

GOLDEN RING OF RUSSIA & MOSCOW TO ST PETERSBURG

In August this year Paul, Eric, Kym and I joined Vladimir on the Golden Ring of Russia and Moscow to St Petersburg cycling tours, doing the comfort version of both tours. We experienced Russian culture every day in the small villages and larger centres we stayed at.

The sightseeing was amazing, with guided English speaking tour guides taking us through museums and Orthodox monasteries. The architecture is a mix of historically elegant to typical Soviet style which made a fantastic contrast. The underground metro stations are gloriously decorated with sculptures that depict Russian life. Agriculture, military and peasant family life are portrayed using ornate plaster and bronze statues with large chandeliers lighting long corridors. We enjoyed the local design of village houses, typically colourful log cabin in style with ornate window surrounds unique to each local area. Road-side stalls were common on quiet roads, with elderly Russian women selling fresh produce such as honey, eggs, melons, berries, stone fruits, cheese and smoked fish. They combined this village style of commerce alongside the use of modern four wheel drives and mobile phones to conduct their business. We used this opportunity to share a snack, often cycling off with a melon or fish strapped to our rear racks. Each village had Soviet style high-rise accommodation in varying degrees of decay.

All villages had an Orthodox church or monastery in either working order or in a state of disrepair. The history of the Orthodox church is fascinating and an important cultural part of both Russian history and modern life. The village cemeteries are a sight to behold and worth a visit. All plots are decorated with colourful flowers either fresh or silk, with ornate iron lacework around the perimeters of each plot. August is wedding month in Russia and we experienced many extravagant weddings taking place with up to 15 stretch Hummers 25 metres in length being parked in tour bus parking areas and witnessed fantastically adorned brides in huge gowns and dutiful grooms enjoying the summer sun. The food is typically Russian, with pickled/fermented vegetables and smoked fish being top of my favourite foods. The accommodation for the comfort tour extended to elegant hotels with grand entrances which is typical of the Soviet era from which they were built.



Getting into Russia was very easy as Vladimir issued us with the required invitation to enter the country and from that we applied for our visas and booked flights. The Russian Cycle Touring Club (RCTC) booked all our pre and post tour accommodation and the overnight train tickets from St Petersburg back to Moscow for our return flight. RCTC have been running these tours successfully now for over ten years, and our tours went without a hitch. The route for both tours is very flat which made the cycling very easy and we could go as fast or as slow as we wanted, enjoying the luxury of having a support vehicle to lead the way. Our tours had an international flavor, with people from Hong Kong, China, Nepal, America, France and Germany, and we continue to maintain contact with them. We enjoyed pleasant temperatures and had only a slight sprinkle of rain the entire trip. Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information with regards to these tours.

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