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Слависты всех стран, соединяйтесь!

Классная! Газета!

№ 9/10 НЬЮ ЛОНДОН 30 апреля 2015



NINE DAYS IN RUSSIA THAT DIDN'T SHAKE THE WORLD



I Was Constantly Surprised

Our trip to Russia this spring was truly a pleasure. From our arrival at the Aeroflot terminal, every moment was packed with cultural, linguistic, and historical learning. I recall the first time I heard Russian spoken; aboard the plane, a stewardess welcomed us in her native tongue. It was at that moment that I realized we were entering a whole other world, a world different from the only one I knew. Besides the language, customary differences were obvious. Whether it was the tone of voice or the words of choice, I was constantly surprised. For example, female employees were referred to as *девушка*, a term whose direct translation in English would be highly offensive if so used. As a former resident of Manhattan, I did not expect to be overly amazed by Moscow or St. Petersburg, but I was gravely mistaken.

I will start with the food. Whether it was Cafe Moo-Moo, Teremok, or some other restaurant, my friends and I sought out Russian cuisine at every opportunity. I fell in love with borsch, *blinchiki*, the pickled fish, and even *kvas*. But even more exotic were the Georgian and Uzbek restaurants. Two nations that had each barely crossed my mind once in my life could produce unforgettable food, music, and dance.

We also toured, extensively. We explored more palaces, monuments, museums, and even graveyards than I could count. And we had extremely knowledgeable guides throughout. We learned about tsars, Mongolian invaders, and natives. We saw Faberge eggs and ancient weaponry, and were told their full histories. We learned about Russian writers, poets, playwrights, politicians, and heroes.

Russia's Deceptive Nature

Initially I was not dazzled by the scenery of Russia. Landing in Moscow just reminded me of being in any big city and it slightly reminded me of Chicago, but only slightly. I was very aware that the cars were what I could only think of as small, dirty cans with wheels, and I felt like Russia was stuck in the past. The exterior of many of the buildings we passed, including our apartment, only supported this. Therefore I was really surprised upon entering our apartment and see how nice and luxurious it was. I then decided that Russia is just a place that likes to deceive people.

Despite the deceptive nature of Russia, I found that I was able to enjoy myself a lot. Whenever I was exploring without a tour guide, it felt as though I was on an adventure, in a land where I had to survive using a very limited amount of dialogue, and it was exhilarating. The only time where it became something that was completely overwhelming is when I tried to buy a few Russian books and the salesclerk insisted on trying to find things for me instead of allowing me to browse on my own. Still, I found the entire experience to be funny and appreciated it.

One thing that I was fascinated by was the architecture of St. Petersburg. It was very interesting to be in a city that had buildings that had such vibrant colors and really valued its history. There were so many statues, perhaps too many, that all had such history behind them. Unfortunately I don't like history at all so I found them all to be quite useless, but I suppose when your country has such a long and disturbing history as Russia has, then perhaps your values are a bit different.

Despite all the good and fun that I had on the trip, my biggest complaint is the ridiculous fact that water is not free at restaurants. I am a guy that loves his free tap water at dinner, and so to be charged for tiny bottles of water, none of which were cheap, I became very upset. This could be due to the lack of a filtration system in Russia, but that just makes me think that it should be their main priority. It may be a petty thing of me, but if I never go back to Russia, the bottled water at restaurants is probably the reason why. My anger about this topic is only fueled by the fact that on every street is a corner store that has bottled water that is a third the price but three times the size.

My second biggest complaint is that there are not always free public restrooms and that sometimes you must pay to use a restroom that is in such bad condition, you should be getting paid to use it. I remember being at a train station and being able to smell the restroom an unsettlingly big distance away from it, and still having to pay to use it.

Regardless of these two horrible flaws of the places I visited, I enjoyed my time spent in Russia. They have different values in terms of race, gender, and sexuality that I would find hard to live amongst, but it's a nice place and it would be nice to visit again, hopefully when I know the language enough to be able to get the full experience.

A.J. Boyce

But most fun for me, were the Russian people. I was able to use my knowledge of the Russian language in real life to communicate and get around. I bought items, ordered food, and got directions using what I had learned in class. This not only showed me why what I already knew was valuable, but gave me a renewed hunger for new words and phrases to put to use. I am very glad that I went to Russia.

Philip Greenberg

Things I Loved About Russia

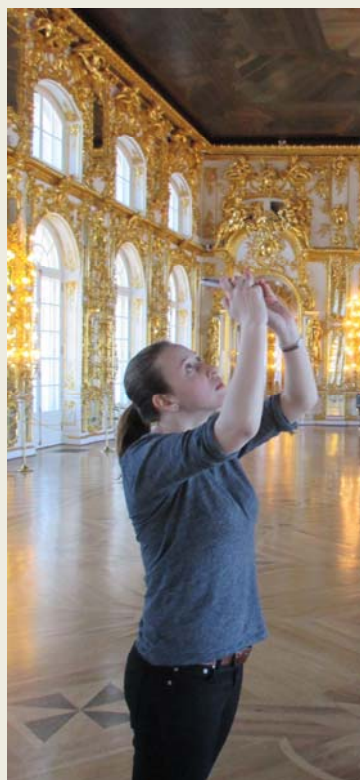
I really liked the experience of spending almost two weeks in Russia. Before this trip, the only times that I had been out of the country was to Canada and those were for athletic tournaments and not vacations so going to Russia was a very new experience to me. The food in Russia was different but for the most part I really enjoyed the food, especially the Georgian food we had at our welcome dinner at the beginning of the trip in Moscow. Another fun thing about the Georgian restaurant was that we got to mingle and dance with local Russians who were really friendly and let us join in on their Women's Day activity of seeing who could peel a potato the fastest. Us American's had the hardest time peeling the potatoes and I don't think any of us were close to winning the race.

I personally liked the feel of St. Petersburg more than I liked Moscow because Moscow as too much of a city city whereas St. Petersburg was beautiful everywhere you looked because majority of the buildings used to be palaces so they were all gorgeous.

Another thing that I loved about the trip was that it was amazing to see all the amazing architecture there and it was incredible to think about how they were able to build all of this way back when they didn't have the technology and equipment that we do now a days. It was fascinating for me to see what they could accomplish and how extravagant the insides and outsides of all the buildings were. I had never seen something as extraordinary in real life as these palaces. Also the crowns and jewels in the armory were unimaginable and something that I couldn't have even dreamt up in my wildest dreams. It was all mesmerizing to look at now I can see why people think that diamonds are a women's best friend because they were truly something special to look at.

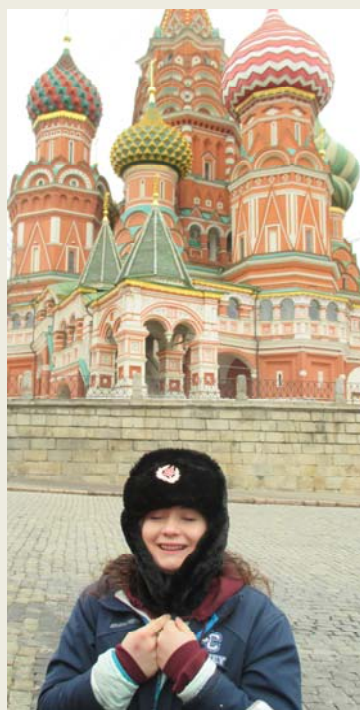
Another thing that I loved about Russia was that there was so much history since it has been around for so long. America has only been around a couple hundred years and has nice old buildings but in Russia some of the buildings and sculptures are over a thousand years old especially Novgorod. I might go as far to say that I liked the wood houses in Novgorod more than the palaces in St. Petersburg because there was so much character to them and the idea that they built these houses entirely out of wood and that they're still around today for us to see which is even cooler.

Honestly there was so much to love about Russia that it's too hard to be able to put it all into words and onto the pages.



Tsarskoye Selo ▲ Catherine Palace

Saint Basil's Cathedral ▼



Everything about the trip was better than I expected it to be and it is hands down one of the top 3 experiences of my life and I think it will be hard for anything to top this trip.

Anna Bleck

Chance of a Lifetime

Our class trip to Russia was a fascinating experience. It allowed the members of our Elementary Russian class to utilize our new Russian language skills and gave us a sense of Russian culture—a culture very different from our own. I learned many things on this trip—I felt as though my confidence speaking Russian improved, and I learned vocabulary that had not been taught in class but proved to be essential when navigating Moscow. Visiting Russia also gave me a chance to explore two beautiful cities—in my opinion, the best way to learn about a city. The experience allowed me to gain an understanding of Russian culture that simply cannot be gained through a textbook, and I am incredibly grateful to the College for this opportunity.

Upon our arrival in Moscow, I was immediately taken aback by how prevalent were the remains of the communist era. The hammer and sickle was featured in many metro stations and on walls. The street where we stayed, Novy Arbat, was lined with dozens of grey, decrepit Stalinist buildings. This put into perspective just how recently communism fell in Eastern Europe and how tightly its remains are woven into the infrastructure of the city. Particularly intriguing were the Seven Sisters, seven towering, ominous buildings that surround the city. Built by Stalin, they were buildings unlike any I had seen before. We were told that they were built to intimidate visitors to Moscow, and that Stalin, as well as the Russian people, prefer to be feared rather than loved.

I also enjoyed Red Square. The first time we visited was our second night in Moscow, and I was struck by the sheer size of the buildings there. GUM, the huge Russian department store, was brightly lit. In front of it was the GUM amusement park. Full of people riding the carousel and ice-skating, the most memorable part of the park were their delicious powdery donuts. Costing only 100 rubles for three, the donuts warmed us as we walked through Red Square to the iconic St. Basil's cathedral, with its vibrant onion domes contrasting against the night sky.

We visited Red Square again during the following day, and then proceeded to the bridge behind it. Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge is currently very topical, as it was the site of political figure Boris Nemtsov's murder less than two weeks prior to our arrival in Moscow. The bridge was lined with flowers, candles, and signs featuring Nemtsov's photograph. A pile of flowers nearly six feet tall covered the spot where Nemtsov fell. Another highlight of Moscow was visiting the Kremlin, which serves as the center of Russia's government. The armory was of particular interest there; it was filled with treasures of the Tsars and illustrated Russia's vast history.

Saint Petersburg was a different experience entirely. Unlike Moscow, the buildings lining the streets of Nevsky Prospekt were bright pastel colors. Referred to as the "Venice of the north," Saint Petersburg was divided into two parts by the Neva River. On one side of the wide, frozen river sat the Winter Palace, which today houses the largest art collection in the world.

We learned that Saint Petersburg had a different name during World War II: Leningrad. On our last full day in Russia we visited the memorial of the siege of Leningrad—a 900 daylong occupation by the Nazis during World War II. The memorial was incredibly moving, and features the world's largest mass grave—called a "brotherhood grave" in Russian. Nearly 500,000 unnamed bodies—some soldiers, some civilians—were laid to rest at the memorial on the outskirts of Saint Petersburg. Gravestones denote the year that the bodies in the grave were buried, and indicate—with a hammer and sickle on civilian graves and a star on the graves of soldiers—what bodies are there. In the far back of the memorial stands an enormous statue of a woman holding a wreath. We were told that she represents Mother Russia, and she is bringing the wreath to the victims of the siege of Leningrad as assurance that the war has come to an end and that they have not died in vain.

Overall, I had a wonderful time in Russia and felt that I learned so much about the culture and people of the language that we are studying. The experience was truly unique and I'm incredibly thankful for being given this chance of a lifetime.

Julia Panter

An Amazing Learning Experience

When I first heard that we would be going on a trip to Russia with our class, I of course immediately called my parents and told them. They replied with the usual, "It'll be such an amazing learning experience."

That doesn't even begin to describe what I experienced over there. As soon as we got on the plane, it felt like a different world. The typical airline magazines were all written in Russian, the announcements were first made in Russian, and all of the flight attendants spoke to us in Russian. The plane ride was about eight hours and during the night, so I slept for most of it. When I woke up, we were flying above Russia. It didn't feel real that we were halfway around the world until we walked out of the airport in Moscow.

We were picked up in a van by a Russian man whose driving made me realize why most people in Russia have purchased dash cams for their cars. We were all exhausted and jetlagged so it was extremely overwhelming for us as we sped through the traffic, listening to our driver quickly explain different important sights, using his cigarette to point. The apartments were much nicer than the rest of the world would have you imagine. There are many stereotypes about how Russian housing is very old fashioned, and not very high quality. However, the apartments were very modern. The building in Moscow had a huge window with a great view of the city.

Moscow is a reminder of the Stalin era, with many sky scrapers that stick up out of nowhere in the middle of the rest of the city sprawl. There are street performers everywhere you walk, but much different from those in New York. There were people reciting Pushkin, who we quickly discovered was somewhat of a national hero, and many people who were playing the accordion and singing. There are a lot of souvenir shops that sell nesting dolls and "I love Russia" shirts.

We went to one of the most famous malls in the world, Gum, with a student who is currently studying abroad in Russia. When we asked to use the bathroom, she said we only could if we had money. Of course we were very confused by this, as we didn't know that you have to pay to use the bathroom in a lot of places in Russia. They call it a "water closet" usually, and if you need it while in a shopping mall, be prepared to pay an extra thirty rubles.

On our first day in Russia, we went to Café My-My, which sells traditional Russian food. In that restaurant, I realized that I really didn't like Borsch. Another Russian food experience was the fast food chain, Teremok. About as common as McDonald's, our group had split opinions on the quality of food there. When asked where we wanted to eat, half of us would suggest Teremok, and the other half would quickly protest. All I can say is that by the end of the trip, I just wanted a cheeseburger.

We also learned that the babushkas in Russia are not afraid to speak their mind. It was definitely extremely cold, and one old woman yelled at us for not wearing scarves. There was also another occasion when I was sitting on the stairs and an older woman told me I would catch a cold and that it was bad luck.

Overall, It was definitely one of the most amazing things I have ever done. I loved seeing all of the store names written in Cyrillic and hearing the people have conversations with their friends in Russian. It was amazing seeing Saint Basil's cathedral and seeing the Kremlin. Saint Petersburg in its entirety was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. I was completely overwhelmed by Catherine's Palace and the Hermitage museum. The whole trip not only really made our class a lot closer, but also absolutely increased my view on the world.

Emily Shafer

The First Time I Was a "Foreigner"

Russia was an amazing experience. It was the first time I had ever really been out of the country. I have travelled to both Jamaica and Mexico, however I had never been outside of a resort except for the couple minutes at the airport.

Our first stop was Moscow. We had just been sitting on a plane for 10 hours for which I slept for approximately 45 minutes. A large man smoking a cigarette greeted us after we collected our bags. He drove us to our apartment on Novyi Arbat while simultaneously pointing out historic places we were passing by (all in Russian as he knew very little English). The drive itself was memorable for finally getting to experience the way Russians drive first hand. Let's just say their driving style, coupled with the fact there were no working seatbelts, made for an interesting experience.

Moscow was interesting. It was nice, but it definitely had remnants from the fall of the Soviet Union. It had a certain aura of being run down; it didn't have the majestiness as we would later see in Saint Petersburg.

However, one of the highlights of our time in Moscow came from the Georgian dinner. We had what I'm pretty sure was a 40 course meal with an endless barrage of food being brought out to us. The food was delicious, and having never really ventured outside of the country before it was an incredible experience. The bar/restaurant that we ate in was also hosting a group of people celebrating some kind of event [8-e Mapra] and after our meal the group invited us to dance and celebrate with them. This was one of the most interesting parts of our entire trip. The language barrier was big; us speaking little Russian and them speaking little English, but somehow we were able to dance and have fun for hours together. ▶▶▶





The First Time I Was a “Foreigner”

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After a time of dancing we then transitioned to a potato peeling contest in which the American team failed miserably. After the contest the dancing resumed and as the night started to come to an end we all ventured outside. This is when the real conversing began. Outside we talked about a range of topics including the perception of Russia in America, race relations, politics, and many others. This was incredibly cool as it was the first time I had truly been a “foreigner” and speaking to native people and to hear their view on all of the different events in the world. It was very interesting and enlightening to hear. After talking for about an hour we said our goodbyes and went on our way. The last thing they said to us, in Russian, was “Go home and tell America that Russians aren't bad people, we are not as bad as you think we are. Russia is not as bad as you think it is. We are all just people”.

Another part of the trip I wanted to mention was our interaction with college students in Saint Petersburg. It was really cool to talk to someone our own age in a different country and to hear different opinions and ideas than I were used to. It was also very cool talking about the perceptions and misperceptions that we each had of each other and getting to better know each other's cultures.

The trip to Russia was the best trip I have ever been on. It helped both in learning the language and also learning the culture. There are so many nuances about a culture that you find when visiting a country and it was so interesting to see them, no matter how annoying they may be (for instance no free water at restaurants). Moscow was a great cultural center and Saint Petersburg was one of the most beautiful cities I have ever been to. We did and saw so many great things, had so many great experiences, that two pages would never be enough to write about all of them. I am truly grateful for the opportunity the school has given me, and especially for the wonderful teachers in the Slavic Department for doing such a fantastic job putting this trip together.

Jack Winston

If I Could Go Back Tomorrow, I Would

From the second we boarded the plane; I knew we were in Russia. From the exit signs in Cyrillic to the plane's flight attendants actually speaking in Russian, the authentic feel I was hoping for was starting to set in. Once we landed and made our way to the apartments in Moscow, Russia was everywhere. One of the first things I noticed on the drive was the ginormous Soviet-like buildings that were still standing. I knew the Soviet Union crumbled not too long ago, but I didn't realize the nostalgia was still in the air and even right in front of our faces. A friend of mine who studies in America from St. Petersburg told me before we left that nobody would smile at you on the street and that's what made it click. Contrary to America and anything else I've ever experienced, Russian's seemed to keep more to themselves. It wasn't like they were unfriendly; it was just a different type of friendliness that I found to be much different than here. Nonetheless, little details like this formed this feeling that maybe the Soviet Union still does exist in some ways?

Once we threw our stuff in the apartment, the trip began. My first impression walking down the street we stayed on was much less than I expected actually. I was picturing a New York like atmosphere with the shoulder-to-shoulder bumping while walking through the streets, but there weren't nearly as many people for that, at least in the area we were. Clothing was also a glaring difference from our group to your average Russian, but that was expected, at least for me. One thing we were warned about, having never fully experienced it before, was the climate in Russia. One little old lady reminded us on the street that: RUSSIANS DRESS FOR THE WEATHER. If a lady was walking around without her neck covered, it was considered that she would die a slow and painful death according to this lady. I thought this idea was very interesting and funny in light of how we interact with the weather here.

But probably my favorite part of the experience was the food. The first night as a part of our welcoming, SRAS' Joshua Wilson took us to a Georgian restaurant with some of the best cuisine I have ever had. And it got even better when we met students from the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg for some Uzbek food. One thing I noticed, apart from the taste obviously, was the amount of courses that are typically served at a Russian dinner. By the time three courses came around, I wondered if it was ever going to end. But the key to the whole idea, I learned, was Russians culturally eat a lot of food, but it's custom to leave food on the table when you're finished eating. This idea was very foreign to us as American's tend to eat more than they can handle.

Finally, the architecture in St. Petersburg was what I found to be the most intriguing and different on my trip to Russia. As I told professor Lanoux upon my return, if I had the choice between Moscow and Petersburg before having been to Russia I probably would have chosen Moscow off a whim, but actually being in Petersburg definitely helped change my perspective. I felt much more at home there with the authentic buildings and architecture that have been preserved for hundreds of years. And what complimented this authentic feel in the city was the architecture of churches across Russia and our trip, which was easily the most abundant and was some of the best sculpting I've ever seen in person before, Novgorod in particular, which is home to the oldest working church in Russia. But all and all, my impressions were too many to count ranging from the food to just realizing you were walking around somewhere else than America. If I could go back tomorrow, I would. Thank you so much to those who made this trip possible! *Joseph O'Connell*