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Volga, Volga: A Voyage Down the Great River

Lesley Chamberlain

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Lesley Chamberlain : Volga, Volga: A Voyage Down the Great River before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Volga, Volga: A Voyage Down the Great River:

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A carping trip down the VolgaBy S. Smith-PeterThis is not a pleasant book to read. The author spends most of her time complaining about the way the Russians live. Given that she was traveling down the Volga in the early 1990s during a time of near-total societal collapse, this seems rather unfair. Instead of looking at the systemic reasons for this collapse (government de-funding of education and services, a catastrophic decline in health care and infrastructure in general) she blames it on the individual Russian love of suffering. A far, far better look at post-Soviet society can be found in Stephen Cohen's Failed Crusade.The author makes the Russians out to be as strange as possible. For example, there is a chapter entitled "Have you come to watch the bears waste their lives?" when the actual question asked was simply "Have you come to watch the bears?" I feel especially sorry for her traveling companion, Alyosha, who at one point explodes, saying that he's being told how to do everything the Russian way, the English way and the American way. I can imagine that he heard a lot of complaining from the author.There are incorrect dates and simple mistakes when dealing with history. Also, she writes about the Tatar intelligentsia of Kazan that they are remote and unreachable. This is pretty Orientalist, as the Tatar intelligentsia speak Russian and would be willing to talk to her. It's just that she didn't bother to set up anything ahead of time. In general, this is a larger problem. She just showed up at all these towns without trying to connect to locals or local intellectuals, which makes her comments very shallow. A few descriptions, such as that of Nizhnii Novgorod, are evocative, though.If you enjoy watching someone be kicked while they're down, read this book. If not, avoid it.5 of 8

people found the following review helpful. Great intro to the VolgaBy Natalia O. NovikovaNo clue what the previous reviewer was talking about....most travel books on Rus' complain or whine...from Dumas to Steinbeck, Fen Montaigne to Benson Bobrick. "River of no Reprieve" is a constant whine against Russian government bs but is still a very good book.Volga, Volga is recommended by me, a Russian. Horoshoi kniga!

This is a personal, cultural journey down one of the greatest waterways in the world. The Volga rises north-west of Moscow and flows north, east and south through the heart of Russia, ending in the Caspian Sea. From source to mouth, it is 2290 miles long and is the 15th largest river in the world. Chamberlain's journey brings to life a picture of a people in violent transition determined to preserve their cultural and architectural heritage, and a river bearing the full complexity of Russia's medieval and modern history. Her search for the cultural identity of the Volga led her back to half-forgotten novels, pictures, films and songs, and she rekindles memories for the literature of Alexei Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky. This is a work of travel literature and social and cultural history for both the layman and the scholar.