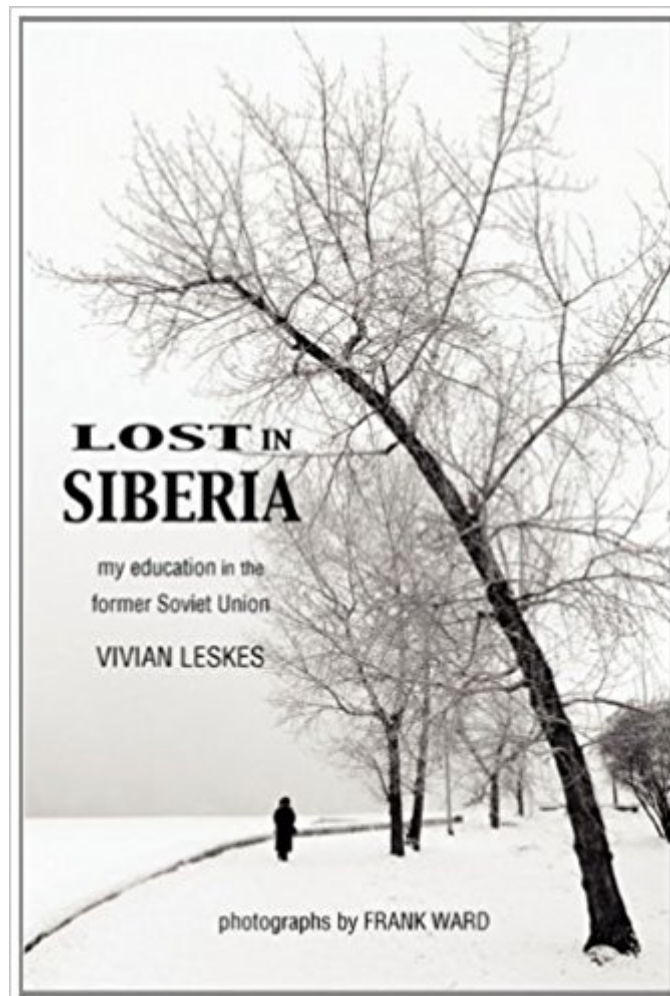




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Lost In Siberia: My Education In The Former Soviet Union



Synopsis

A community college teacher of English with a firm grasp of the Russian language spends a Fulbright-funded year in Ukraine, Russia, and Siberia--primarily in Siberia--as a teacher of English. Colleagues, students, and strangers engage her in the challenges of teaching and learning language as well as the fine art of experiencing a foreign culture on its own terms.

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Customer Reviews

Over a period spanning several years, English teacher Vivian Leskes spends a number of months (about 12 months in all) in Siberia. Although her tale starts and ends in the Ukraine, her experience in teaching English to Russian-speaking peoples (be they Ukrainians, Russians or Siberian native people) is based on their shared identity of life in the former Soviet Union. This is a short, easy and gentle read. It's fun as she provides insight into the "Russian way" of seeing and doing things. Her American sense of time, importance and priority must inevitably yield to Russian ways. The most memorable part is her time in Irkutsk, "the Athens of Siberia." It is so-named for the exiled Decembrists, members of a mercantile and officer class who failed in their reform efforts directed toward Czar Nicholas I in 1825. As a means of neutralizing them, the noble Czar exiled them to Siberia. The Decembrists settled mostly in the Irkutsk area, the upper Angara watershed immediately west of Lake Baikal. The Decembrists are given credit for bringing culture and commerce to this far-flung corner of Czarist Russia. Leskes' story about obtaining a toilet seat for her apartment toilet is representative of her Siberian experiences. I spent a month in Siberia in the summer of 1994, performing volunteer service in two Russian national parks on the east and west

sides of Lake Baikal. We worked closely with Russian park rangers and adapted as best we could to strange and amusing Russian ways. Our time in Siberia was bracketed by multi-day home-stays in Irkutsk with park employee hosts. Our group of volunteers was able to see and visit many of the sites in Irkutsk that Leskes talks about. I recognized many of the views portrayed in the photos taken by her husband, Frank Ward. The black-and-white stark motif style of these photos accurately and emotionally captures the sense of place that is Irkutsk. This is an easy, enjoyable read and would serve as good primer to someone who intends to visit Siberia and Irkutsk in particular.

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