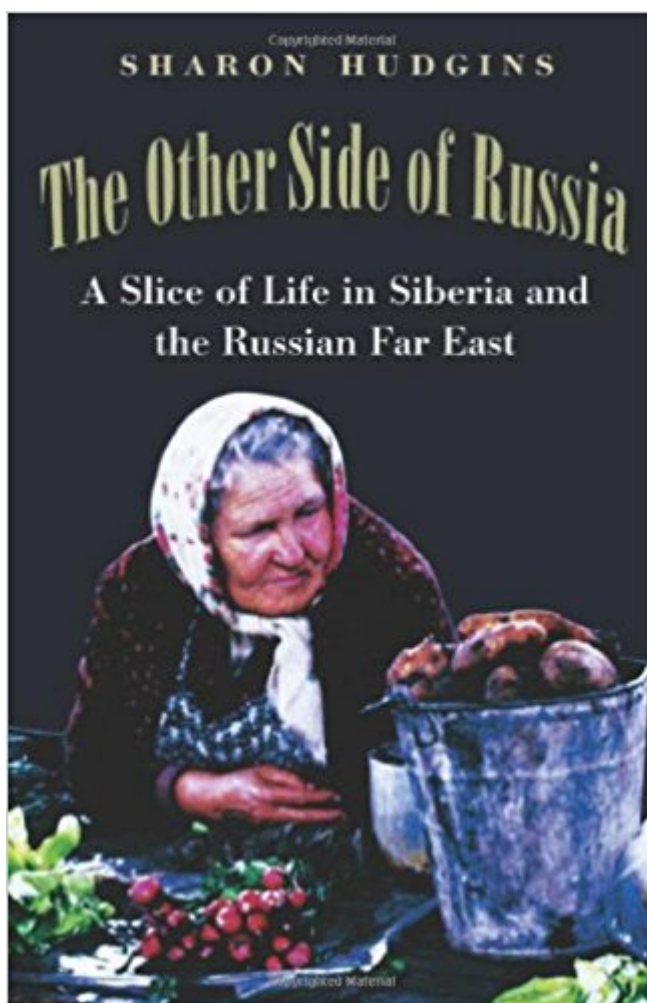


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# The Other Side Of Russia: A Slice Of Life In Siberia And The Russian Far East



## Synopsis

Travel to post Soviet Siberia and the Russian Far East with author Sharon Hudgins as she takes readers on a personal adventure through the Asian side of Russia—•an area closed to most Westerners and many Russians prior to the 1990s. Even today, few people from the West have ridden the TransSiberian railroad in winter, stood on the frozen surface of Lake Baikal, feasted with the Siberian Buryats, or lived in the "highrise villages" of Vladivostok and Irkutsk. One of the few American women who has lived and worked in this part of the world, Hudgins debunks many of the myths and misconceptions that surround this "other side of Russia." She artfully depicts the details of everyday life, set within their cultural and historical context—•local customs, foods, and festivals, as well as urban life, the education system, and the developing market economy in postSoviet Siberia and the Russian Far East. Hudgin's prose shines in her colorful descriptions of multicourse meals washed down with champagne and vodka, often eaten by candlelight when the electricity failed. The author's accounts of hors d'oeuvres made of sea slugs and roulades of raw horse liver will fascinate those with adventuresome tastes, while her stories of hosting Spanish, French, and TexMex feasts will come as a surprise to anyone who thinks of Russia as a gastronomic wasteland. Readers of *The Other Side of Russia: A Slice of Life in Siberia and the Russian Far East* will find themselves among the guests at Christmas parties, New Year's banquets, Easter dinners, and birthday celebrations. They will experience the challenges of living in highrise apartment buildings often lacking water, heat, and electricity. Above all, Asian Russia's natural beauty, thriving cities, and proud people shine from the pages, proving it is not only a land of harsh winters and vast uninhabited spaces, but also home to millions of Russian citizens who live and work in modern metropolises and enjoy a rich cultural and social life. Â Â

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Like Hedrick Smith’s *The Russians*, Sharon Hudgins’ *The Other Side of Russia*, takes the reader inside Russia, to the daily life of people, and the economic and political realities in the post-Soviet era. It goes well beyond being a travelogue, and provides insight well beyond the confines of Siberia. A great read.”—Helen Hundley (Helen Hundley)

An award winning food and travel writer, Sharon Hudgins taught for the University of Maryland University College in Germany, Spain, Greece, Japan, Korea, and Russia. She served as an administrator for the university’s two undergraduate degree programs in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Hudgins currently resides in the United States with her husband, Tom.

My wife has been getting a lot of good information about life in Soviet Russia from this as well as the recipes.

In *THE OTHER SIDE OF RUSSIA*, the University of Maryland University College has established a joint undergraduate degree program in business management with the Far Eastern State University in Vladivostok and the State University in Irkutsk. In the summer of 1993, author Sharon Hudgins and her husband, Tom, packed off to Siberia and the Russian Far East to serve as teachers in this cooperative venture, while the former was also Maryland’s on-site program coordinator in both cities. This book chronicles their experiences from their arrival until their departure in December 1994. Whether she’s describing the immensity of pristine Lake Baikal, the problematic living conditions in their high-rise apartment, local customs and food of the Buryat people, the vagaries and perils of shopping for household necessities, maddening water and electricity outages, local festivals, the growing pains of a free-market economy, the university students’ learning ethic, or the conviviality and generosity of their Russian friends, Hudgins has a keen eye for small details, as when describing an open air market: “An Uzbek woman ... sold raisins and nuts in small paper cones made out of official forms from the Irkutsk Municipal Water Department ... In one part of the market, a pretty teenage girl, wearing a garish, flower-printed dress and a thousand-yard stare, held a handful of peacock feathers and sipped a can of Dr Pepper, while in another section two older

women, both drunk, tried to punch each other out in a fist fight."I haven't been so engaged by a travel essay about Russia since Hedrick Smith's 1976 bestseller, THE RUSSIANS. My only criticism is the relative lack of photographs - only a couple at most per chapter. Luckily, Sharon's poetic prose paints pictures almost as effective as snapshots, as this from her vantage point on the Trans-Siberian Railroad:"A profusion of wildflowers carpeted the meadows, like an Impressionist painting exuberantly expanding beyond the limits of canvas and frame: undulating shades of yellow, gold, and blue, maroon and magenta, soft pink and pristine white, the pale purple globes of wild onions gone to seed, thousands of red-orange tiger lilies, whole fields of dark purple Siberian irises, and occasionally a single red poppy or two, like a stubborn symbol of politics past. Outside Chita a small lake glistened under the midnight moon."For me, a travel narrative is all it can be if it makes me want to go there myself. THE OTHER SIDE OF RUSSIA accomplishes that. Well, maybe for just a brief visit, perhaps, because I certainly wouldn't want to live there.

The Other Side of Russia emerged from Barbara Hudgins experience of living in Siberia for a year and a half, from 1993 to 1994. Working as the onsite program coordinator for the University of Maryland University College in Siberia and the Russian Far East, she worked and lived in Vladivostok and Irkutsk. Hudgins book is the first book about Siberia I'd come across written by someone who spent extensive time in Siberia. This gives her a depth of understanding that adds a lot to her memoir. The structure of her memoir is unusual. She's divided the book into two sections. The chapters in part one focus on place - Irkutsk, Vladivostok, Lake Baikal, etc. - and the chapters in the second part focus on aspects of life and culture in Siberia - housing, education, food and festivals. Hudgins supplemented her first-hand experience with extensive research. This offers readers an in-depth source of information about many aspects of Siberian place and life. What's lost in this non-chronological format is Hudgin's own adaptations and reactions over her time in Siberia. She does insert some feelings and personality, but the focus is on the topic, rather than on her personal experience or characters who change and develop over the period. Hudgins seems to have thrown herself into Siberia with a remarkably open mind. She expertly captures the small details of Siberian life and renders vivid pictures of feasts shared with Russian friends. For those who have been to Siberia, this book will take you back there. For those planning on going, The Other Side of Russia provides a great overview of the life and culture.

Best book I've ever read that truly delves into the personalities and quirks of Russians in their daily lives. Especially in the second half of the book, I couldn't stop smiling at all of the author's

observations of Russians because they really rang true to me. I spent some time working in Siberia too, and this book brought back so many funny, frustrating, and touching moments. I want to read my copy again! My only wish is that it was more current, updating observations into the 21st century.

well researched with abundant details of life at the time in irkutsk and vladivostock during 193-4

If you are interested in the average person's life in Communist Russia this would be a good book to read. The author did a really great job describing the "bad-attitudes" toward Americans living or visiting foreign countries, that we all have experienced while traveling! Besides that.....the book gives you an idea of the hardships suffered every day by the Russian people, just to have to wait in line for bread, and various food items, many of which were not even available! True as true can be, the Russian shopkeepers there had sullen, rude, nasty dispositions and attitudes toward Americans, just as they do in the US. If you don't believe me, just go into a Russian Market right here in our own country! It's disgusting! Well, the author and her husband made the best of a very bad situation while working and teaching there. I myself would NEVER have their patience!

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