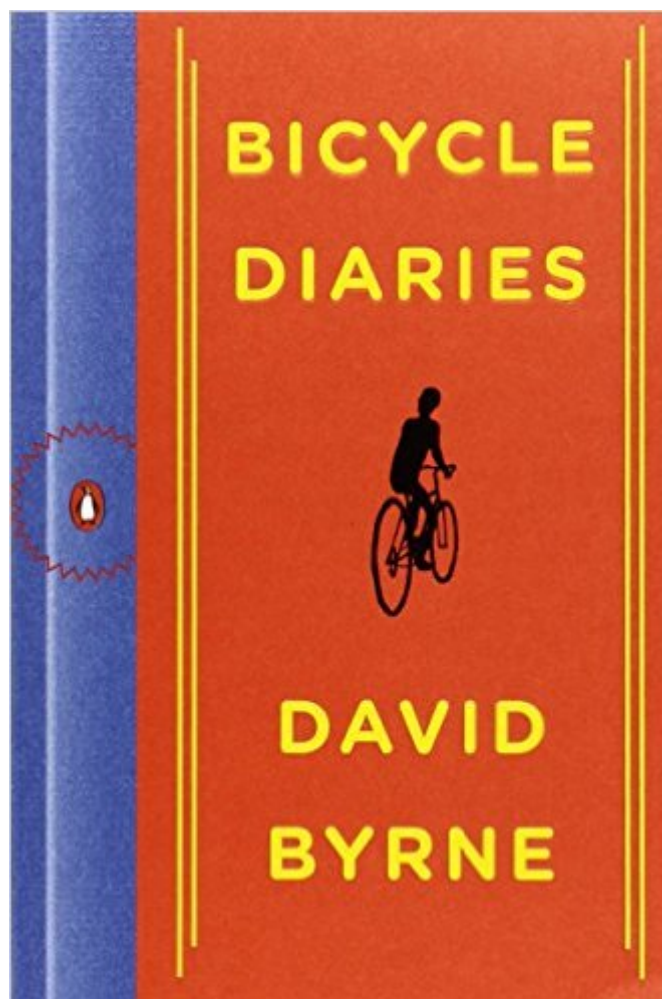


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# Bicycle Diaries



## Synopsis

A round-the-world bicycle tour with one of the most original artists of our day. Urban bicycling has become more popular than ever as recession-strapped, climate-conscious city dwellers reinvent basic transportation. In this wide-ranging memoir, artist/musician David Byrne—who has relied on a bike to get around New York City since the early 1980s—relates his adventures as he pedals through and engages with some of the world's major cities. From Buenos Aires to Berlin, he meets a range of people both famous and ordinary, shares his thoughts on art, fashion, music, globalization, and the ways that many places are becoming more bike-friendly. *Bicycle Diaries* is an adventure on two wheels conveyed with humor, curiosity, and humanity.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (81 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #231,863 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Individual Sports > Cycling > Excursion Guides](#) #589 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Travel](#) #964 in [Books > Travel > Travel Writing](#)

## Customer Reviews

David Byrne is a smart, funny, artistic sort of fellow whose talents, inclination and curiosity have led him all over the world. A few decades back, David discovered folding bicycles and since then he's ridden his bicycle along the side and back roads of many cities, riding, thinking, chatting, living life and seeing how it's lived in a wide range of places. His view of the world seen from a bicycle saddle gives him "glimpses into the mind of my fellow man, as expressed in the cities he lives in." Now, his meditations on people, places and the various ways we get along and get around are collected in his new book, *Bicycle Diaries*. *Bicycle Diaries* is the best kind of art, a work that brings the reader along on the artist's journey. *Bicycle Diaries* is a physically beautiful book, hardcover with no dust-jacket, yellow embossed letters cheerfully identify the title and author while a black silhouette of a rider draws the reader forward. An observant reader will notice a tiny bicycle peeking out from the

spine at the bottom of page 11 and on each odd page thereafter the bicycle has makes more progress. Fanning forward through the pages sets the tiny typeset bicycle free, racing across the pages in the oldest style animation, persistent vision holding tight to the bike while the pages blur past. Ever the artist, be it in music, lyric, print, or type, David remembers that a book can be more than just a file on a Kindle. The tiny animation is just one example of the playful digressiveness of this book. While he casts a loving and critical look at the world, David is always conversational. He ponders, rants, muses and marvels. He reflects on how our cities reflect our minds. We build what we value, but our shaped world shapes those values. In an age where it seems that every celebrity has a publicist and a book that screams "look at me", David is instead riding his bike down interesting streets and pausing now and then to say "Hey, look at that!" He profiles interesting buildings, streets, people, cities and artists. He's structured the book as a series of chapters each concentrating on a city such as Berlin, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, Sydney or New York, but the book is not a mere travelogue. In Manila, he uses the life story of Imelda Marcos as a springboard for contemplation of the way we each build the mythic stories of our lives. In Buenos Aires he considers geography, faith, death, music, art, unemployment, sex, the pack behavior of dogs, politics, football, gentrification, nightlife, and worker ownership. In every place he rides, he finds the unique and the common and connects the local with the global. Bicycle Diaries is an intensely human and humane book, a book that echoes in print the sense of "My God, how did I get here?" that David expressed years ago in the Talking Heads. To an interesting person like David, all places are interesting and he consistently reminds us just how interesting humans are. We are the ones building the human world -- we don't just travel the world, we make it. David's work takes him out in the world, a world he shapes with songs and images. As he's ridden more, in more places, he's become more of a cycle activist, using his talents to shape the world to be friendlier to humans and bicycles. He's designed and installed bike racks in New York City, he thinks about helmet design and he works with transportation planners. And most importantly, he's written a wonderful book, a book that reveals the simple delight of riding a bike through an amazing world.

David Byrne is an enormously creative and thoughtful composer, artist and performer. He's also a cyclist and a world traveler which makes him a kindred soul. These attributes prompted me to buy the Kindle edition of the book and, while my expectations were not very high, this book probably should have remained a magazine article. In the acknowledgments David says it was a publisher/editor who convinced him that there was a book here and the author would have done well to ignore the advice. It is really a collection of thoughts inspired by David's bike rides in cities

around the world and, while it is modestly entertaining, the thoughts inspired by his two-wheeled meandering are not particularly original or earth-shaking. I found myself abandoning the book about half-way through which is something I almost never do. The writing itself is not bad, but I just don't think he has enough to say to make this work as a book. I remain a David Byrne fan and I'll look out for his next effort, but I wouldn't recommend buying the book.

Not only is the title of this book misleading, so is the marketing and hype about it. Supposedly, this book was to convey Byrne's observations and interpretations from the saddle of his bike as he pedaled through cities and suburbs of some of the world's most interesting venues (e.g., Berlin, New York]. Would that it were such. Being an urban bike rider who observes the life and rigors of urban living from my bike saddle, I thought this would be a great read. Well I was wrong. In fact, if this book had not been a gift to me (because it was on my 2009 Christmas list), I would say I was ripped off. Some sections of the book do describe what is seen, heard, and thought while riding a bike. The description of riding from a section of Buffalo (actually, he was in a suburb at the start of the ride, and he eschews suburbs to a fare thee well) to Niagara Falls is one such description as is his account of riding from downtown Detroit to, and past, 8-Mile Road, but even these are brief, sketchy in observation, and woefully lacking in understanding and interpretation. Yeah, Byrne has numerous comments about rust belt cities, but nothing he thinks or says is a reflection of what he has actually seen from his bike--his comments are just stereotypic notions about Buffalo and Detroit (at least his text about Buffalo did not mention snow) that could have been embroidered into a discussion without ever leaving a pent-house condo in ever-growing cities such as Atlanta, Houston, or Los Angeles. His thoughts have little to do with what he actually saw on his trips, because he missed many important sites and many of those sites he did note, he failed to interpret wisely. I have made the Buffalo to Niagara Falls ride at least a dozen times (though I have sense enough not to ride the dangerous-to-bicyclists Maple Road past Hooters (now closed), Fuddruckers, Commerce Drive and Sweethome Road as he did on his ride) and have walked from downtown Detroit to 8-Mile Road at least three times, and I could write a great deal more than a few paragraphs from what I have seen from just those experience and and still avoid the cliches of Detroit not being there anymore and dissing franchise chain restaurants. What he says about cities is actually sophomoric--not wrong, just not astute and woefully lacking in insight and resolution. But the real kicker about this book is not that he fails to see much from his bike rides, it is that most of the book has nothing to do with bike rides. He goes on to a great extent about Baltimore, Berlin and other cities without even mentioning bicycling. A better title for this book would have been The Musings of

a Man Sitting Late at Night in His Hotel Room When Visiting Some of the Great Cities of the World in Which I Rode a Bike Once in a While. If you are a David Byrne fan and want to know more about what he thinks about this and that of urban and suburban life and his comments on certain cities, then this book might interest you; but if you think you are picking up a book by a bicyclist who describes his observations and thoughts while biking some of the great cities of the world, this is not the book for you.

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