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In A Sunburned Country

Bill Bryson



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In A Sunburned Country is Bryson's eighth book. In the acknowledgments he writes that, "...in the hope of forestalling ten thousand or so letters from readers pointing out that it should be called In a Sunburnt Country. I know it should, but it isn't." This is typical Bryson: the humor begins before the book does and it's subtle, satisfying and very real. The new book details Bryson's special take on Australia, a country he professes to love: The people are immensely likable -- cheerful, extrovert, quick-witted, and unfailingly obliging. Their cities are safe and clean and nearly always built on water. They have a society that is prosperous, well ordered, and instinctively egalitarian. The food is excellent. The beer is cold. The sun nearly always shines. There is coffee on every corner. Rupert Murdoch no longer lives there. Life doesn't get much better than this. In a Sunburned Country, Bryson tells us that Australia is the largest island on the planet and -- in terms of land mass -- the sixth largest country. "It is also the only island that is also a continent, and the only continent that is also a country." It is home of the largest living thing (the Great Barrier Reef), the top ten most poisonous snakes in the world, the largest monolith (Ayers Rock) and it has, "more things that will kill you than anywhere else." Aside from being an interesting place from a geographic and natural standpoint -- after all, fully 80 percent of everything that lives in Australia, Bryson points out, exists no place else on earth -- exciting things happen there. And inexplicably, says the author, the rest of the world seems to barely notice.

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