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City-pick St Petersburg (City-Pick Series)



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Customer Reviews

I haven't been to St. Petersburg (yet) but I am fascinated by this city, mostly due to my literary wanderings together with authors like Andrei Belinfante or Daniil Kharmis. I am not a great fan of Raskolnikov, but I do love Oblomov. The city has all the ingredients to attract tourists interested in history and arts and the City Pick Guide edited by Heather Reyes and James Rann answers perfectly my curiosities and confirms my thoughts about the city. Founded relatively recently at the scale of history, in 1703, and aimed to be Russia's Western window to the world, St. Petersburg was inspired by Amsterdam and a bit of London. 'Architects in Amsterdam and Rome were cramped for room in which to slot their buildings. But in Petersburg they were able to expand their classical ideals'. (p. 20, *The Cultural History of Russia*). Vasilevsky Island, for instance, was designed by Le Blond 'as an ideal citadel town which would incorporate all life's essentials'. (p. 28) Russian and world famous literati - Truman Capote, Theophile Gautier, Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre, among others - were there and wrote their memories about the city, with love, admiration or realism. '(...) sometimes this city gives the impression of an utter egoist preoccupied solely with its own appearance', said Joseph Brodsky. Belinfante's St. Petersburg is a Chagall world, when the characters seem to fly brought by the fast forward movement of the busy century. A city of splendour and great expectations, cruel and loveable, the St. Petersburg of the literary world is either the result of short visits, long-term interaction with the city and its inhabitants or purely the result of literary imagination. As in the case of other guides edited by Oxygen books, it is based on a

selection of relevant fragments from important authors, covering the architecture, different stages of history - I was expecting a more detailed presentation of the city today, including by the mention of the details of contemporary literary life; the fragments dedicated to the city under siege moved me to tears though -, main personalities and cultural benchmarks - as the world of music and dance.

If you want a travel guide with neat little lists of places to see, things to do, restaurants to try, this is not for you. This is a different sort of travel guidebook altogether. In fact, it's not really a guidebook at all, more a literary and cultural map of the Venice of the North - a collection of writings by over 60 western and Russian authors (mostly non-fiction, but there is a healthy dose of fiction as well), all related to this incredible city. The well-selected readings are curated and bridged together with nice, short introductory texts, and the organization is somewhat chronological, though it is the sort of smorgasbord of offerings that one can dip into at any point, follow the thread for a while, and then hop to another section. Soon enough, you'll be making your own "must see" notes in the margin and, before you know it, you will have one of those travel guides filled with little lists...As reviewed in *A Russian Life*

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