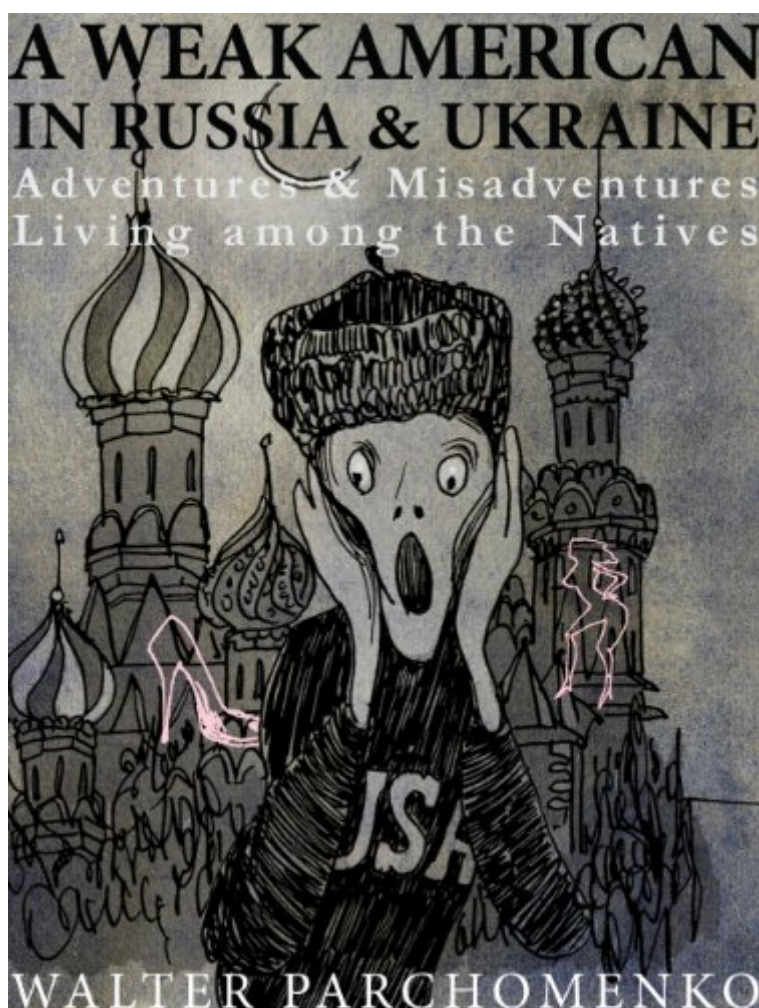


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A Weak American In Russia & Ukraine: Adventures & Misadventures Living Among The Natives



Synopsis

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine is a painfully funny collection of travel nightmares; country and culture shocks experienced by an American living and working among the natives over the past 20 years. It offers practical tips on how to cope with: Sexy young women who view foreign men as potential ATM machines and transportation out of their closed countries; herds of stampeding Slavs on city streets, in metro areas and supermarkets; angry motorists who stop for pedestrians at crosswalks only because they are bumpier than potholes; packs of howling stray dogs who don't understand English and Slavic attack pigeons. A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine also takes readers by the hand and allows them to experience the agony of entering a collapsing post-Soviet medical system and interacting with Kafkaesque bureaucracies. And it provides foreign men, who seek Slavic brides, priceless advice that can save them from bankruptcy, jail and even confinement in a psychiatric hospital. The result is a book that weaves comic misadventures without trivializing serious issues, including AIDS, rampant corruption and ecocide; shatters many prevailing stereotypes about Slavic men and women; and clears up numerous culturally based misunderstandings Americans typically have of Russians and Ukrainians. Seinfeldian humor. Like the very popular TV series Seinfeld, this is fundamentally a book "about nothing": the banal but often fascinating events that make up our human existence. Chapters titled Slavic Attack Pigeons, Fornicating Flies, Howling Stray Dogs and Mayo Heaven are just a few illustrations. A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine fully agrees with H.L. Mencken who aptly observed: "The basic fact about human existence is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not so much a war as an endless standing in line." A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine is bound to be a source of hearty laughter for aching souls and an essential guide to help Americans and other foreigners cope with, and even enjoy, the challenges of daily life in Russia and Ukraine; and understand the many harsh post-Soviet political, economic, social and environmental realities in these countries. 59 chapters with 60 original illustrations.

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Customer Reviews

As an armchair traveler, I got back on a kick reading about Eastern Europe and Russia recently and discovered this inexpensive Kindle book. It's an interesting subject: how Russians and Ukrainians are so drastically different than Americans are. And how different living in Ukraine is from living in the U.S. However different we are though, read this and you'll think Slavs are aliens from deep space. My only experience with Eastern Europe was a trip to Moscow and Leningrad in 1989 as a teenager where I found the people reserved but kind in my limited interaction with them. The author, Walter Parchomenko (who has a Ukrainian heritage) has a love-hate relationship with Ukraine and Russia; he complains bitterly about the terrible toilets, no smiling, no superficial niceties, the roads, the potholes, the subways, the stores, the food, housing conditions, etc. etc. but he continues to go back and torture himself over and over and over again. And there's much pontificating on American men coming for Slavic brides (in a nutshell, don't!!). As a result, this is a long book and the reader gets the SAME stories and observations over and over and over again. This book is desperately in need of an editor to weed out the repetition and correct errors like "whole" for "hole". By the end, I felt beaten up, pummeled and exhausted (not to mention depressed) about Ukrainians and Russians. I really want to believe he painted a negative portrait of these people with a very broad brush. Every woman under 35 looks like a hooker in 3" heels, every single person is awful and rude, you'll fall into a pothole or an open sewer if you dare to leave your flat, every man drinks vodka 24-7...and so on. On the other hand, the author relates his tales with a humorous tone and seems to have an admirable 'grin and bear it' attitude despite all his hardships. This had potential to be a

well-rounded, fascinating book by an American with Ukrainian roots: the author could have written on his family's history a little more (his parents were WW2 survivors who were lucky to escape to the US), perhaps some deeper historical observations of WHY the Slavs are the way they are (countless ethnic conflicts, Stalin's forced famine, the trauma of WW2, etc.?), more personal stories from Slav friends themselves....but there's not a lot of that. Parchomenko does underscore that the behavior and attitudes he observes are likely due to omnipresent corruption, the Soviet system, greed, desperation, and lack of resources for starters...I certainly learned a good bit (as in I don't want to travel there after all) but I think my problem is that I wanted more introspection and depth out of this book than the author gave me. Three stars for the subject material.

Walter Parchomenko wrote an excellent book in a very amusing and easy to read style, full of anecdotes and personal stories and yet, he provided a very serious analysis of the post-Soviet Russian and Ukrainian lifestyle and mentality. What helped the author tremendously was that he speaks Russian and Ukrainian. Thanks to his linguistic skills he managed to mingle and live among the locals. As someone who lived for a while in Russia and visited Ukraine as well, I agree with most of Parchomenko's observations. Essentially, thanks to the long time living in the Russian empire and then the Soviet Union, Russians and Ukrainians have pretty much the same mentality, jokes, behavior and even food. I also agree that both countries are very corrupt, practically third world countries, where the so-called elites are in fact the top looters of national wealth. As Parchomenko noted VIPs in Russia and Ukraine are in reality Very Important Plunderers, who are experts in criminal business schemes. The author provides as well very important insights about the post-Soviet behavior and mentality and tackles issues such as the no-service culture, the lack of smiles in public, the rude public behavior, the overdressing of young women, the public acceptance of corruption as well as cheating at schools and universities, rampant alcoholism, poor Soviet heritage work ethic, the devastating state of infrastructure, including sidewalks, public toilets, etc. He also gives very valuable advice to men who plan to marry or date a Ukrainian and Russian women. It is not per say a bad idea, but Parchomenko warns such men to be very careful and to try avoiding the gold diggers and pro daters in big cities like Moscow and Kyiv. I totally agree with his observations on the female front. Many Ukrainian and Russian women are stunning but to find a decent woman, you have to get out of the capital cities and the popular bars and restaurants frequented by expats, since these places have become huge magnets for gold diggers and all kinds of scammers. It is also curious that the author noted the big difference between Russians and Americans in perceiving friendship. Americans call a friend anybody that they have known for a

while, where as for Russians and Ukrainians, friendship has a much deeper meaning. I do not agree with the author, though that Russian and Ukrainian food is tasty. He even called borsht a "very tasty Ukrainian stew." I found the food in both countries to be bland and in some cases even impossible to eat with the exception of some salads. I guess, though that it is a matter of taste and I have to give credit to the author that he mentioned the excessive use of mayonnaise in Russia and Ukraine. The thing that I couldn't get is how the author is still fascinated with Russia and Ukraine and after 20 years of living part time in both countries and facing so many challenges and bureaucratic nightmares, he still wants to come back there for a while. In my case, after spending three semesters in Russia, I don't plan to even visit the country. Anyway, the author succeeded in writing an excellent book for anybody interested in the vast Wild East, which starts right at the eastern border of Poland.

Very entertaining, humorous, sad, interesting, and thoroughly informative of what it might be like to live/visit Russia or Ukraine. I really knew nothing of the area prior to reading this book and feel much more aware of the culture and the cultural differences between (weak) Americans and our Slavic counterparts in Eastern Europe and Russia. Though I have no real interest in the whole Slavic Brides chapters, I found it both funny and sad at the same time. As the author suggests, I'll stick to the sports car in my mid-life crisis. I would highly recommend this to anyone who will be visiting either country and/or who is just interested in learning about our world outside of our American bubble.

Walter Parchomenko has a great observational sense of humor of life in Ukraine and Russia. The first time I read this book I was visiting my in-laws in Ukraine, and was living the book laughing at myself with each chapter. I have made many trips, and appreciative of experiencing another culture as a foreigner. My experience in the military where I lived on a base full of Americans was much different. Living in an other culture where no one spoke English was a very unique experience, and the book gave me a guide to a lot of the things going on around me. In my travels, I have come to enjoy the culture and people though it is very different than my own.

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