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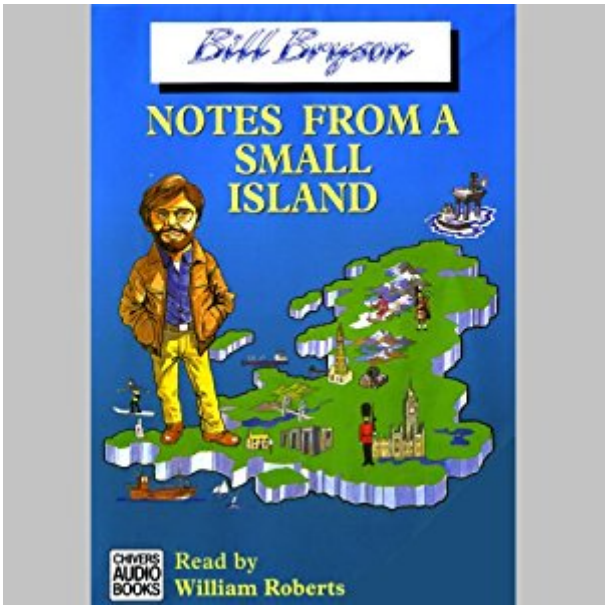
Notes From A Small Island



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Synopsis

After nearly two decades in Britain, Bill Bryson took the decision to move back to the States for a few years, to let his kids experience life in another country, to give his wife the chance to shop until 10 p.m. seven nights a week, and, most of all, because he had read that 3.7 million Americans believed that they had been abducted by aliens at one time or another, and it was thus clear to him that his people needed him. But before leaving his much-loved home in North Yorkshire, Bryson insisted on taking one last trip around Britain, a sort of valedictory tour of the green and kindly island that had so long been his home. His aim was to take stock of the nation's public face and private parts (as it were), and to analyse what precisely it was he loved so much about a country that had produced Marmite, a military hero whose dying wish was to be kissed by a fellow named Hardy, place names like Farleigh Wallop, Titsey and Shellow Bowells, people who said 'Mustn't grumble', and Gardeners' Question Time. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I have to stop reading these books. People are looking at me funny in restaurants and on the train when I burst out laughing. But Bryson's books are SO GOOD. What's a person to do?If you read A Walk in the Woods and felt a deep yearning to walk the Appalachian trail, haul out your suitcase. This book will make you want to follow Bryson's footsteps again as he travels across England, Wales, and Scotland by foot, by bus, and by train. He spends a day or so in dozens of small towns and cities, disecting them for our education and amusement. He tours galleries, musuems, and historic homes; visits pubs and restaurants; and stays in an amazing variety of shoddy hotels.

(There are fine hotels in England. They just cost more than he is willing to pay.)Even if you don’t plan to go to England anytime soon (and why not? it’s a lovely country full of friendly people we Americans and Canadians can mostly understand) this book is a reminder to those of us who are far too insular that the world out there is different and that difference is a good and quite frequently amusing thing.

Bill Bryson expertly captures the mental amusement and bemusement of an American living in Britain. I am an American who also lived in England, and I laughed myself silly reading this book. This isn’t meant to be a travel guide or an in depth academic study of British culture as some reviewers must evidently believe. There are many ways to reminisce about life in a foreign country, and BB chose to tell us fond, funny stories of his life in the UK. Let’s not be stuffily chauvinistic about these things. I’m sure many Brits could write equally hilarious tales of their lives over here in the USA. For me its hard to understand that any American who has lived in Britain would not find funny such tales as the train/bus schedule incident (As I remember it the Brit Rail agent couldn’t understand Bryson’s difficulty with a schedule that had a daily train arrive in a town minutes after the scheduled departure of the daily bus that took travellers to their next destination.)If y! ou are a Bryson fan, this is as good as he gets. You will especially enjoy it if you have spent time in both the US and the UK.

This is a great read, a fascinating book about the writer’s journey through Great Britain, with the author’s impressions cleverly expressed. He’s like an earthier Paul Theroux, or like Peter Mayle as channeled by Dave Barry. Bryson is good at using both humor and hyperbole to illustrate good points about his British travels as well as disappointments. After reading the book, you feel you’ve had a conversation with an old friend who gave you the lowdown on his trip without any sugar-coating. You feel that everything Bryson says comes directly from the heart.The only reason I didn’t rate the book 5 stars is that, a few times too often, Bryson goes into great detail about how rude he was toward service people who were just doing their jobs and whose performance wasn’t precisely what he wanted. He reaches a low point when he takes almost a page to describe his reaction to a McDonald’s employee who made the mistake of asking if he wanted "an apple turnover with that." Maybe it’s because I’ve waited tables, but Bryson struck me as exactly the kind of arrogant, self-righteous, condescending customer you prayed you wouldn’t have to serve. He comes close in these passages to personifying the ugly American: willing to enjoy England’s riches, but not tolerant of its shortcomings.Nevertheless, that’s no reason not to read the book. Bryson’s

insights into the places he visits are more than worth the price of admission.

It all started with A Walk in the Woods. A friend loaned it to me, and almost didn't get it back. Then he loaned me Notes From a Small Island, but with a warning. "You may not like this as much," he said, "I didn't even finish it. But give it a go." Curious about his tepid reaction to the book, I took it with me to jury duty. I sat in the cafeteria, literally laughing out loud. I could have gotten off a case by pleading insanity -- I'm sure that's what people at the surrounding tables were thinking. Bryson's turn of phrase is truly magical. His appreciation for England, for people, for family, is deep. His observations are so well-worded, they give you chills. Two of his passages made it into my journal of quotable-quotes. So I got through half the book at jury duty. Cut to my couch at home. I'm reading the latter half of the book, and come across his description of his drunken attempt to get back to his hotel after an evening at the pub. Downhill. I tell you, I was crying, I was laughing so hard. It's hard to get me to chuckle, and forget LAUGH, during a comedic movie, much less a book. I reread the paragraph two or three times, like rewinding a scene on video tape, and laughed harder and harder. Bryson is a gift to readers who love good writing. And a good laugh.

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