The study of history is an important practice that allows us a better understanding of where we’ve been and, subsequently, where we’re going. It seems there is always some new detail or story to be discovered. And, often it can be these small facts and sidebars that serve to make the whole of a story far more captivating and relatable. Sometimes, these details reflect the best of mankind throughout the years. Sometimes they emphasize its utter ridiculousness. The following books are full of stories, some notorious, some not so familiar but all of them intriguing, loaded with compelling anecdotes, cautionary tales and enduring truths that are certainly both entertaining and thought-provoking.

*When Hitler Took Cocaine and Lenin Lost His Brain: History’s Unknown Chapters* by Giles Milton

Did you know the United States was once subject to an emperor? Or, that in WWII Japan undertook a bombing campaign on U.S. soil by setting armed balloons adrift on the jet stream? Delving into obscure anecdotes from the past, Giles Milton’s compendium of historical oddities provides readers with a look at history that not only proves captivating but also highly
educational. Covering subjects ranging from adventure to war, mysteries to disappearances and everything in between, this book not only uncovers little-known facts about some of the most notable episodes in history but also introduces some of its other, lesser-renowned chapters. Exploring such topics as Hitler's English girlfriend, Lenin's double hemispherectomy, the Japanese soldier courageously fighting World War II until 1974 and much more, the tales found here may prove thoroughly engrossing even to readers who are not necessarily history enthusiasts.

Bad Days in History: A Gleefully Grim Chronicle of Misfortune, Mayhem, and Misery for Every Day of the Year [4] by Michael Farquhar

National Geographic and author Michael Farquhar present, for your entertainment, 365 instances of benign embarrassments, death and dismemberments, cultural and societal upheavals and a plethora of other delightful episodes of historical mayhem and pandemonium. Correlating instances of bad luck, sheer folly, and unadulterated turmoil with every day of the year, Bad Days in History not only makes for an eclectic collection of strange tales but also an engaging read. Take, for instance, the "accomplished" surgeon, John Taylor, who managed to blind two of the world's greatest composers, Bach and Handel, in one lifetime. Or, perhaps the gentleman Ronald Wayne who sold his 10% ownership stake in a fledgling corporation called Apple for a financial bonanza of $800. But, don't worry. At least, in this last instance there is a happy ending. According to Farquhar, Mr. Wayne affirms that today he is perfectly content selling stamps and coins out of his mobile home somewhere in the desolate Nevada wastelands. Anyway, just remember while you might be having a bad day, this book proves that someone else could always be having it worse.
Ask the Past: Pertinent and Impertinent Advice from Yesteryear [5] by Elizabeth P. Archibald

Ever wondered how to recover from a dance mishap, how to tell if someone is or is not dead, how to swim like a man or how to fold fabulous napkins? Ask the Past is a wildly entertaining guide for successful modern living built upon the timeless sensibilities of those who came before. Based on the eponymous blog, this book is chock-full of the wisdom of the ages as historian and bibliophile Elizabeth P. Archibald draws from centuries of antique texts, offering an amusing compilation of bygone adages ranging from the shrewd to the absurd. So, if you’re looking for sage advice on how to make yourself invisible, how to train your cat to fire a pistol, how to walk on water or how to escape from prison, look no further.


From 60,000 BCE to present day, authors Erik Sass and Steve Wiegand trace the arc of history and, along the way, spice it up with puns and sidebars relating to humorous character notes, origins of inventions, famous quotes, legendary battles and more. Both irreverent and edifying, The Mental Floss History of the World offers an amusing but nevertheless informative
examination of the often ridiculous trajectory of humankind. Did you know that the wedding custom of having a “best man” and carrying the bride across the threshold likely dates from the third century practice of Germanic men abducting brides from neighboring villages and carrying them home, with the aid of a loyal companion of course? Or, that in 1096 a fanatical group of German peasants decided that a certain goose had been “blessed by God” then proceeded to follow it around for a while, attacking any perceived non-believers they might encounter in a grand adventure known as the Goose Crusade? Filled with loads of hilarious anecdotes and entertaining yarns of this sort, this book might prove somewhat difficult to put down.

Audience: All Ages [7]
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