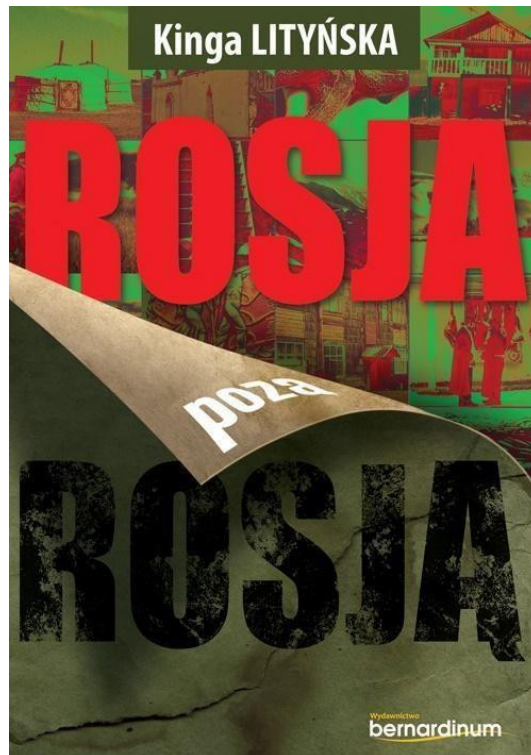


# *Russia Out of Russia*

Kinga Litynska

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**“Russia – the mother, Russia – the nurse. This is how the citizens of the post-Soviet republics call the largest country in the world. A former super power, now the Russian Federation continues to expand its influences which are present in the states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan even twenty-six years after the collapse of the empire.”**

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Russia has always aroused fascination. There is something mysterious about this huge country that brings Europe and Asia together. For Westerners, the Russian Far East seems to be as unreachable as it is scary. The existence of the USSR was fraught with consequences. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was first and foremost a state of terror and absolute control of citizens by the authorities where privacy did not exist. Everything had to be subordinated to the only right one party line.

Contrary to appearances, with the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet mentality has not

completely been erased. The former Soviet republics are still heavily influenced by Russia in terms of culture, language, and even cuisine. The legacy of communism will always linger since “a new law can be made overnight, but it takes years to change people’s mentality and habits,” says Litynska. Examples? Russian *pirozki*, Lenin statues, communist architecture decorating Kazakhstan’s former capital, Alma Ata, or the Kyrgyz migrating to Moscow to seek employment.

It is this heritage that the book by Kinga Litynska, *Russia Out of Russia*, speaks about. Just like her debut publication *China Beyond Belief!*, it was published by *Bernardinum Publishing House*. Although Litynska is a teacher by profession, her real passion is traveling. As an independent traveller, among many others, she visited such exotic countries as South Korea, Mongolia, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

In her new, engrossing report, she describes her trip to the republics of the former USSR. Litynska does not only focus on the beautiful: the natural wonders and tourist attractions of the countries that she visits, but draws the reader’s attention to “the local customs and daily lifestyles of the citizens of the republics, which makes her book a “journey into the human mind” – the aim that the author successfully achieved. On the pages of her book, she skillfully describes her experiences and shares her observations and thoughts in an extraordinarily vivid, sometimes humorous, manner. Moreover, Litynska provides lots of extra information about the territories that she explores, briefly sketching their history, political sentiments, as well as economic difficulties that the citizens have had to face since the collapse of the Union.



The first country Litynka takes her readers to is Kyrgyzstan which she enters from China. And what pleases her most? The local cuisine. “Finally, fresh vegetables! Not soggy and overcooked like in China, but crispy carrots, beetroots and juicy sauerkraut.” These are the goodies that Litynska buys at the market in Osh. Knowing the taste of Chinese sweet sausage and totally inedible pork-floss candies, she is delighted with Kyrgyz markets and produce that she can enjoy because “what matters is not where you come from, but where you are coming from,” she says.

Although Kyrgyzstan is a popular tourist destination, it has its problems such as high unemployment rate, very aptly portrayed in one of the chapters “Freedom or poverty?” On her way, the author encounters many interesting locals. “Be it a hotel receptionist, a merchant at the marketplace, or a waitress – they all, with nostalgia, recall the times before the collapse of the Soviet Union, when everyone was better off.” She describes post-Soviet hotels and grocery shops, observing the co-existence of cultures. From her book, the reader will also find out how the locals perceive Western tourists.

Having left Kyrgyzstan, Litynska visits “another country with a Soviet legacy that permeates everyday life of the people of Muslim Kazakhstan.” She takes the reader on a journey by train through endless steppes – the predominant feature of the landscape – making a sharp description of the Kazakh mentality and way of life. The author shows the absurdities of the Soviet economy, giving examples of the devastation of the natural environment present in the former republics. She draws the readers’ attention to Kazakhstan’s great problem – access

to water – and describes Nur Sultan, the country’s capital, in stark contrast to desert provinces.

Her journey ends in Russia. Here, the readers can join her in her hitch-hiking adventure to The Far East “along the *Trans-Siberian Trail* to discover the unknown land near the Arctic Circle.” She takes you to the coldest city in the world, Yakutsk, where the temperature in winter drops to minus sixty degrees. Then, you will travel five days and five nights by jeep following the *Trail of Bones* built by the *Gulag* prisoners. The bodies of the dead were buried where they died, giving the route its name.

Litynska sketches Siberia as an endless, beautiful and fascinating land. Together with her, you discover Kamchatka – Russia’s other identity. In the last part of the book, you can admire the majestic volcanoes, black-sand beaches of the Pacific coast, taste the delicious salmon caviar, and set off to meet the biggest inhabitant of the swampy *tundra* – the brown bear. On the pages of her book, not only does Litynska describe the countries she explores, but also she compares and contrasts them with one another, pointing out their similarities and differences. At times, she makes interesting references to China, where she spent three years, working and travelling. This makes her travel report a more exhaustive account, complemented by incredible photos, thanks to which you can see the colorful, amazing world you read about.

“*Russia Out of Russia*” is a very interesting travel book which will delight every fan of this genre – just as it delighted me.

