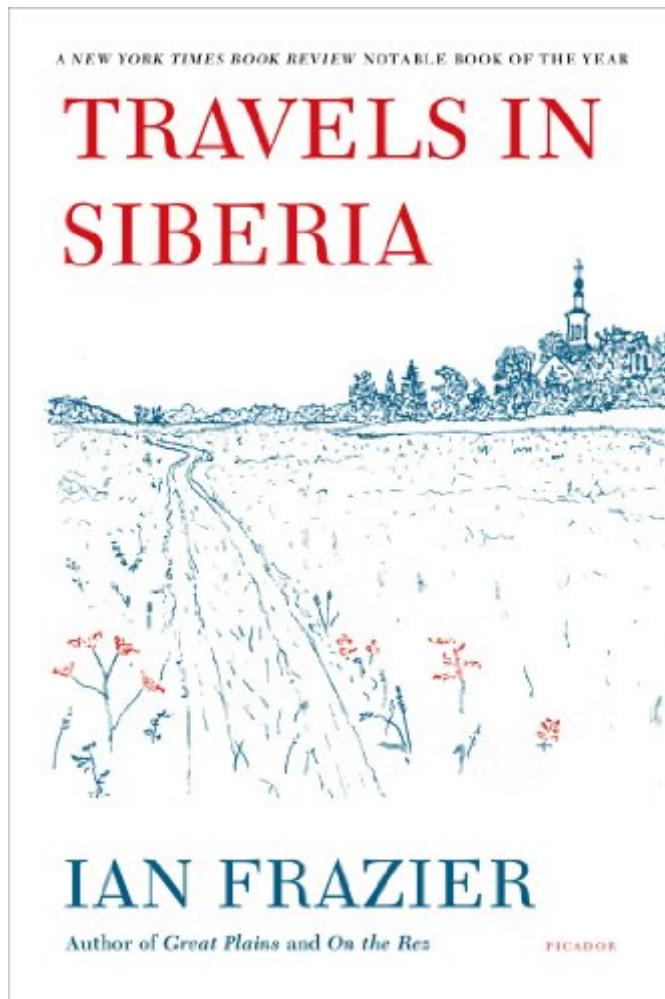


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Travels In Siberia



Synopsis

A Dazzling Russian travelogue from the bestselling author of Great PlainsIn his astonishing new work, Ian Frazier, one of our greatest and most entertaining storytellers, trains his perceptive, generous eye on Siberia, the storied expanse of Asiatic Russia whose grim renown is but one explanation among hundreds for the region's fascinating, enduring appeal. In Travels in Siberia, Frazier reveals Siberia's role in history—its science, economics, and politics—with great passion and enthusiasm, ensuring that we'll never think about it in the same way again. With great empathy and epic sweep, Frazier tells the stories of Siberia's most famous exiles, from the well-known—Dostoyevsky, Lenin (twice), Stalin (numerous times)—to the lesser known (like Natalie Lopukhin, banished by the empress for copying her dresses) to those who experienced unimaginable suffering in Siberian camps under the Soviet regime, forever immortalized by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in The Gulag Archipelago. Travels in Siberia is also a unique chronicle of Russia since the end of the Soviet Union, a personal account of adventures among Russian friends and acquaintances, and, above all, a unique, captivating, totally Frazierian take on what he calls the "amazingness" of Russia—a country that, for all its tragic history, somehow still manages to be funny. Travels in Siberia will undoubtedly take its place as one of the twenty-first century's indispensable contributions to the travel-writing genre.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like Siberia, this book is big. Like Siberia, this book takes a long time to get through. And like Siberia, it's fascinating and compelling. However, unlike Siberia, it is not freezing cold in winter and overrun with killer mosquitoes in spring and summer. I read it over a period of about a year, which you can do because the narrative has breaks in it and you won't lose the flow if you put it down and come back to it later. A book this size is going to have a lot of detail in it. If you're looking for a quick overview, this ain't it. And if you're an impatient person who likes to skim, it's probably not for you. There are things missing; for instance, there's barely a mention of the indigenous populations of Siberia. But Frazier has become an expert on Siberia in many respects, and the book is loaded with history, geography, geology, politics, and culture from this incredible place. Frazier is funny and candid, and his wry humor and observations permeate every description. The book is also a travel memoir, replete with interesting characters and drama of a type and sensibility that, according to Frazier, are unique to Russia and Russians. It's low key in tone, but epic in scope. All in all, it's one of the most interesting and entertaining books I've ever read.

I appreciated the pieces of history and literature mixed into Frazier's travel stories. His writing voice blends just enough humility and authority to make reading his work like having a long chat with an intelligent friend. The way he connects historical events to ordinary, yet outstanding people he admires, people I wouldn't have heard of otherwise, makes his look into the past feel more like a memoir. Having spent some time in Russia, I smiled reading about the discomforts he endured. Frazier is an honest, personable author with a gift for seeing the details in life we overlook and giving them significance. Whether you're hoping to learn something new about our world or just laugh, I recommend reading *Travels in Siberia*.

Well-written with humor, honesty, and plenty of history, *Travels in Siberia* encompasses just about everything that could be said about the region. Frazier shares his various voyages to and within Siberia, including a cross-continental road trip in an often-breaking-van, interspersing his narrative with plenty of Russian history. During his multiple expeditions, the author meets people from all walks of life, battles the elements, has a love-hate relationship with his guides, wrestles with his own

nervousness and anxiety-ridden tendencies, is attacked by swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, explores an abandoned prison, rides in all sorts of vehicles on terrains both monotonous and dangerous, and never manages to fall out of love with Russia. I greatly enjoyed Fraizer's stories. However, I sometimes felt like his history lessons went on for too long. He delves into Russia's bloody history, going back to the time of Genghis Khan, through the tzars, the Decemberists, communism and Stalinism, post-communism corruption, and into the future (where he describes the effects of global warming on Siberia's permafrost). I did like the recounting of local legends, but the countless Russians named (with their lives described in [often] unnecessary detail) became exhausting. Although it was easy to get swept up in the personal travelogue, Fraizer's history lessons did not always have the same page-turning draw.

A writer with self-professed "Russia Love", Ian Frazier thoroughly documents (complete with background history and any other vignette he finds interesting) his five trips to Siberia - the last in 2009. Luckily for Frazier, I'm a history and interesting fact lover, and so I didn't mind his literary departures from strict travelogue. For those who love to travel and love to read books about travel, this is a gem. Especially since I doubt I will ever travel to Siberia. After reading Frazier's book, I honestly don't think I'd ever want to. As a North Dakota native, Siberia reminds me of the uglier step-sister of my state. They look alike - they are both endless expanses of plains (although Siberia does have forests), the "mountains" are really just a few hills, it's filled with mosquitoes in the summertime and it's very, very cold in the winter. The people seem nice in both places, but the culture is so very different. Bribes are commonplace in Russia, and efficiency is non-existent. In fact, Frazier's description of Siberian towns reminds me of walking into the late 20th century with a liberal sprinkling of garbage for decoration. Like North Dakota, eastern Russia is sitting on some huge natural resources. Its oil deposits make it currently the largest oil producer in the world. The last chapter of *Travels in Siberia* is a fascinating look at how oil production and Vladimir Putin's nationalizing the companies in this industry have made him and Russia a super economic power. Given that these comments were four years old, I just had to do a little research to see how this has changed in light of America's surge in oil production due to fracking. It seems, not surprisingly, that centralized decision making is going to leave Russia's energy-based economy in the dust. They don't modernize, they don't invest, and as of today, their exports are shrinking by double digit percentages. Frazier's story of Russian negotiating tactics (ie, hanging the company representative upside down out of a flying helicopter to get them to sign an agreement favorable to Russia), leaves to me believe that few outside companies will be willing to help Russia come into the 21st century of

oil production. That, and the threat of Putin stealing intellectual and real property. It's no wonder the the United States is predicted to be the leader in oil production within the next four years. Travels in Siberia is a fascinating book about an area of the world we seldom hear about.

The author is in love with Russia, and more specifically, Siberia, and he writes as only a lover could - enthusiastically, poetically, and also with a lot of humor. Siberia "ain't no Disneyland," as one guidebook says, but this wonderful book takes you there with grace, humor and a love of words, language, history, and people.

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