



Vacationland: True Stories from Painful Beaches

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John Hodgman--*New York Times* bestselling author, semifamous personality, deranged millionaire, increasingly elderly husband, father, and human of Earth--has written a memoir about his cursed travels through two wildernesses: from the woods of his home in Massachusetts, birthplace of rage, to his exile on the coast of Maine, so-called Vacationland, home to the most painful beaches on Earth

Vacationland is also about Hodgman's wandering in the metaphoric wilderness of his forties, those years when dudes especially must painfully stop pretending to be the children of bright potential they were and settle into the failing bodies of the wiser, weirder dads that they are.

Other subjects covered include the horror of freshwater clams, the evolutionary purpose of the mustache, which animals to keep as pets and which to kill with traps and poison, and advice on how to react when the people of coastal Maine try to sacrifice you to their strange god.

After three bestselling books of fake facts, Hodgman is finally ready to tell the truth--in the same outlandish, audacious, and inimitable style that has won him fans in every medium he has worked: books, stage, social media, television, and movies.

Vacationland: True Stories from Painful Beaches Details

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Author : John Hodgman

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From Reader Review Vacationland: True Stories from Painful Beaches for online ebook

Hannah says

John Hodgman gave me an ARC of his new book the other day at the library, and I pretty much immediately devoured it. I found it both genuinely funny and funnily genuine, and like the humor of his podcast that I very much enjoy, I thought its great honesty gave it real punch. Hodgman's observations about my home state, Maine, are insightful and relatable, and his owning up to his own privileged existence throughout the volume mirrors his admission of his experience as someone "from away," and makes it precisely what it ought to be - truthful, humble, and a sincere and effective combination of hilarious and dispiriting. I really enjoy when people admit that being kind is a choice, and can be extremely difficult, and when they reveal their own private dreams, sorrows, and crazy unreasonable expectations for themselves and others. That's John Hodgman's real talent - showing his full humanity, and thereby breaking into yours.

Troy says

As a weird dad myself, I am the prime market for Vacationland but I can honestly say that this book connected with me deeply and in unexpected ways. It is a brilliantly disguised meditation on aging, on privilege, and on identity.

John Tankersley says

As we age, we become more sentimental. As he ages, so goes John Hodgman's writings. A memoir of a man struggling to keep his privilege in check from a man who grew up as the beneficiary of an unequal society. It was a real pleasure to hear his own internal monologue on raising his kids, struggling with his privilege, and being entertaining while he does it. This book seems like a less articulate dominant group response to BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME--but from a very different perspective.

I hope John Hodgman writes more books in this vein. I enjoyed him here even more than I have in his other books. Well done. A very good read.

Allen Adams says

<http://www.themaineedge.com/buzz/a-ta...>

Sometimes, truth is stranger than fiction.

Not in the case of John Hodgman, though. His latest book – “Vacationland: True Stories of Painful Beaches” – is a massive departure from his previous three books, a bestselling trio constructed entirely out of fake facts and imaginary trivia.

See, the stories in this book are true ... and hilarious.

“Vacationland” is divided more or less evenly between Hodgman’s earlier days spent in western Massachusetts and his more recent experiences with his family on the coast of Maine. But regardless of which summer house he’s remembering at any given moment, his unique comedic voice rings out with a clever clarity that is very much unlike anything else you’re likely to read.

These stories – over a dozen in all – serve as a sort of primer on all things Hodgman. Taken together, one could argue that they illustrate not only who he is, but how he came to be that person. It’s a memoir of sorts, but a selective one; the end result is a portrait of a man who has never been entirely sure what it means to be an adult, but is muddling through nonetheless.

The book’s first half explores Hodgman’s relationship with his family’s home in western Massachusetts. These stories feature plenty of glimpses at the deliberately esoteric weirdo teen desperate to grow up that Hodgman was, but also digs into his young adulthood as his life’s path began its unexpected shift.

Whether it’s the self-inflicted existential crisis of “Dump Jail” – where he constructs elaborate tales to tell the guys at the dump if they ever ask - or the substance-enhanced idyll of cairn building in “Rocks on Top of Other Rocks,” Hodgman captures a sense of the very real absurdity that often accompanies being an adult. Maybe he explores the notion of his first “real” job and his first REAL job (“Mongering”); maybe he confronts the need to remain hip as he ages (“Daddy Pitchfork”).

Or maybe he’s relating the story where he meets Black Francis, lead singer of The Pixies and one of his personal musical idols, at the county fair and invites him and his family back to his house and shares cans of Diet Moxie with him – all while also contextualizing adulthood by way of broken septic systems and poop-filled silverware drawers (“Nerve Food”).

As for the second half, that’s when we learn more about the time Hodgman and his family have spent summering on the coast of Maine. This Hodgman has already achieved a fair degree of success, though he still has some questions with regards to this whole adulthood business.

For instance, there’s the story of how he and his wife accidentally bought a boat (“You Are Normal People”). “A Little Beyond the Safe Limits of Travel” is in many ways a follow-up to that story; it also captures the inherent spirit of Mainers beautifully. In “A Kingdom Property,” the stark differences between people and their attitudes are rendered with a clarity that is both funny and a little sad.

Hodgman also takes some shots at Maine humor in the piece titled ... “Maine Humor”; the famed Perry’s Nut House makes an extended appearance as he breaks down the notion of Maine humor and denigrates the value of fudge.

And on and on and on. Every one of the stories in “Vacationland” charms with its honesty; even when relating true tale, Hodgman’s wit is unsurpassed. Anyone who has lived in these places will be struck by moments of recognition.

But it’s more than that. We’ve all questioned our choices as we stagger through adulthood; everyone has stretches where they feel as if they have no idea what they’re doing. Growing up – and growing older – is scary. Hodgman captures that feeling with exquisite precision. There’s weirdness at every turn, no matter where we are or who we’re with. John Hodgman understands that.

Look, these stories are funny. They’re REALLY funny. Frankly, you probably don’t need me to tell you that. What you might not expect, however, is what kind of heft they have. Even in the funniest moments, there are real feelings and real ideas being expressed. Hodgman finds ways to elicit a sense of pathos without ever losing that light of laughter. He shares hard truths as willingly as the easy ones. And he never once seems to forget just how lucky he is. It’s remarkable to read, an open window into a complex comedic psyche.

This book might not be everything that is John Hodgman, but everything it is is definitely real.

“Vacationland” is smart and snarky and occasionally raw. Hodgman’s narrative gifts are undeniable, and when combined with this kind of genuine feeling and truth, the end result is flat-out exceptional. It’s a beautiful balance of humor and heart – a book that’ll make you laugh, that’ll make you think ... and that’ll ultimately make you glad you spent some time with John Hodgman.

Julie says

Writer, humorist, podcaster, PC guy, and Daily Show contributor John Hodgman is back, and he's telling (almost) the whole truth. In this collection of funny and reflective essays, Hodgman explores the existential symbolism of his patchy beard, how to navigate the social and natural wilds of Maine, and how even the weirdest dads have some "cool" cred. It's funny, and it's wrought--life is short, and Hodgman's book never lets you forget his (and your) impending demise.

I was predisposed to love this book... I'm a fan of Hodgman's, and the comedic memoir is one of my favorite genres. But I came away from Vacationland feeling that it was just "okay."

There are moments of wit, brilliance, and emotionality, surrounded by other moments that left me wondering "so what?" Hodgman's trademark humor is undermined here by a tendency to follow a joke with a self-congratulatory doubling-down that seems to say, "see what I did there?"

Vacationland has the barebones of a great comedic memoir, but could use something more. Though I found myself saving several passages that were deftly articulate, funny, and relatable, the essays as a whole lack oomph.

I received an ARC of this book in August 2017. It will be published on October 24, 2017.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This book is a bit uneven. John Hodgman reminds me of your single uncle (probably your dad's youngest brother) that you can't escape at Thanksgiving, who thinks of himself as a bit more interesting in his youth than he really was, but who has enough money to spend to have stuff to talk about.

So the stories vary.

The pot stories are pointless. The whole point seems to be, see, I also smoked the pot. Alongside a story near the end about getting drunk after a college appearance. Okay.....

I started out liking one story about Maine but it ended up being a white privilege narrative about only being able to afford one summer cottage.

I don't know, I left with a bad taste in my mouth. I think this is partially his brand of humor, the kind where you get why it's funny kind of but you wouldn't actually laugh at it. Or perhaps this isn't the humor for me.

Thanks to the publisher for providing access to this title through NetGalley in exchange for an honest

review.

Tony says

If you know who John Hodgman is and generally enjoy his dry sense of wit, then this book is for you -- congratulations. It's a loose and shaggy collection of reflections thematically connected through vacation homes in Massachusetts and Maine. If that sounds like an amazing feat of NPRish navel-gazing white privilege thematic stunt-work, well, Hodgman is certainly hep to that. His self-deprecation extends and stretches throughout the book in numerous asterixes noting the absurdity of his milieu and himself as an unambiguous beneficiary of class and racial history. In any event, the book meanders amusingly along and had much the same effect on me as a decent personal reflection on the radio or a podcast does -- I enjoyed it at the time, but it left absolutely nothing behind behind a generally warm appreciation. I'm certain that in six months times I will remember literally nothing about this book beyond that vague sense of enjoyment.

Mandy says

I laughed out loud 4 times, if that's an indication.

Kathy says

Plainly put, John Hodgman's *Vacationland* is great. It positively exudes Hodgman-yness. Yes, I had to check the cover repeatedly to make sure it hadn't grown an alarming goatee/mustache combination! Straight Talk: If you are a John Hodgman fan you will like this book; If you aren't, you wont. I am and I did and I regret nothing!

FULL DISCLOSURE: I received an ARC of this book from Viking/Netgalley in exchange for an honest (though possibly biased) review.

Portia says

What. A. Delight. I have been watching John Hodgman in various things for years but didn't really know anything about him so this was so much fun to read. The essays varied in topic and I really got a rounded view of who John Hodgman is. My roommates ended up reading most of the book with me because I kept having to share the best passages with them (which were the majority of the book). It is so well written and I can't explain how much fun I had reading this.

I did take points off, though, for his very wrong views of fudge.

Gaelen says

I listened to this as an audiobook, which I highly recommend, because Hodgman's delivery adds a lot. It's the

first book he's written that's an actual memoir, and it's terrific. It's not just funny, but it's insightful, charming, and self-aware. I think that even people who aren't already fans would enjoy it.

Matthew Quann says

I found it nearly impossible not to compare John Hodgman's essays with those of David Sedaris. Hodgman seems inspired, in part, by Sedaris' wry observations and dry humour, even if he is never able to reach the heights of Sedaris. The two authors are quite dissimilar in personality and writing, but the style of the book itself is what Hodgman seems to have used as a framework to build his own collection of essays.

Unfortunately, the stories collected in *Vacationland* are supremely off-balance. Listening to Hodgman's narration made me feel for the poor dude: he sounds anxious as hell! This sometimes plays to his favour, namely when relating an anecdote in which he misread a social situation, but also became an irritant the more it wore on. Hodgman all too often spends time explaining his social views and espousing his wokeness to the detriment of the stories. It would have been much more effective if Hodgman had shown restraint in explaining his white privilege instead of spoon feeding the audience his realizations.

Also, some stories seem to go off on tangents from which they never recover. Hodgman will be telling some interesting story only for it to go off the rails with something that is mildly related. It takes a lot of steam out of the good storytelling and infuses it with superfluous narrative. The book is also structured with beginning, middle, and end headings, but they only follow a loose trajectory of Hodgman's life.

All the same, this is an easy, enjoyable listen for the most part. Hodgman may stumble and fall on occasion, but this is by no means a bad book. Comparing him to Sedaris is exceedingly unfair: though this is not Hodgman's first book, it is his first bit of long-form nonfiction. He also sounds like a great guy! Hodgman seems like the guy you'd want to share a beer with while you grill some steaks, and he'd regale you with stories about his adoration for his family. I'll be interested to see if he hones his craft in a future collection.

Jerrie (redwritinghood) says

The writing is OK, but the stories are warm and charming and sometimes funny. He also does a great job of reading this himself. 3.5??

Alison says

I'm glad my sister recommended this to me. I wouldn't have checked it out based on the cover (I know, I know) and I wouldn't have realized that John Hodgman was the same guy who played the PC in Apple's PC vs. Mac ads, or that he'd been on The Daily Show. He's a great storyteller. Having just finished David Sedaris's *Calypso*, I was suffering a bit of humor withdrawal because I always get a bit attached to everyone in his family. Hodgman's book was a great salve for this... not because he gave me another family to get attached to (he does a good job protecting the privacy of family and friends by focusing mainly on himself), but by giving me a set of places to get attached to. From his childhood stomping grounds in Western Mass, to his family's vacation home in Maine, his stories - while delightfully entertaining - also convey a strong sense of place. I'll now go back and see what else he's written - and hope for a sequel.

Pop Bop says

He's Such A Tease

Like Calvin Trillin, (who may be a bit more urbane and "citified" compared to Hodgman's more rueful suburban everyman persona), John Hodgman often feels like he's ever so gently teasing the reader, even as he amuses.

In this collection Hodgman declares that he's pretty much burned out and used up, such that these pieces are sadly all that he has left. Maybe it's time for a retrospective and a little bit of a summing up. There's that tease, and a slyly false self-deprecating air that lets the reader in on the joke and feels oh so inviting. Even when Hodgman is being a bit pointed or edgy, and even when he's dismissing or mocking something or someone you might hold dear, he's still, well, friendly.

None of these articles gets up on a high horse or goes in for a kill. This is much more thoughtful and gentle stuff, (often with Hodgman the butt of the humor), but that doesn't mean it doesn't resonate and it doesn't mean it doesn't make a point. Even when he's just being a husband or a father or an only child Hodgman can pluck a nerve or point out a few sticky truths.

You will get semi-autobiographical essays about middle age, fatherhood, growing up an only child, and, famously, the "painful beaches" of Maine. Apparently, some of this material is drawn from his comedy tour, "Vacationland". (BTW, Hodgman has said that his original title for the book was - "John Hodgman Tells Absolutely, Maybe Awfully True Stories as He Sprints Toward Death in Emotionally and Literally Cold Places." So, I guess that works as a summary of this book too.)

But all of that aside, this is very, very funny and witty writing by someone who knows what he is doing and is in complete command of his craft. As you read, and savor, you are amused and also impressed. That is an admirable combination, and this is a wonderful find.

(Please note that I received a free copy of this book without a review requirement, or any influence regarding review content should I choose to post a review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.)