

**Your On the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**The Baltic Sea Tour:
Moscow, Russia**

The Baltic Sea Tour

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Chapter 6: Moscow, Russia Report One



August 8, 2008

Today we arrived at St. Petersburg, Russia, a fanciful, beautiful city described in the next chapter. On this date, our schedule had us flying to Moscow early in the morning and returning late at night. It was to be a full day.

First Impressions

After leaving the ship, we took a bus to a local airport. During this short ride, our guide introduced himself, and explained he would accompany us to Moscow. There, another guide and an authority on Russian history, would take us on tours of the Kremlin, Red Square, Moscow's famous subway, and other sights I had wished to see for many years.

Why had I not traveled to Russia before now? Since college days, I had wanted to visit Moscow and to see Lenin's tomb. I was student of Russian history. In college, hoping to discover the mysteries of the USSR, I had taken a course on Russia's revolution and its aftermath. Our professor informed us we were not going to learn any state secrets, that he gleaned his knowledge of the Soviet Union from the same sources available to us. What a downer. I was expecting a CIA operative at the lectern.

Later, while working at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), one of my collateral duties was assistant custodian of the National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) library. During lunch, I would sit in a double-vaulted room and learn exotic secrets about Stalin, Beria, and other miscreants. These "secrets" had been gathered by CIA and DIA analysts by reading *The New York Times* and *Pravda*.

Do you think---as a taxpayer---you are overpaying for our vast intelligence system? You've no idea. The NIEs' assessments of the USSR were, as often as not, little more than common knowledge. I recall reading an NIE on Chou En Lai, a high level official in China's Communist hierarchy (the first Premier of the People's Republic of China). The material came straight out of a popular book titled, *Red Star over China*.

Anyway, the NIE custodian, an Air Force Colonel and a happy-go-lucky fellow, considered me a bit strange for imbibing in this habit. He once asked why I read the NIEs. I mumbled something about my interest in international relations. He quipped he might read them if they had a sports page.

While checking-in for the flight, images of Russia---stereotypes implanted from readings---came to mind. One was the sorry state of Russia's commercial aviation. Our guide did not help matters by his description of our plane, "We're flying to Moscow on a TY-154. It has two wings and three engines. It has twenty years in the fleet. We'll see how she does." This next statement was not one to assuage one's fear of flying: "Good morning comrades! This is your pilot Peter Fiodorovich. We've no co-pilot, flight engineer, or navigator, and we're passing these savings on to you!" I'm joking about this last comment, but not about the first one.

The check-in took over an hour. We went through two security gates, but we did not have to empty our pockets or take off our shoes. I was allowed to maintain possession of an 8 oz. bottle of water, a pocket knife, and a bottle of beer I had purchased at the airport bar.

In the U.S. the TSA at an airport security gate confiscated a man's after shave lotion. It was a 6 oz. bottle, but was less than half-full and thus met the requirement for being less than 3 oz. of liquid. But to security, it was labeled as containing 6 oz. of liquid. The man later thought of emptying the remaining lotion and testing if he would be allowed to bring aboard an empty bottle. But, wisely, he chose not to test the system any further. ("OK mister, what are you up to? What's in that empty bottle?")¹



Figure 1. It has two wings and a 20 year-old engine.

While in one of several lines, our guide informed us, "You may be given someone else's boarding pass. Don't worry. It happens all the time." I was Ms. Hadley for this flight. Holly was Mr. Drury. Not exactly TSA-compliant. But our passports had been examined upon leaving the ship. We were immediately placed on a bus, which took us to an airport door. There, we were escorted into the lobby, then to the ticket line, then through the gates, and onto the plane, as seen in Figure 1. The procedure was secure. They just did not worry about things that did not matter.

¹ Where can a TSA agent know where to draw the line? By exercising common sense. But using common sense can get one into hot water in litigious, rule-bound America. So, stick to the regulations, and one will not get into trouble.

My stereotypes of Russian commercial aviation are not fair. Yes, we were flying in an old plane (akin to Southwest's 727s), and the airport was shabby (akin to most of our local airports). The many lines seemed inefficient and unnecessary (akin to our lines). But the stewardesses served us juice with a *free* snack. We did not pay for the pastry or for any of our luggage. Even during takeoff, we were allowed to place our bags behind our legs, and allow our feet to occupy a space designed for feet, not bags. The pilot did not feel obligated to give us a National Geographic tour of the passing tundra. There was no piped music. Except for the airplane noise, we experienced a sensation of silence---in a public place no less. Like the Russian citizen, the atmosphere was stoic, and yes, quiet.

Sidebar: John Reed's Influence

While taking the course in Russian History at the University of New Mexico, we students were encouraged by our teacher to read John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*. My teacher was referring to an eyewitness account of the Bolshevik Revolution.

I read the book, and because of this read, I became favorably disposed toward the Bolsheviks---a mistake I corrected as I learned more about Lenin and Stalin. Cutting myself some slack, most any alternative in Russia of the early 1900s would have been preferable to the ruling Romanovs. But Reed became a close friend of Lenin and his famous narrative reflects his bias.

Nonetheless, if you want a detailed, first-hand account of the revolution, and of earlier events leading to the Bolshevik's seizure of power, Reed's book should be on your nightstand.

Second Impressions

Reading articles from various newspapers about 21st century Moscow had left me with the impression the city was not a safe place; that with the exception of a few tourist spots, it was also grimy and dirty---just like the Cold War days. I had read that Russian-style Mafiosi lurked about, looking to kidnap unwary tourists. My stereotypes were again incorrect.



Coming into central Moscow from the airport revealed a prosperous and growing city. The streets were much cleaner than New York City's. New buildings (in shades other than Russian gray) shared the skyline with old churches.

Moscow is a vibrant city. Our guide said we would be as safe walking a Moscow street at night

as we would be walking a street in an American city. Her comment did not make me feel any safer, but it did put the issue into perspective. Figure 2 shows typical scenes around Moscow.

Red Square

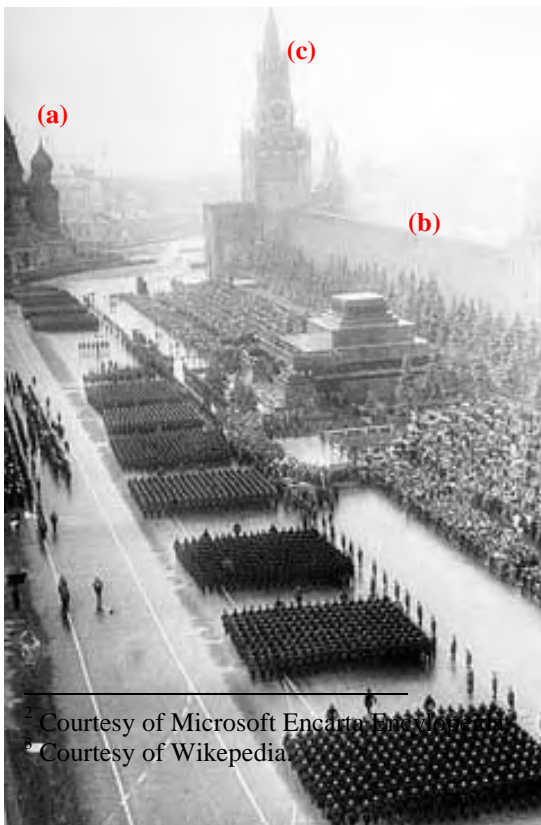
After a drive around the area surrounding Red Square, we found ourselves deposited at the south end of this iconic part of Russia. For many people, the very name of Red Square evokes historic images: Stalin reviewing thousands of troops during a May Day parade. Lenin's mausoleum. John Reed's tomb. Saint Basil's Cathedral. The GUM department store.



Figure 3. May Day parade in Red Square.

Figure 3 shows part of Red Square. The large building in the upper right side of the photo is GUM, the famous department store.² One can gain a sense of the size of Red Square by looking at the marching troops in the photo. The square is 1100 feet long and 230 feet wide.

By the way, Red Square is not named "Red" because of the Reds (Communists). Its name comes from an antiquated Russian word for beautiful.



² Courtesy of Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia
³ Courtesy of Wikipedia

Figure 4 shows another view of Red Square, looking southeast. I've labeled St. Basils (a), Lenin's tomb (b), and the clock tower (c).³ For a while, after the USSR came apart, the new Russia stopped the May Day parades. Instead, rock concerts were held in the square. During the Communist reign, the Beatles were banned, so the appearance of Paul McCartney a few years ago was considered a significant event. So was the concert of the Hot Chili Peppers (cool), as well as the installation of an ice skating rink (cooler).

However, in May 2008, Russia held a Victory Day parade to mark the 63rd anniversary of the defeat of Germany in WW II. With the exception of Germans, the celebration was highly attended,

Ah, that card Joe Stalin! During his tenure, several historic landmarks were demolished so that larger tanks

Figure 4. Another view.

and trucks could truck through Red Square. It was also determined that St. Basils was in the way. One of his aids (Lazar Kaganovich) showed Stalin a model, in which he jerked the church out of square. Stalin came back with his famous quote, “Lazar! Put it back!” HA!

Sidebar: Stalin’s Perfect Storm

Stalin had a higher regard for a church building (and he was not a church-goer) than he did for his subjects. Estimates vary, but all sources give a conservative figure of at least 3 million citizens who died because of Stalin’s purges. This number does not include millions more who died because of the famines created by Joe’s plans and collectivization efforts.

In an astounding act of stupidity, Stalin and his Marxist ideologues did nothing less than destroy Russia’s (fledging) middle class, practically all “petit bourgeois” (capitalists); including whole classes of workers: doctors, airmen, Kulaks (landed farmers), professors, students; even lowly peasants. Small wonder famine occurred. Small wonder the USSR collapsed from its own weight (and for conservative readers, Ronald Reagan’s Berlin Wall speech).

GUM. How best to spend our limited time in Red Square? Our guide gave us a couple hours to be on our own. Holly and I needed rubles, so we headed to GUM, the largest department store in Moscow. Located on the east side of Red Square, GUM (Gosudarstvenny Universalny Magazin, meaning State Department Store in English; and pronounced goom) was established in 1921 by the Communists. It is an extension of the function of the ancient Red Square, which was once a marketplace.

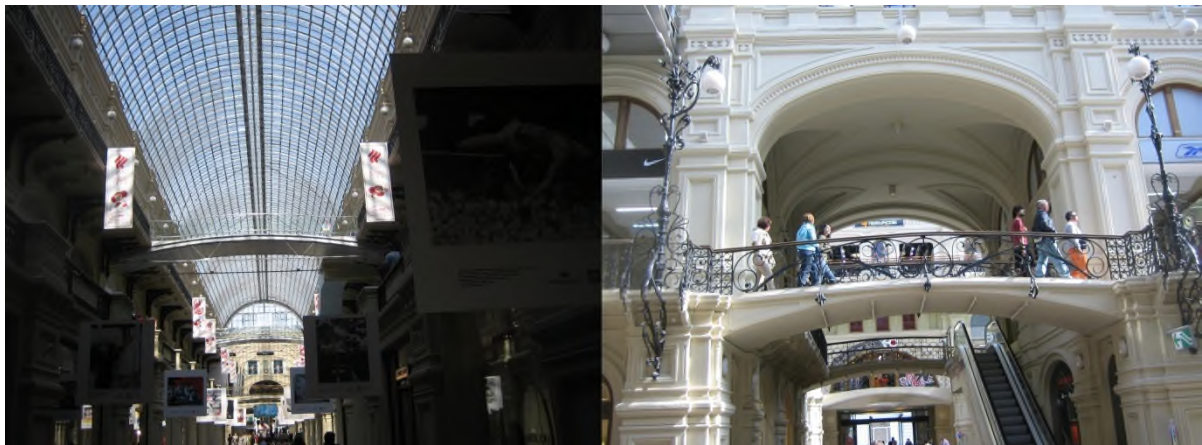


Figure 5. GUM

The structure shown in Figure 5 was built to replace the trading huts that burned down in 1825. The glass roof design was an engineering feat in its day. By the time of the Russian Revolution, the building contained about 1,200 stores. After the Revolution, GUM (and just about everything else in Russia) was nationalized. GUM became one of the few stores in the USSR that did not have empty shelves. The queues into the building often extended across Red Square.

Today, except for the Russian signs, GUM could be mistaken for a shopping mall in most any cosmopolitan city. Nonetheless, we could not find a bank or currency exchange in a timely manner. Not wanting to investigate some 200 stores, we decided to take our luck with US dollars.

After the GUM visit, Reporterette headed for Saint Basil's Cathedral, a Disney-like, gingerbread edifice, seen in Figure 6 (left photo). I headed for Lenin's tomb, an austere, somber mausoleum, also seen in Figure 6 (right photo).

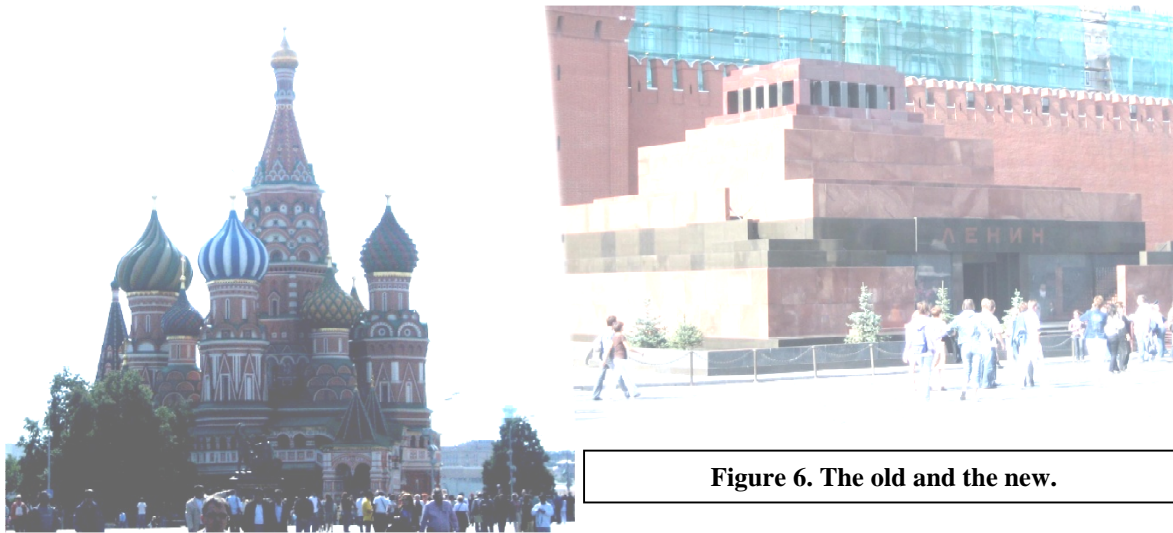


Figure 6. The old and the new.

Lenin's Tomb and a James Bond Tour Guide. Off we went to our respective adventures; for Holly to check out a famous, fantastic church; for me to fulfill a long time aspiration. The truth is, I was a bit nervous. I know this statement seems silly. After all, how can a dead person make a live person nervous? Perhaps nervous is the wrong word. Maybe anticipation is a better description of my emotions. In hindsight, I had similar feelings when I first approached JFK's grave, Lincoln's tomb, and Reagan's grave. And for now: at long last, no pictures but the real thing.

As I approached the entrance to the tomb, a soldier pointed me to the north end of the square. I could see people queuing up for their visit with Vladimir. The line snaked out of the north end of the square and blended into the urban landscape. Shitsky! (Excuse the Russian.) I should have taken a private trip to Russia. That way, I could have queued up for as long as it took to see the tomb. I walked to the north end of the square, where security gates and admission booths were placed. I watched the action. It would take hours to make it to the entrance to the tomb. As I was moping around this area, enviously eying the folks passing through security, I discovered I was being eyed. Thus begins the tale of Red Square's James Bond:

The Spy Who Came into the Square⁴

- A man approached me, “Looks like you have a problem.” (Perfect English----Granted, New Jersey English---but I could make it out.)
- “Yeah. I don’t have time to wait in line to visit the tomb. I’ve wanted to see it for a long time.”
- “I can take care of this problem.”
- “How?”
- “I can give you my pass....only 300 rubles and after you see Lenin, I’ll tell you all the state secrets. I’ll show you where Eisenhower stood....All that.”
- “No line?”
- “See the soldiers next to the pay booth and security gate? Just show them this pass (a piece of green plastic with Russian lettering), and they will let you into the head of the line.”

I gave it some thought. It seemed like a good deal. Even if it were a scam, I had lost only 300 rubles and I had a plastic card as a souvenir. I did not know how many dollars equated to 300 rubles, but similar to most humans who want to deal, I fixated on what pleased me: “*Only* 300 rubles” seemed reasonable. If he had said, “*For* 300 rubles,” I would have been suspicious. But he uttered, *only* and did not say, *for*. The adverb *only* informs me I’m getting a good deal. The preposition *for* tells the truth.

- I asked, “Where did you learn English?”
- “I was one year old while in a Nazi concentration camp. My parents got to America. They kept-up Russian and I also learned English. Spent time in both countries. Now I’m here. Oh, you can’t take a camera through security.”
- “So how will your pass help me? I can’t leave my camera on the street.”
- “OK, here’s a different pass. It’s also a receipt. I’ll take your camera, you give me 300 rubles. I’ll give you this pass and a receipt for your camera. I’ll meet you at the exit of the tomb, and then tell you about state secrets. I used to work for the KGB.”

Perhaps a brief pause in this scene is appropriate. I’m a trusting sort of person. I prefer oral agreements to written contracts. A person’s word is usually good enough for me. But trust is a two-way street. Thus far, it appeared I was on a one-way street headed for a dead-end alley.

- I said, “I don’t feel comfortable with the deal, especially giving my camera to a stranger.” (Especially one who spoke with a New Jersey accent.)
- He responded, “Fine, but I do it all the time. Never had a problem. Enjoy your day.”

⁴ The conversations in this part of the essay are taken from my notes and recordings made with my camera. The notes were taken in shorthand, and the associated quotes are near (but not) verbatim. Quotes from the camera are identical to what was spoken. For ease of reading, I have not made a distinction between these two sources. I have been careful to preserve the accuracy of the dialogue. (Mark Twain would have been proud. More likely, he would have wondered by I have bothered to write this footnote.)

I walked away. I thought about his last comment: Maybe he had never had a problem, but what about his “clients”? I wondered how many digital cameras he owned. I glanced back at him as I thought about how to spend my rapidly dwindling time at Red Square. He seemed innocent enough, walking around, looking for some action (Figure 7). I concluded he was probably a BS artist, but I had come halfway around the globe, partially to see Lenin’s tomb. He was offering, however chancy, such an opportunity. I turned around and approached my resident spy.



Figure 7. My favorite spy.

- “OK, here’s a proposal. I’ll take the first pass. I’m keeping my camera. If they bar me from entering, I’ve lost 300 rubles. But I only have U.S. dollars.”
- “Fair enough. I take U.S. money.”
- “All I’ve got are fifties. I’ve no idea of the exchange rate.” (An error on my part. In any negotiation, never hint of ignorance.)
- “Oh, a fifty will do just fine.”
- “But what is the exchange rate?”
- “Look sir, you don’t have rubles. I don’t make change. You want this pass or not?”
- I wondered if this man had a daughter working as a waitress in Tallinn, Estonia. “OK, here’s fifty.”
- “And here’s your pass. See you at the exit.”

We’ll continue “The Spy Who Came into the Square” in the next report.

Moscow, Russia Report Two

August 8, 2008

We continue our story about visiting Red Square and the man who offered me a way to visit Lenin's tomb.

The Spy Who Came into the Square (Act 2)

After returning to the ship, I was told by a steward that 300 rubles translated into about 12 U.S. dollars. Because I had only fifties on me, I ended-up giving my James Bond spy-guide a generous tip. But it was worth the expenditure, as described below.

I walked to the front of Lenin's Tomb line, which was next to the security gate and pay booth. A phalanx of Russian soldiers were in charge of the proceedings, some shown in Figure 8. As I made my way to the head of the line, I presented the green plastic card to one of the guards. He pointed me to the first position in front of the security gate. The pass was genuine! I gave thanks to my newly acquainted spy guide.

At the gate I emptied my front pockets, took off my belt and cap, pulled out my wallet, removed my shades, and was in the process of taking off my shoes when I was stopped by two of the soldiers. They laughed and instructed me to pick up my belongings and pass through the gate.



Figure 8. Guarding Lenin and Red Square.

I confess. I did not empty all my pockets. I had yet to pull out my camera. My tactics for this maneuver are known as *creating a diversion*: Calling attention to something that is not important in order to divert attention to something that is important.

I gathered my personal effects and headed for the tomb. On the way, I discovered the passageway toward the tomb was bordered with the graves of famous, former Communists. Figure 9 shows a photo I snapped (surreptitiously) of part of this avenue.

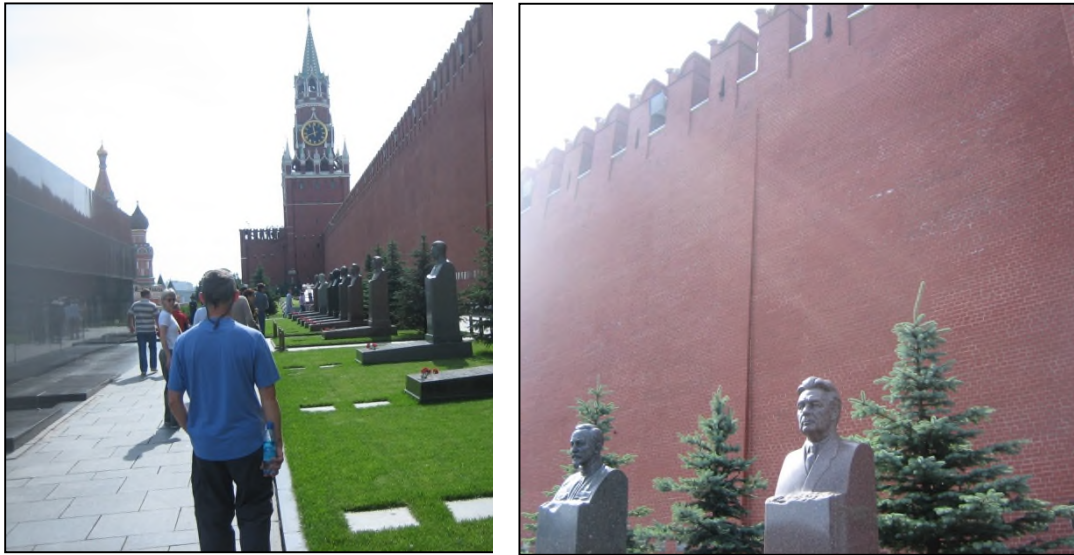


Figure 9. Tombs of the known soldiers.

I came across names I had read about for many years: Brezhnev, WW II heroes; even Stalin (who had been evicted from his own tomb on the square a few years ago). I was handicapped in presenting this sensational expose to you. I was not supposed to have a camera and thus, was assumed not to be taking pictures. Consequently, the photo in Figure 9 represents a furtive shot from the hip. I'm proud of it, and I succeeded in making other pictures of equal irrelevance. If you want copies of my investigation, just send an email with a credit card number to Give-Me-A-Lot-Of-Money-For-Pictures-Of-Absolutley-No-Value.com.

Lenin's Mausoleum

At last, I found myself entering into Lenin's resting place. Lenin. The very name evokes emotions and images for us all. Because "Your on the Street Reporter" filings are meant to be relatively brief and sometimes even contain reportage, I will not dwell on this subject. A few words can be found in the postscript to this report.

The entry to the tomb was guarded by soldiers---placed four feet apart. The security reminded me of our Presidential Inaugurations. With this exception: The guards on Pennsylvania Avenue are placed to keep a living person alive and functioning. In Lenin's tomb, the guards are placed to keep a dead person dead and functioning.

Functioning? See the next side bar, which is written in the present tense, but describes earlier efforts to keep Lenin fresh and tidy (the text in parenthesis reflects my thoughts).⁵ Today, we are not told how Lenin stays composed.

⁵ Edited quotes are from Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia. Key-in "Lenin."

Sidebar: House of Wax?

Lenin's embalmers state the corpse is real and requires daily work to moisturize the features and inject preservatives under the clothes. Lenin's sarcophagus is kept at a temperature of 61 degrees and a humidity of 80 - 90 percent. The chemical used for the process is called "balsam," which the embalmers say is made of glycerin and potassium acetate. Every eighteen months the corpse is removed and goes under a special chemical bath. (How about the suit?)

The bath consists of placing the corpse in a glass bath with potassium acetate, alcohol, glycerol, distilled water, and as a disinfectant, quinine. (Disinfectant! What germ with a scintilla of discernment would attack something bathed in acetate, alcohol, and glycerol?)

One of the main problems the embalmers face is the appearance of dark spots on the skin, especially on the face and hands. (Forgetaboutit. Aging spots are part of aging and Lenin is definitely aging.) They manage to solve the problem: in between baths the spots are eliminated by the use of a variety of different reagents.

For example, if a patch of wrinkling or discoloration occurs it is treated with an acetic acid diluted with water. (As an alternative, try a shot of XO to the esophagus in the sarcophagus.)

Hydrogen peroxide is used to restore the tissues' original coloring. (Uh oh. Lenin was in the Red camp (Bolsheviks). Hydrogen peroxide makes things white, as in the White camp: his arch enemy, the Mensheviks.)

Damp spots are removed by means of disinfectants like quinine or carbolic acid. (How long can these preventative maintenance operations go on? As much as I wanted to see Lenin, I had thoughts of letting the man rest in peace, and letting my macabre curiosity go unfulfilled.)

(This sidebar is a snide aside about Lenin's tomb. It goes counter to my awe that the tomb even exists. But as I went through it, I wondered if it should exist.)

As I made my way down into the crypt, passing through a dimly-lit staircase, I heard nothing: silent visitors and silent soldiers. The guards put their fingers to their lips to remind visitors to be quiet. I proceeded down a dark green marble staircase, making a 180⁰ turn; then down a few more stairs: Into the home of Vladimir Lenin. A somber, elegant room. However furtive the opportunity, I took no pictures.

The room is set up for visitors to walk around Lenin's body. Starting at the right side of his head (seen, in a manner of speaking, from Lenin's view), the passageway then takes the viewer toward his feet, and then around to the left side of this head. We were not allowed to stand still, but were permitted to make a slow walk around the aisle.



Figure 10. Lenin and his tomb.

As suggested in the above sidebar, Lenin's body did not look very fresh. But then, what should one expect from a human who had died over 70 years ago? The countenance of the image before me looked like Lenin. The setup was sufficient. However as much I dislike Lenin's misguided philosophy and his murderous ways, he deserves to be regarded as a major historical figure. Unable to take a photo of the inside of Lenin's tomb, I borrowed one from the *Scientific American* magazine, as seen in Figure 10.⁶

Final Encounter with my Spy-Guide. After exiting the tomb, my guide was waiting for me. He did not seem impressed that I had smuggled my camera through Russian security. Otherwise, he was entertaining and engaging. He said my fifty dollars had earned a presentation about state secrets and the interworkings of Stalin's cadre. I mentioned I was writing a report and would be using his quotes. He responded:

- "I've not worked for the KGB since 1984...but you still can't use my name! You can use my initials L.V."
- "That's no problem, as you haven't given me your name. Why not? That's over twenty years ago."
- "It's just better that way.See the top part of the tomb? That's where Eisenhower stood when..."
- "OK...Sorry, I'd like to hear your talk, but I'm running out of time, and I want visit the State Amoury Museum. I intend to come back to Moscow. Perhaps you can show me around?"
- "I'd love to! Here's my business card."
- In keeping with our agreement, I'll not mention his name, but I did make this observation, "The card has your name on it. I thought you did not want your name known."
- "I'm counting on you not to give it to anyone else."
- "But it's a business card! Did you only have one card printed up...just for me?"
- "Ha! No, but I am careful about who gets the card."
- "Well, OK, but the card does say, 'Moscow Guided Tours.' "

I left it at that. If you want to employ a colorful guide in Moscow, let me know. I have a back channel to secret, public Moscow guided tours. I'll use my Red Phone to call L.V. and make the open, clandestine arrangements.

The State Amoury Museum

The last place we visited on Red Square was the State Amoury Museum. It contains much more than armaments. It includes crowns, jewels, and clothing dating back to the 12th century, an astounding display of royalty wealth. I would like to show some photos of Catherine I's necklace and Peter the Great's sword, but cameras were forbidden. (And I reluctantly honored this rule).

⁶ <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/lenin-s-body-improves-with-age1/>

Make sure you allow time to tour this place. We regretted having only an hour to see the artifacts. But it is not a large museum; three hours or so should do it.

The opulence and profligacy of the Romanov rulers who ruled over Russia from 1613 until 1917 is astounding. They and Russia's nobility gained so much wealth from their exploitation of serfs that they practically threw away money and valuable material. Catherine II (Catherine the Great) traveled with hundreds of accompanying carriages and wagons and thousands of people and animals. One of her carriages was the size of a small house, pulled by sixteen white horses. Inside, the wall and floors were adorned with gold laded tapestries and rugs.

Two of the Romanov's more modest carriages on display at the Armoury are shown in Figure 11.⁷ Catherine often gave presents of diamonds and rubies that surrounded one of her pictures to those she wished to impress and reward. Meanwhile, the serfs went hungry. Small wonder the Romanovs were eventually overthrown by the common people.

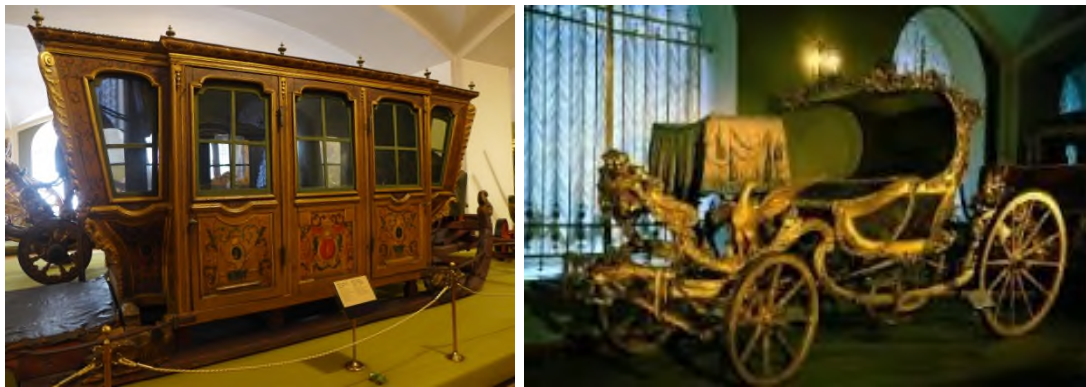


Figure 11. Two modest carriages of the Russian upper classes.



Figure 12. Rewards.

Peter the Great had a better idea of rewarding his soldiers: not diamonds or emeralds: medals. Our guide explained it was Peter who came up with the idea of giving a lot of medals away for...well, just about anything, some pointed out to us in Figure 12. The guide said Peter often presented medals instead of money for a campaign.

As a child, when I saw military men with scores of medals on their chest, I was very impressed. I recall wondering how in the world they could have participated in so many battles with such consistent bravery to win scores of decorations. Later, while in the Navy, I experienced Peter the Great's Peter Principle: Show up somewhere and regardless of your competence or lack thereof, you'll get a medal. I have four medals for service in Vietnam. Two were for just being in the general campaign area. One was for being in the service during the Vietnam War---and not being in Vietnam. Only one in four was earned for doing something out of the ordinary.

⁷ These photos are courtesy of the museum.

Some of the museum's exhibits are outside, and could be photographed. Figure 13 is a shot of the famous Czar Cannon. It was cast in 1586 and weighs 40 tons. We were told it was mounted on a gun carriage for transport, but the guide did not have information on how---or if---it was used in battle.



Figure 13. The Czar Cannon.

It was nearing noon-time. Our next stops were the Moscow subway, a Russian lunch, and for the remainder of the day, a tour of the Kremlin.

It had been an extraordinary morning. And the afternoon promised more of the same.

Postscript: Some Thoughts on Lenin

For the 1800s and early 1900s, Lenin posed legitimate complaints about Russia's government and how industrial capitalism was functioning in European countries. Bear in mind that in those days unions had not yet made their mark. Peasants and factory workers were semi-slaves. Kulaks and factory owners raked off the spoils and left almost nothing for the vast underclass. Charles Dickens and Dostoyevsky wrote fiction about this subject, but their subjects were drawn from the nonfiction world.

Unfortunately, Lenin stretched the ideas behind capitalism beyond what capitalism---at the time--had to offer in Russia and other countries in Western Europe. He did not commiserate with capitalism's difficult birth and its associated problems. He compared a free enterprise philosophy with that of a venal Romanov Russia. In so doing, he inaccurately posited Russia of 1899 to that of, say, the United States, or a Dickens' England. In his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, he inaccurately blamed many of the ills of a despotic Russia on capitalism. But he did not just attack the future Enrons and Bernie Madoffs of his world, he assailed the future Costcos, Nikes, Googles, and Intels. His attacks---when viewed in today's prism---seem silly.

But let's give Lenin his due. He was writing in his time, a time when capitalism needed fixes, when it needed restraints upon its propensity for excess.⁸ He described flaws of the quasi-capitalistic, despotic society of Russia, but these characteristics did not reflect the realities of how some other countries had begun to soften the sharp edges of pure capitalism.

The irony of Lenin is the erroneous legacy of his prophesy: He was behind the times that were yet to come. Capitalism did not "repair itself," but acquiesced to moderation because of rules placed on its behavior.

No question; capitalism was (and is) in need of repairs. In parts of the world, it was running amok, and is still coming under serious criticism for its inevitable propensity to increasingly favor those who already have a lot of capital, to the increasingly detriment to those who do not. Lenin's problem was in his solution. Pragmatic people know that unbridled capitalism cannot function over the long haul. It must have restraints placed on its inclination toward achieving pure profit. Those restraints are known as regulations. They place a loop around human greed.

Lenin's error was to eliminate *completely* any semblance of a capitalistic-driven society; to quash a milieu that fostered competition for market share; to deny a culture that thrived on the ablest achieving success. The result? Well, Communism needs no further eulogy. Sure, we are (in 2008) experiencing deep fissures into the ideology of capitalism. But the concept of capitalism remains valid....as long as it has restraints placed around it.

Again, we must remember that Lenin and his predecessors were writing in their time. We must remember that most countries in Europe were governed by Kings and Queens of such wealth and hubris that they had no empathy for their miserable subjects. Visit the castles and forts of the Romanovs. Visit Versailles. Visit the Vienna Hapsburg family holdings. Unless you are of the landed gentry, any number of these visitations will have you wishing you could hoist the former residents onto a scaffold. The manner in which they lived their opulence---at the expense of those whom they controlled---was nothing less than sick.

⁸ Pure capitalism, without restraints, needs more than fixes. Left without reins on its inevitable distribution of wealth to fewer and fewer people, it is hardly the solution Americans have been led to believe.

Moscow, Russia Report Three

August 8, 2008

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We continue the report on the visit to Moscow.

Moscow Metro

Our tour guide took us for a three-stop ride on the subway. Early this morning, when she mentioned part of the day would be a ride on Moscow's "underground," I thought she may have been in cahoots with the Moscow Metro for fare-splitting. What about the Duma? The KGB prison torture chambers? Why a subway?

I learned why. In addition to being an important mode of transportation, the station chambers of the subway are architectural beauties. Each one has its own décor; some have statues and chandeliers. I made several photos of two of the lobbies through which we walked, but the picture in Figure 14 (from Microsoft's Encarta) is a better rendition.⁹ I have added two photographs I snapped, seen in Figure 15. The left photo is Figure 15 shows a map that depicts how extensive the Metro is. The right photo shows one of many decorative and commemorative emblems that are placed throughout the underground system.



Figure 14. The Moscow Metro.

Our guide said these elegant stations were created by the Russian big-wigs to serve as status symbols for their administrations. Who would not agree with this claim? I doubt any architectural work is the creation of people who want to sublimate their egos. Anyway, whatever the

⁹ Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, all rights reserved; key-in "Moscow."

motivation for the creation of the Moscow Metro may have been, I think you will agree it is worth a few rubles to ride.



Figure 15. More scenes from the Moscow Metro.

A Russian Lunch

After stepping-off the Moscow Metro, we stepped into a Moscow restaurant. Our guide told us we did not have a lot of time. We had yet to visit a Russian street market and then pay a call on the Kremlin. Drink-up! Eat-up! After we sat down, we discovered the first serving was a glass of vodka. Granted, a small glass, but nonetheless a glass...not a modest shot---and no ice. Because I am not a big fan of vodka, I laid off the appetizer. Besides, I wanted to be semi-lucid when I visited the Kremlin.

The vodka glasses were kept full throughout the meal. In America's cafes, the waiter occasionally fills up water glasses. For this lunch, the waiter did the same, except he filled-up vodka glasses. While I was eating, and wishing for a Coke, I recalled many Russian kings, queens, premiers, presidents, and dictators tried to prevent their citizens from drinking vodka.

I'm not sure why. Perhaps drinking vodka made for happier citizens, at least during 10% of their time on earth. The remaining 90% was allotted for their hangover. The strategy of the Russian leaders was probably to keep the Russian low-life sufficiently drunk to prevent any semblance of intellectual activity, yet sufficiently sober to tend to the tedium of production.

Our meal was delicious: beef and potatoes; washed down with potato based vodka. I took in a glass with the meal...just to stay attuned to the dining protocol. When in Russia, do as the Russians do.

We left this fine café and proceeded to the Kremlin. On the way, we passed by the Duma, the Bolshoi theatre, the Hotel Metropole, and the former KGB building. Also, we stopped at a street market.

A Moscow Flea Market

The market offered a wide array of wares---it resembled a large open air curio shop. Trinkets galore. Plates to hang on a wall. Pennants; military caps; vodka glasses; used book-ends; used Buddha statues; hundreds of Russian dolls that contained smaller dolls, that in turn, contained still smaller dolls, and so on. Figure 16 shows some of the items on sale at the market.

Uh oh. As seen in the lower right photo, many of the stands sold T-shirts. Thus far in this cruise, I had succeeded in not partaking of a T-shirt. I was tempted, but I was attuned to T-shirts Anonymous 12-step program. One rule is: One slip of a T-shirt purchase leads to another slip. Before one knows it, one has slipped many T-shirts over one's body. By then, it is too late. One is, once again, hopelessly addicted.

Yet there they were in full temptation: Not the usual T-shirt enticements with pictures of Mount Rushmore or the Rolling Stones, consumptions easily attained. In contrast, I viewed exotic, hard-to-find T-shirts with pictures of: Red Square, the Kremlin, the Metro, St. Basils, and heroes of the revolution.



Figure 16. A street market.

I examined the offerings that would satisfy my temptations. I asked several of the vendors,

- "What is your most popular T-shirt?"
- All responded, "Stalin."
- "How about the second?"
- "Lenin."

I started to say, “Lenin....I can understand.” I would not have advanced my views on the man himself. But I was tempted to ask more about Stalin. I wanted to offer:

- “Stalin killed millions of Russians for nothing more than their ideas about politics. I’ve learned he had no moral compunctions about much of anything, as long as his actions advanced and secured his position.”

But I was talking with vendors of T-shirts, not intelligentsia. Nonetheless, my quasi-Gallup Poll revealed this additional information:

- I asked a vendor, “Tell me why Stalin’s T-shirts are so popular at this market.”
- “The tourists like them.”
- “How about the Russians?”
- “Ha! How many Russians do you see here?”

I succumbed. The T-shirts Anonymous program was put on hold. I purchased two shirts, shown in Figure 17. For my conservative readers, rest assured I have not worn them. The truth is I could not put them on, even in jest. I know too much about Lenin and Stalin to wish to advertise their names. OK, perhaps the Lenin T-shirt would be an appropriate parody to sport around. But up here in northern Idaho, I am not certain people would appreciate the satire.



Figure 17. Moscow souvenirs.

The Kremlin

We arrived at the Kremlin, another of my fanciful places to visit before I’m shipped off to gray panther purgatory. The Kremlin is the seat of the Russian government. It is located next to Red Square. It was founded in the 12th century to be a fortress for a city and the walls surrounding the Kremlin date back to the 15th century. For an American, it is hard to imagine such antiquity. Columbus was sailing toward the future America, a land with no buildings, while the Russians were laying bricks for the Kremlin. I took some pictures of this historic site. Some are shown in Figure 18.

The top left photo shows the walkway up to the Kremlin gates. The top right picture is of the Emperor Bell, the largest bell in the world. It is 20 feet high and weighs 210 tons. It was designed in 1733 for the empress Anna Ivanovna. As seen in the picture, an 11.5-ton fragment broke off during a fire.

The photo at bottom left in Figure 18 is the Assumption Cathedral, which has been a cultural center for Russia for centuries. The first stone for this building was laid in 1326. Since that time, it has been the site for inaugurations of Tsars, bishops, and patriarchs. The bottom right photo shows government buildings, some of which were used by Stalin and his cadre for their residences. I asked our guide to point out the building where Stalin lived and where his first wife committed suicide. It is shown in this photo (bottom-right, and on the left part of the building).

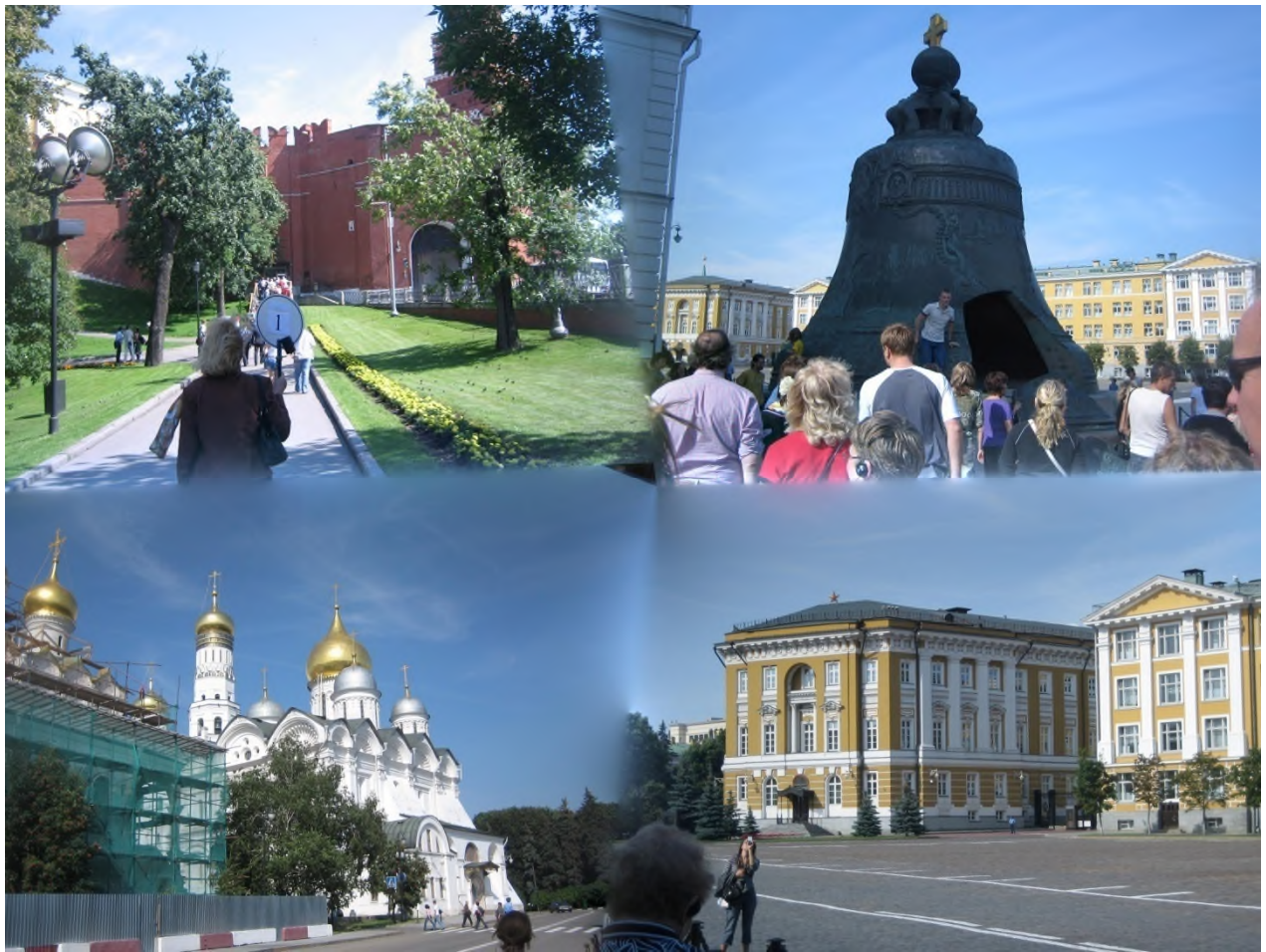


Figure 17. Scenes from the Kremlin.

Back to the Good Old Days

During this part of the day, as our guide described the Kremlin buildings and the officials they housed, my mind wandered-off to what was likely going on inside those buildings. Moving to the present tense, it seems to me that Russia's leaders, after losing the Cold War, have taken on the patina of the former KGB and its adversarial view of the West. Three of every four senior Russian

officials today were once affiliated with the KGB or other security organizations.¹⁰ Sure, someone has to run the government. But 3 of 4? How about representation from the departments of commerce, transportation, or beverage control?

Make no mistake, the Russian leaders lament their lost empire. Putin himself said the break-up of the Soviet Union was the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe “of the 20th century.”¹¹ That depends on whose country was broken-up and whose country did the breaking-up. I consider the dismantling of the Soviet Union one of the greatest triumphs of 20th century democracy. Mr. Putin is a sore loser.

As of this writing, Russia is riding high on its gas and petrol exports. But unless it undergoes a transformation, it will not be able maintain this life style. It must create a more stable “rule of law” if it is to become a permanent player in the world economy. Assets that can be arbitrarily taken over by the state will not provide much of an incentive for foreign trade and investment. However affluent a country may initially be, corruption will eventually rot its roots. In addition, Russia seems unable to migrate away from a kleptocracy. The ancient tsars, the Nicholas regime that was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, Lenin, Stalin, now Putin: all have formed corrupt forms of authoritarian regimes.

Back to the Present

As we walked around this extraordinary place, our guide informed us that rulers, going as far back as Ivan the Terrible, resided here. She also said that Ivan the “Terrible” was a poor translation of his title, “He was better named Ivan the Awesome...or one who inspires awe.” I am not so sure about her assessment. Ivan was a brutal and murderous ruler. But I agreed that Ivan did inspire awe.

It was time to return to St. Petersburg. Holly and I were tired but exhilarated by the experiences of this remarkable day. We had considered not coming to Moscow, to postpone the visit for another time. We did not and we were glad for making the trip. Anon said it well, “Do it now. Later is too late.”

¹⁰ “Putin’s People,” *The Economist*, August 25, 2007, p. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.