

in the country names, much less demonstrate any knowledge of the background, physical features, ethnic populations, religions or health care access. A first perusal of *NationMaster* was exciting. It is possible to compare countries, get profiles of individual countries or categories such as agriculture, crime, social issues, education and many more. The devil is in the details, though, and with closer scrutiny, it is disappointing. Too often the information and statistics are out of date in a time when changes are unfolding at a dizzying pace. In addition, it is difficult to discern where the exact data comes from, making it difficult to look for newer statistics from the issuing agency. Two requests for further source information and updating frequency went unanswered.

Using the example of the United Kingdom, the population data are from 2014, the GDP from 2012, the groups it belongs to include Christian Countries, Cold Countries and Heavily Indebted Countries, among others. It is confusingly listed as ranked first and last for Geography – Area and David Cameron is listed as Prime Minister. The agricultural statistics were taken from 2001 Food and Agricultural Organisation data, as well as data from 2003, 2005, 2007, 2004. The most current statistic was from 2010. Weather statistics are from 2009. Confusingly, linking to the terrorism in the UK opens the door to many terrorist incidents, with the number of British nationals killed, which made sense in a fashion but what seemed logical was to find the number of incidents in the UK instead.

The comparing two countries option is easy. Choosing Canada and Australia, the user sees a side-by-side comparison with cost of living, crime rates, GDPs, health and people compared. Clicking on the label for the topic gets a ranked listing of the countries – for example, clicking on the murder rate label, an alphabetical list of the countries and their murder rates pop up. Some items articulate some differences, such as, in the example of Canada and the USA, one is “slightly larger” and the other “slightly smaller” than the USA. Below the side-by-side comparison chart is a source list. The most recent statistic is from 2009.

For Australians, there is a very fun and useful feature. Users can find affordability, safety, convenience a “hip score” of neighbourhoods in various cities around the country.

There are so many issues, from indifferent punctuation and capitalisation to inane factoids such as “Poland is full of history”. The problems with *NationMaster* detract from the possible value of this website.

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### Penguins, Pineapples and Pangolins: First Encounters with the Exotic

*Clare Cock-Starkey*

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While perhaps less of a “reference” in the more traditional sense of the word, as this is not a book one would turn to in order to find a fact or single piece of information, this volume is still to some extent a reference work. What Cock-Starkey presents her reader with is a selection of experiences relating to the exotic natural world.

Ever wondered what happened when kangaroos were first encountered by the English in Australia? Captain William Dampier describes them as being “as big as a sheep”. What about how the first exotic fruits were discovered and tasted? The orange that we now take for granted as part of our diet was in fact an eleventh-century crusader introduction, and even some 400 years later, in India its true delicacy was still observed with Sir Thomas Herbert writing in 1677 that they “may well be remembered, they were so succulent and dainty, and of course so curious a relish as affects the eater beyond measure”.

These examples provide just a small glimpse into what this fun and accessible volume has to offer the curious reader. Not only does it make it possible to learn about those intrepid explorers who were brave enough to search out the world and bring it back to Europe both literally, and in their notebooks or journals, it also makes it possible to learn about how they made their discoveries and what their reactions were.

Used as a quick reference guide to establish the origins of exotic animals and birds, food, fruit and plants or people, places and customs, this is a handy book. Accessibly written, well evidenced, referenced and resourced, it is also absorbing, quirky and amusing. Furthermore, it takes us back to a time when, wanting to know more about our world meant risk, danger and the thrill of adventure. The accounts relayed in this book were not discovered at the click of a button but through hours of research; their original discoverers too set out on adventures to uncover facts. The

book reminds us that there is still great joy to be had in the printed word and in having a sense of adventure, wonderment and awe. Cock-Starkey takes us back, down the ages, to a time when innocent wonder and awe were prevalent, when all that was new and undiscovered was fresh and exciting. Travelling with her and looking at the world through the eyes of those who found and discovered before us, seeing for ourselves as readers, that there is still much to explore and learn from the printed word.

Use this book as a quick reference guide, perhaps a stepping stone to further research, either into the characters upon whose work it draws or

the discoveries they made. Incredibly readable, informative and factual, this book captures the recording of experience and shares it for a modern audience. It makes us stop, look and listen. We stop to read, look at some of the curious facts and interesting original artwork, listen to the words of those who made discoveries for us and contributed to our understanding of the world. Readers of this book will soon learn that a good reference book is one they can turn to time and again to find a new and fascinating fact (footnotes and further references included too).

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