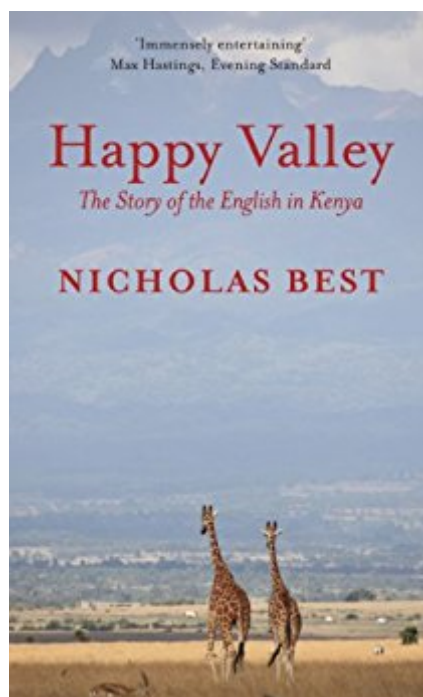


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Happy Valley: The Story Of The English In Kenya



Synopsis

"Nicholas Best tells an immensely entertaining tale"Max Hastings, Evening Standard"Erudite, amusing and, even, gossipy"Nigel Dempster, Punch"First class... quite hilariously funny!"Melbourne Herald"Anyone with experience of Kenya, past or present, resident or tourist, will enjoy reading Happy Valley"Country LifeThe definitive story of the British in Kenya, from the explorer Joseph Thomson, whose exploits inspired King Solomon's Mines, to the decadent Happy Valley set of the 1930s, the murder of Lord Erroll, and the Mau Mau revolt of the 1950s.

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Customer Reviews

I'm not sure whether to praise or damn this book. For a start it's actually the story not of the English per se, but of the British and other nationalities who came to Kenya. Secondly, the title seems sensationalist in that it refers to the 'Happy Valleyites' - a very small group of wealthy pre-WW2 wasters, who were in no way representative of the majority of hard-working settlers. Another criticism is that little mention is made of the colonial administrators who built hospitals, schools, bridges and roads, worked on locust and disease control, and created a working civil service, health service and police force. Perhaps they weren't eccentric enough for the author, who appears to seek out only the colourful and outrageous. He damns the settlers as pigheaded and a bit thick. Pigheaded

perhaps (I should know, I went to school with their sons); but on the whole not stupid. Often at great personal cost, they figured out what crops or livestock worked and what didn't, thus pioneering the way for today's farmers in Kenya. On the positive side the book is indeed entertaining; and in my view it improves in depth and understanding when describing the post WW2 transit to independence, including the difficult time of the Mau Mau insurrection (and it needs to be remembered that Mau Mau killed far more of their own countrymen and women than white people, and arguably contributed nothing towards the progress to independence). On the whole a worthwhile read, although it falls far short of telling a full and balanced story and Elspeth Huxley's books give a better flavour of this period of Kenya's past.

Happy Valley is a book that you won't want to put down as it takes you through the many adventures of the colorful colonialists who came to Kenya. Its strength is that it is a riveting work that captures the main events of an incredible story. Its main weakness is that it sometimes lacks depth, but it remains a great introduction to a most fascinating subject.

â Nicholas Best tells an immensely entertaining taleâ™ â “ Max Hastings, Evening Standard â “An erudite, amusing and, even, gossipy bookâ™ â “ Nigel Dempster, Punch â “Anyone with experience of Kenya, past or present, resident or tourist, will enjoy reading Happy Valleyâ™ â “ Country Life â “First classâ | quite hilariously funnyâ™ â “ Melbourne HeraldIf one were to believe the views of the above "distinguished" reviewers one would certainly buy it. I received my copy as Christmas present and have just read it on a beach in Antigua -- what it was apparently designed for. It is not immensely entertaining. It is certainly not erudite but yes it is gossipy (anecdotal). Anyone with experience of Kenya has read all this elsewhere before and will not find it very enjoyable -- very soon I was anticipating the next hoary old tale and was seldom disappointed. Not funny at all let alone hilariously so. A more energetic editor/publisher would have checked many of the statements in the book. There was no rinderpest in Masailand in 1883 -- the cattle were dying of contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and rinderpest did not arrive in Kenya until at least five years later. A Duke of Portlan never served in the Kenya administration nor supported the settlers -- a future Duke did. Probably very few of the settlers were strong in the arm and thick in the head and certainly none that I knew. Much credence is given to Meinertzhagen throughout much of the book yet it is now well accepted that he was a romancer if not an out and out teller of untruths. And so on and so on. If you want to know more about Kenya read some of the source books -- your money will be better spent.

A very thoughtful and fair presentation of the late colonial phase of Kenya's storied history. Having visited the country ourselves to see how the business of our son and his partner and co-founder were doing, this book brought back some fond memories of Karen, the Mt. Kenya Safari Club and other places mentioned. Recommended to all!

This slim volume The book covers several episodes in the colonial history of Kenya. It's not suitable for research historians, but it will entertain you on a flight or on the beach. Some of the anecdotes will make you laugh till you cry.

My father was one of the Italian prisoners of war in a camp near Thika, and worked as an engineer with E.A.P.&L. I and mother went with him from Italy in 1948, and I attended the Hill School, Eldoret 1948 to 1952 with many Africaners, then the Duke of York. We lived near Thika during the Mau Mau, and went to the cinema in Thika with all our guns as they had to be unavailable in the house. Loss of a gun was prison. This book has stirred many memories and I recalled visits from the Black Watch, after their Korea war stint, also the Inniskilling Fusiliers. A very well written book with humour and I feel very accurate. Well done and a credit to the country.

This book may be a bit "gossipy" as other reviewers comment, but it is a thoroughly good read. What is most refreshing is the fact that it is not cloaked in the latest fashion of political correctness at all cost. It is a gutsy book that I found objective, unbiased and at times almost brutally honest. I learned a lot of Kenya history that I had not known. Certainly some parts are amusingly written, while others stirred up feelings of sadness, nostalgia and loss. Perhaps the title is aimed at better book sales rather than at describing the true content of the book, which is about far more than the "Happy Valley Set". For anyone interested in Kenya history from the time of the early Pioneers to Independence, I thoroughly recommend this book.

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