# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People and Language</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Reading</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Capital:** Moscow

**Population:** 140,041,247 (July 2009 est.)

**Languages:** Russian, other minority languages

**Type of Government:** Federation

**Administrative Divisions:** 46 oblasts, 21 republics, 4 autonomous okrugs, 9 krais, 2 federal cities, and 1 autonomous oblast

**Total Area:** 17,075,200 sq km (6,592,772 sq mi)

**Area:** Approximately 1.8 times the size of the United States

**Time Difference:** 8 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time
(Russia is divided into 11 time zones)
Early Russia was a collection of cities that ultimately merged to form an empire. During the early years of the ninth century, the Varangians, a Scandinavian people, came to Eastern Europe by crossing the Baltic Sea. In 862, the semi legendary warrior Rurik led the Varangians to the city of Novgrod on the Volkhow River. Oleg succeeded him, and twenty years later, he advanced southward and gained control of Kiev. His accomplishment thus created the first unified, dynastic state in the region, with Kiev as the center of a trade route between Scandinavia and Constantinople.

Vladimir I, great-grandson of Oleg, ruled over a kingdom in 989 that stretched as far south as the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, and the Volga River. Vladimir made Greek Orthodoxy the state religion. Russia was called “Kievan Rus” during the rule of Grand Duke Yaroslav the Wise (1019-1054). Under Yaroslav, Russia became the largest European state stretching from the Gulf of Finland in the northwest, to the Black Sea coast and the lower Danube in the south, and from the Carpathian Mountains in the west, to the upper Volga in the east. Yaroslav developed an education system and revised the first Russian law code.

During the 13th century, the Mongols, also known as the Tatars, established a state in Central Asia. In 1223, the Tatar’s armies led by Genghis Khan invaded the southeast and conquered Siberia, China, Central Asia and the Caucasus. After Genghis Khan’s death in 1237, his grandson Batu Khan began a second westward expansion into Russia. Over the course of three years, the well-armed Tatars overwhelmed the Russians and finally established rule in the 1250s.

In the second half of the 14th century, the Russians ceased to follow the Tatar’s orders. On September 8, 1380, Grand Duke Dmitri Ivanovich led the Russians to fight and won the battle against the Tatar’s armies on Kulikovo Field. Tatar’s power ended one hundred years later during the rule of Ivan III (1462-1505). In 1480, Ivan III established Russia’s national independence and Kievan Rus became known as Russia. Under the rule of Ivan III’s son, Vasily III (1505-1533), all the lands of Russia were finally unified. They formed a new united state, and the feudal wars ended. Ivan IV, also known as "Ivan the Terrible", was the first ruler to be crowned tsar (emperor). Under his rule, the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates were conquered. As a result, the Volga region, western Siberia, and Urals became a part of Russia’s territory.

After the death of Ivan IV came a period known as the "Time of Troubles." During this period, another tsar quickly replaced a presiding tsar. Taking advantage of the instability, the Poles attacked and conquered Moscow in 1610. However, a popular movement led by Kuzma Minin and Duke Dmitri Pozharsky, saved the country. After several bloody battles, Moscow was liberated. The State Council assembled in 1613, electing Mikhail Romanov as the new tsar.
In 1689, 17 year-old Tsar Peter (1672-1725) inherited the throne and introduced many reforms into Russia. He built metal works that enabled Russia to produce its own arms. In addition, he began a textile industry. Tsar Peter divided the country into provinces ruled by governors who were responsible for tax collection, the armed forces and public order. He also introduced new schools and textbooks on various subjects and opened an Academy of Science. For his remarkable accomplishments, Peter became known as "Peter the Great."

The Russian Empire made great advancements during the reign of Catherine II (1729-1796). Under her reign, a liberated press was introduced, yet freedom of speech was limited. In 1773, a massive peasant rebellion led by Emelyan Pugachev swept through Russia. It was the greatest popular revolt in Europe.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France invaded Russia but was defeated. In the latter half of the 19th century, Russia was gradually transformed from a feudal society to a capitalist industrial power. Food, textiles and machine-producing industries all flourished. Railroad construction expanded on a massive scale between 1860-1890. By the end of the century, the Siberian main line connecting western Russia with the Far East had been completed.

In 1881, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by the Narodnaya Volya ("People’s Freedom"). Alexander III (1845-1894) inherited the throne as the new tsar and established a savage regime. The leaders of Narodnaya Volya were put to death. Nevertheless, workers’ disturbances continued and the first workers’ unions were established. In the 1890s, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) began his revolutionary activities in Russia and in 1903 founded the Communist Party.

In 1894, the new tsar Nicholas II (1868-1917) came to the throne. In the summer of 1914, World War I broke out. Russia, along with Britain and France, was drawn into a vast and lengthy war against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. A bloody civil war broke out in 1918. The Communists “Red” and monarchists “White” fought for control of the country. Under the leadership of Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the Communists were triumphant in 1922.

After the November 1917 Revolution and civil war, the former empire was divided into several independent socialist republics. In 1922, representatives of four republics: Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia (Belarus), and Transcaucasia (now Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) signed a declaration forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). A Georgian, Joseph Stalin, took over as general secretary after Lenin’s death in 1924. He ruled until his death in 1953.

During the 1930s, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan joined the USSR. At the beginning of World War II, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
were incorporated by the USSR in 1940. From 1920 to 1940, great improvements were made toward education. Almost 50 million men and women became literate. In 1930, universal primary education was introduced. Russia was also the first country in the world to introduce free health care to all citizens. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the USSR. Six months later, German troops occupied half of the west of the Soviet Union. The Russians counter-attacked and eventually drove the German troops from Russia in 1944. Later, they succeeded in capturing Berlin on May 1, 1945.

In 1953, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) became general secretary. During his reign, Russia made some outstanding achievements including the launching of the first artificial satellite, the first nuclear power station and the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin. In 1964, Khrushchev was removed from power because of internal politics. Later in 1985, the new general secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev endeavored to save the Party and the country with widespread reforms. He was the first and the last president of the USSR.

In August 1991, The USSR was divided into fifteen independent countries: the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Currently, most of the countries cooperate under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have joined the European Union (EU).

The first president of the Russian Federation was Boris Yeltsin who ruled until 1999. The country was on the brink of economic collapse after independence. In an attempt to establish a market-based economy, the government ceased controlling prices for most items sold. Steps were also taken to privatize industries. The eventual outcome of the privatization was that individuals, called oligarchs, gained control of large segments of the economy.

Yeltsin resigned on December 31, 1999, and Vladimir Putin became acting president, moving from his post as prime minister. Putin won the March 2000 presidential elections, thus giving him a full term as president. One of his first actions as president was to divide the country into seven administrative districts, with each district governed by a presidential appointee. Putin also set out to enhance Russia’s relations with other European countries, China and India, and maintain Russia’s relations with Iran. After the 2001 terrorist attacks, he was in opposition to the planned military intervention against Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the political and economic power of the oligarchs was reduced. The government also restricted certain television networks whose owners were deemed unfriendly to Putin.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev was selected by Putin to succeed the presidency. After the March 2008 elections in which Medvedev was voted to become president, he return Putin’s favor by appointing him as prime minister. In the first few months of his presidency, Russia sent troops into neighboring Georgia to support rebels in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
Based upon geologic structure and relief, Russia can be divided into a western and eastern part along the path of the Yenisey River. The maximum east-west extent of Russia is approximately 5,600 miles, while the north-south width is between 1,500 and 2,500 miles. Landforms and landscapes primarily occur in a series of broad latitudinal belts. In the north lie the arctic deserts, and toward the south are the tundra and forest zones. South of the forest zone is the wooded steppe zone and the steppe zone, with a semi-desert section along the northern shore of the Caspian Sea.

Total area of land covered with permafrost is 4 million square miles. In the western part of the country, permafrost occurs in the tundra and forest-tundra zones, and along the Yenisey River in western Siberia. This part of the country consists of lowland plains, low hills and plateaus. Most of the area east of the Yenisey River is covered with permafrost and the terrain is mainly mountainous, save some extensive lowlands.

Russia has five main drainage basins: the Arctic and Pacific Oceans and the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas. The Arctic basin covers most of Siberia and the northern parts of the Russian Plain. Three rivers account for a large portion of this basin. The Ob River, in addition to its main tributary, the Irtysh, has a continuous length of 3,362 miles. The second river is the Yenisey with a length of 2,540 miles, and the Lena River has a length of 2,734 miles. The remaining rivers that drain into the Arctic Basin are the Northern Dvina and its tributaries, the Vytegra and Sukhona, the Pechora, the Indigirka and the Kolyma. The last two rivers are located in Siberia.

The rest of Siberia is drained into the Pacific. Many small rivers in the north flow from the mountains, while in the south, the Amur River forms the boundary dividing Russia and China. The river is 1,755 miles long, and one of its tributaries, the Ussuri forms part of the border. The rivers Dnieper and the Don both drain into the Black Sea. In addition, a small northwestern section drains into the Baltic. The Volga, with a length of 2,193 miles, is the longest river in Europe and the Volga System carries two-thirds of the waterway traffic. Its source is at the Valdai Hills northwest of Moscow and it drains into the Caspian Sea.

Russia has over two million fresh and saltwater lakes. The largest lakes in the western part of the country are the Ladoga with a surface area of 6,830 square miles, and Onega with a surface area of 3,753 square miles. The Peipus has an area of 1,370 square miles and Rybinsk Reservoir on the Volga. Narrow dam lakes are found behind the rivers Don, Volga, and Kama and are between 100 and 200 miles in length. A man-made lake found in Siberia is the Bratsk Reservoir, which is 340 miles long and is among the world’s largest reservoirs. Lake Baikal is the largest body of fresh water in the world with a surface area of 12,200 square miles and a maximum depth of 5,315 feet.
CLIMATE

Russia has a largely continental climate due to its massive size. Most regions experience six months of continuous snow. Consequently, no part of the country has a year-round growing season. In the northern artic and sub-artic zones, the average winter temperature is negative 58 °F. By complete contrast, in the south and the Caucasus, summer temperatures can reach 110 °F. Western Russia has a typical continental climate of hot summers that reaches 86 °F and cold winters that can be negative 13 °F. The Russian year is clearly divided into four seasons that sharply differ from each other: winter, spring, summer and fall.

The winter months of December, January and February have frosts, ice and snowstorms. During this season, white snow and ice blanket the earth. The winter is particularly longer in the north where the land is washed by the Arctic Ocean. Much of this region is almost perpetually ice-bound. Average days of snow cover vary from 60 to 80 days in the South and from 260 to 280 days in the Far North. The Far East experiences permafrost during most of the winter. For this reason, buildings must be constructed on pilings and machinery must be made of specially tempered steel. In the north, winter lasts seven to eight months of the year.

Spring begins in March and lasts through April and May. This is the time when the first flowers appear from under the snow; they are called snowdrops. The ice on the rivers begins to melt and break up, turning into rivulets of water that run along the streets in the towns and flow into the meadows and fields in the countryside.

Spring is followed by the summer months June, July and August. Everything blooms, thrives and bears fruit. Summer is hot in the south and relatively warm elsewhere. Average temperatures range from 55 to 75 °F. Drought often occurs in early, middle and late summer.

Fall is considered the most beautiful time of the year, called “golden autumn”, because the forest leaves turn golden red. Particularly beautiful are the maple trees, whose leaves acquire a golden and bright red tinge. In November, the trees shed their leaves leaving only their bare branches.

The ocean has little effect on the climate of Russia due to high mountains along the country’s southern border. Low to moderate amounts of precipitation is typical during the year. Rainfall is highest in the westerly mountain regions with an average annual precipitation of 79 inches. Average annual rainfall decreases toward the southeast. The wettest areas are the small, lush subtropical regions adjacent to the Caucasus and along the Pacific coast.
EDUCATION

During most of the Soviet period, the government tightly controlled the education system. Schools emphasized skill building and teaching of the Communist ideology, and teachers were expected to both educate students and shape their personalities to the Communist ideal. The students permitted to study a given profession were determined by official estimates of the number of graduates the profession will need. Private schools and publishing were prohibited by the Soviets.

In 1992, Russia adopted a new education law that legalized private schools and home schooling. This law also gave educators the right to choose their own textbooks and to determine other aspects of instruction. Private publishing has expanded rapidly, although new textbooks are still not widely available.

Russia has inherited a comprehensive system of education from the Soviet period and developed an extensive network of preschool, elementary, secondary, and higher education institutions. Children are required to attend school six days a week, Monday to Saturday. The school year begins in September and ends in May. It is divided into four terms, with vacations of up to two weeks between the terms. Preschool begins with children five years old and is optional. Education is required and free beginning at age 6, when children enter primary school for grades one to four. Intermediate education begins with grade five and continues through grade nine. Children can then enter upper-level schools or vocational-technical programs.

Undergraduate training in higher education institutions generally involves a four to five year course of study, after which students may enroll in a one to three year program of graduate training. Vocational schools consist of general education and technical training, as well as some on-the-job experience.

TRADITIONS

Russians enjoy participating in traditional customs and activities in all parts of life. Often, classical literature is celebrated through reciting of poetry, attending plays, and discussing novels. Traditionally, peasants sang epic songs that originated before the sixteenth century. Familiar folk instruments are the balalaika, a triangular guitar with three strings, and the garmon (concertina). A strong ballet tradition, beginning in 1738, exists among Russians and is patterned after the classical French style.

A common fairy tale typically tells the story of a prince or a simpleton as its hero. Animal tales feature animals that possess human characteristics. Traditional folk art displays intricate designs on objects. One of the most famous pieces is the matryoshka, which is a series of wooden dolls that nest inside each other.

Passage into adulthood is observed through graduation from high school or university. A patronymic is used in formal and business situations wherein the father’s first name forms the root of the child’s middle name.
At home, Russian dinner tables are laid out to include a plate of bread, salt, pepper and mustard. Russians generally eat three meals a day. The morning meal typically includes buckwheat pancakes, porridge served with sour cream and cheese, although some Russians eat only bread and tea for breakfast.

Dinner is served in the afternoon and is the main meal of the day. It often begins with soup, which is made from beets and served with sour cream. It may also begin with appetizers such as salted fish, cold meats, bard-boiled eggs and caviar. The main course is served hot and typically made with beef, pork or chicken. Popular dishes include meat or vegetable-filled pasta accompanied by sour cream, and cubed or sliced beef in a sour cream sauce over noodles. The evening meal usually consists only of tea and appetizers. In addition to tea, coffee and seltzer are popular beverages, and vodka and beer are extremely popular alcoholic drinks.

Pie is another traditional Russian national dish. Russian pies are typically small and elongated. They are filled with various ingredients such as cabbages, peas, turnips, carrots, potatoes, spring onions, mushrooms, meat and fish. The pies are then covered with leavened or unleavened pastry and baked in the oven.

**PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE**

With an estimated population of 140,041,247, more than four-fifths are ethnic Russians. The remaining population is made-up of over 120 ethnic groups, each of which speaks their own distinct language. The Tatars, Ukrainian, Chuvash, Bashkir, Chechen and Armenian groups have individually over one million members. Some of the groups give name to some of the administrative divisions within Russia. Groups that do not have autonomous ethnic units have been divided into territories and regions.

The Russian populace can be divided linguistically into four groups: Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic, and Caucasian. The Indo-European group includes the East Slavs and other smaller populations of speakers of different languages. The East Slavs comprise four-fifths of the total population. The majority of speakers in the Altaic group are the Turkic. They live primarily in the Central Asian republics.

Additional Turkic speaking clusters live in various regions throughout Russia. One such cluster, consisting of the Bashkir, Chuvash and Tatars, live between the middle Volga and southern Urals. A second cluster lives in the North Caucasus region and consists of the Balkar, Karachay, Kumyk and Nogay. Other Turkic-speaking groups are the Altai, Khakass, Shor, Tofalar, and Tuvans who live in southern Siberia between the Urals and Lake Baikal. The Sakha and Dolgan live primarily in the middle Lena Basin and the Arctic, respectively. The Manchu-Tungus and Mongolians are also part of the Altaic group.
The Uralic group, well distributed in the Eurasian forest and tundra zones, includes the Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic. Caucasian speakers live in the North Caucasus region and consist of many small groups, collectively called the Abkhazo-Adyghian and Nakho-Dagestanian group.

Lifestyles of the urban and village populations in Russia differ sharply and are greatly dependant on their income levels. For Russia’s poor, life is a daily grind of survival. Many people spend hours each day selling their belongings or other goods on the street. The clothes worn by urban folk are of international style. Men usually wear European style jackets, trousers, shirts and ties. Women wear dresses or blouses with skirts or slacks. In the city, work schedule determines daily routine.

On workdays, household chores are accomplished when time permits, thus, most are done during the weekend. The norm in Russia is a five-day workweek with two days off, usually Saturday and Sunday. One of the days off is devoted to household affairs and the other is usually spent on entertainment such as walks in a local park, or visits to the cinema, theater, museum, family, or friends. In the summer, urban Russians usually try to go on vacation to enjoy the warmth of the northern sun and admire Russia’s flowers, green forests and meadows.

Life is quite different in the rural areas of Russia. Village life revolves around agricultural seasons. Daily work includes sowing and harvesting, grazing of cattle, plowing, haymaking, hunting and collecting fruits. During the winter months, Russians rest after the hard work done in the fall. Summertime is enjoyed by the villagers through swimming in local rivers or lakes, or going mushroom and berry picking in the forests.

The Russian extended family in its fullest development consists of the eldest male, his wife, his unmarried daughters, his sons, their wives and children, the widow of any deceased male member and her descendents, as well as others who may have been adopted.

The eldest male member or family patriarch provides leadership for a Russian family, but does not exercise his rule in any consistent fashion. He is very detached from family life, spending time in studies and social clubs. He intervenes in whatever specific family issue that interests him. The eldest male member is expected to look after the welfare of the household members. His position of authority requires loyalty and obedience, regardless of whether he meets or avoids his responsibilities.

Women are generally considered inferior to men and are expected to be submissive to their husbands. At the same time, women tend to be idealized by both their husbands and children, and they exert considerable authority in their families. Households in which the father has died or failed in his responsibilities, the mother usually assumes his role.
RELIGION

The most commonly practiced religion is Russian Orthodox Christianity. About one-fourth of the population belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church and members are dispersed throughout the country. However, the vast majority of Orthodox believers do not attend church on a regular basis. Nonetheless, the church is widely respected by both Russian believers and nonbelievers, who see it as a symbol of Russian heritage and culture. The state officially observes Orthodox holidays.

Muslims form the second largest religious group in Russia. They are concentrated mostly in the ethnic republics of Chuvashia and Bashkortostan in the middle Volga region, and in the republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan. Buddhists live chiefly in the republic of Buryatia and Tyva on the Russian border with Mongolia and in Kalmykia on the northwest shore of the Caspian Sea.

Despite the re-emergence of traditional religions, most Russians do not adhere strictly to a single belief. Instead, they combine traditional faiths with alternative beliefs. Witchcraft and astrology are popular, especially among young people. Russians have also turned to numerous new beliefs, sects and religious denominations. Foreign missionaries and other proselytizers have introduced a wide variety of religious beliefs and New Age philosophies.

HOLIDAYS

On certain popular holidays, the singing of ditties called chastushkas is a prominent feature of Russian country festivals and parties. In certain parts of rural Russia they still remain popular. A chastushka is a verse of four lines sung in a dance rhythm to the accompaniment of the balalaika. The song is usually a humorous improvisation on recent local news, in which two performers compete with each other to the general merriment and encouraging applause of the listeners. Both men and woman participate.

New Year is celebrated with much vigor in Russia. Many celebrate it twice a year on January 1 and 14. The second date corresponds to January 1 in the Julian calendar. The celebration includes a brightly decorated Christmas tree and the exchanging of New Year gifts followed by a hearty dinner. According to tradition, an abundant meal signifies an abundant New Year.

Another popular holiday, Butter Week, or Shrovetide in Russian, occurs the day before Ash Wednesday. Families sit down to a festive meal as it is traditionally the last opportunity to feast before the fasting period of Lent. The highlight of this holiday is the eating of bliny (pancakes), a symbol of Yarilo, the ancient pagan sun god. It is also a time to announce the coming of spring. June 12 is Russia’s Independence Day. It commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Russian Federation in 1991. Other popular holidays include Christmas, celebrated on January 7, and Easter.
When Medvedev took office as president in 2008, he envisioned Russia strengthening its economy by improving its infrastructure, innovation, investment, and institutions. He worked toward decreasing the government’s role in the economy, and he endeavored to reform the tax system and banking sector. Additionally, he sought to reduce corruption and improve the judiciary.

Since the financial crisis of 1998, Russia’s economy has grown at an average rate of 7 percent. At the end of 2008, GDP growth was 6 percent, primarily driven by non-tradable services and domestic manufacturing. Over the turn of the century, the country experienced a time of declining poverty and unemployment, as well as an expansion of the middle class. In 1999, foreign exchange reserves were $12 billion, and by the end of July 2008, it had grown to nearly $600 billion. Total foreign debt is roughly one-third of GDP.

Due to the global financial crisis, investor concerns over the Georgian conflict and issues with corporate governance, the Russian stock market fell by approximately seventy percent. The crisis also affected the liquidity in the banking system. In early October 2008, the government injected $200 billion into the economy. The rescue plan was aimed at increasing liquidity, helping firms refinance foreign debt, and supporting the stock market. There was also a $20 billion tax cut plan for the populace and industries.

During the summer of 2008, the seventy percent drop in the price of oil had an adverse effect on the external accounts and the federal budget. By the middle of November, the Central Bank enacted mini-devaluations of the currency, causing an increase in capital flight and freezing of the domestic credit markets. This caused an increase in the unemployment rate while those who were working went without pay. There was also a severe decline in production. By the end of the year, the foreign exchange reserves were roughly $435 billion.

To improve the economy, the government is taking strides toward diversifying and modernizing infrastructure. Domestic and foreign investments remain low due to the global financial crisis. The government has taken steps to improve the judiciary, but it has not been highly successful. In time, Russia aspires towards appointment to the World Trade Organization.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


SUGGESTED READING

**Russia: The Once and Future Empire From Pre-History to Putin**
**By:** Philip Longworth
**Publisher:** St. Martin's Press, 2006

This book answers many questions a reader might have about Russia as Longworth explores the rich history that Russia has experienced.

**Culture and Customs of Russia** *(Culture and Customs of Europe)*
**By:** Sydney Schultze
**Publisher:** Greenwood, 2008

The author provides a clear description of Russia’s geography, history, religion, society, education, food and the arts. The book is an excellent introductory reference work.