa; the first single trip since *The Pillars of Hercules*. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Paul Theroux writes books like a composer writes music. So much intricacy but also broad symphonic strokes. He just about covers everything you'd be looking for in a well written book. Almost like if you were to look for faults, he's got them covered. Uncritisizable! Beautiful book on, to most of us, a mysterious continent. Love his perspective on the human condition. Very informative and entertaining, serious and facetious... historical and contemporary, real and fantastical, sexy and disgusting... etc!

I loved this. Paul Theroux travels from Cairo to Cape Town, recording his conversations with a cast of characters he meets along the way. Also included are his reflections on a wide range of topics related to Africa. His straight-shooting style and counter-intuitive conclusions, particularly his view that aid in Africa has done more harm than good, inspires the ire of many readers, and I myself got mad at him once. Although he does have a tendency to overgeneralize (aid workers in Africa are repeatedly and derisively referred to as "Agents of Virtue"), his sense of humor, honesty and genuine love for Africa and Africans compelled me to forgive him. This book is so evocative and entertaining. It's funny and vivid, and I was sad when it ended. A quote from the book: "For an author, there is no greater achievement than this, the successful re-creation in prose of the texture and emotions of a real place, making the reading of the work like a travel experience, containing many of the pleasures of a visit. How nice it would be, I thought, if someone reading the narrative of my African trip felt the same, that it was the next best thing to being there--or even better, because reading about being shot at and poisoned and insulted was in general less upsetting than the real thing" (388). Mission accomplished, Mr. Theroux!

You gotta admire Mr. Theroux. He really did it this time. The most amazing part of this book comes at the very end. He finally makes it to South Africa, and checks into one of the most exclusive hotels in Jburg. He then books a train for the cape, to observe the beauty at land's end, where two (Indian and Atlantic) oceans meet. He returns to find his valuables all gone, even though he, on advice of the hotel staff, deposited them in the "strongbox." Oh well, just shows how sometimes it is impossible to trust anyone. Desert fu, Nile River fu, Big City fu (Cairo), Malawi revisited, Lake Victoria crossing, hippos, crocodiles, baboons, snakes, ganja smoking guides, giraffes crossing the train tracks, Boers in darkest Africa, darkest Africans just trying to survive, and much, much, more. Rick says DEFINITELY check it out.

I enjoyed this travel selection particularly since I have traveled to both Kenya and Tanzania around the time that Paul T. was there. Although I reject his premise that tourists "don't care about the people" just the animals--I understand his premise. As a tourist we were on the "better" roads and resided at the more up-scale hotels, but many do truly care about the culture, education and daily lives of the people. What a trooper! I respect his service during the his Peace Corps days and his reflections of the changes that time has wrought in these lands. His views about the detriment of the some of the "charitable" work and how it often hinders the African self-help motivation are most provocative and need to be taken seriously!

I picked this up in preparation for my trip to Africa. It was an easy read and gave me a perspective on Africa that really added to my experience. A great book for the soon to be Africa traveler. It was written a few years ago, but I found the message to be still relevant.

Paul Theroux was a real adventurer travelling overland from Cairo to Cape Town. He was very brave to do some of the things he did. The trip was a big disillusionment for him in some places - especially in Malawi. As I live in Cape Town I was interested to hear his impressions of "my" town. There were quite a few inaccuracies, which made me wonder how many inaccuracies there were in the descriptions of the other places that he wrote about. However overall the book made me think that Africa as a continent is a lost cause. So the book is quite an education for anyone who is thinking of coming to Africa.

The travelogue was interesting at times and at times boring. When Theroux stayed with describing the people, the incidents he encountered, the villages and towns, the reader gets a real feel for the

people and the country, but when he starts referring to quotes from other authors and books, it becomes a self serving and patronizing. There is too much detail on conversations between his old friends and colleagues. Its really only 3 and a half stars.

It was the first of his travel books I read. Not just a travel book. It is beautifully written and hard to put down. It's one of those books that as soon as I read the last page I turned back to the first page and read it again. Since then I have read all his travel books.

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