

2011 WATERWAYS OF THE CSARS

Friday, June 24, 1911. Leaving Sandy Springs at lunchtime can be tricky but after a few false detours we finally got on 400 for the ride to the airport. At the airport they would not let me check in at the curb for some reason, but a nice young woman helped me schlep my bags inside. There were lines everywhere but Delta took pity on me and managed to get me checked in. Then I was in a wheelchair and off to Concourse E. I did not get patted down but went through some sort of X-ray machine.

I was disappointed that the Business Elite Lounge does not open until 2 but settled in the old Crown Room to start my journal. At 2 I moved to the Elite lounge and shortly found Charity as well as Evans who had come in on another flight and was there to see us off. It has been years since anyone was on the concourse to give a sendoff. It is such a treat to be traveling with my daughter-in-law.

I was disappointed that the flatbed seats haven't been put on our flight. One of the flight attendants told me she had traveled with me before but I had no recollection of her. It was a pleasant flight to Moscow.

Saturday June 25. There is an eight-hour time change from New York and I feel every moment of it despite taking the jet lag pills.

In Moscow we waited for the wheelchair, ... and waited and waited. Finally a laconic man appeared. He almost ran with the chair to the lift. Here Charity and I had to part for the lift was so small it only held the chair and the pusher. We cleared customs and then went to Aeroflot for our boarding passes for the St. Petersburg flight. Then the chair was parked and our man disappeared. It is bad that we don't even know the most rudimentary Russian. I was ready to get out of the chair and walk the rest of the way to baggage claim when my man reappeared and finally we got to the gate for the flight to St. Petersburg. We then waited some more before they were ready to board us. We were served a lunch that included caviar and beef stroganoff.

Sergei met us at the St. Petersburg domestic airport. We are the only ones on this flight. He said most people come into the international airport. He loaded us in the taxi and soon we were driving to the ship. It was not pretty, very industrial and among the boxy communist buildings I could see shantytowns.

It was good to finally board the Viking Pakhomov, but the blow came that we were not allowed into our rooms until three. I opted to get on the computer, while Charity put her head on a table in the lounge to take a nap. I found there is some sort of glitz with the computer. Later the WIFI worked very well and was available through most of the voyage. Only in the locks was the signal lost.

Once in it, we found our room tiny but adequate. I went to the briefing but found myself falling asleep and returned to the cabin and went to sleep. Charity woke me at dinnertime and we had a pleasant dinner (beef stroganoff again). Now the trick is to stay up as long as possible to force myself onto Russia time.

Monday June 29. I stayed up until nine, then slept well the rest of the night waking up at 8:30. I don't feel jet lagged at all!

Peter the Great¹ or Pyotr Alexeyevich Romanov (1682-1725) founded the city of St. Petersburg and made it his capitol. Originally a swamp, canals were used to drain the land and a port was established on the Neva River at the Baltic Sea. Unlike other Russian cities there is no Kremlin (Citadel).

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_the_Great

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The program this morning was to go to the Hermitage Museum². We are on Bus #1 with Valera our guide and Pasha our bus driver. Valera is very good and the head guide. Unfortunately there was a rollerblade³ race going on in downtown St. Petersburg and the bus couldn't get anywhere near the museum. We must have walked a mile to get there.

The museum is housed in the Winter Palace⁴, the official residence of the Russian Czars from 1732 to 1917. With the neighboring Hermitage, it is full of the most amazing collection of art. Catherine the Great (1729-1796)⁵ built the Hermitage to house her art collection. While the magnificent building has been restored since I was here so many years ago, it still isn't air-conditioned. There has also been some vandalism so that we saw some of the more precious paintings behind Plexiglas panels.

Valera walked us through a lot of the second floor pointing out the highlights. Since there are a thousand rooms and three million exhibits we only saw a small part of what is there.

Then we had "free time". Valero kindly took me back out through the security to an ATM so I had rubles and could buy a coke and cake at the coffee shop. Charity explored more galleries the highlight of which was a large impressionist collection that the Germans had confiscated and only came to light recently. The walk back to the bus was not as long but I was tired after so much time on my feet.

Back on the ship we had an early dinner and then got dressed to go to the ballet. It was Swan Lake at the Kirov Marinsky Theater⁶. Although the cast was students, I thought the prima ballerina was quite good. However the seats in the theater were hard, so it wasn't as enjoyable as it might have been. One couple couldn't find the bus after the show, so it was after 11 before we got back to the ship.

Monday, June 27. We had an 8 AM departure for the Pushkin Palace⁷ southeast of St. Petersburg. This magnificent palace, designed by Italian architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli⁸, was pretty much destroyed by the Germans but ever since 1947 the Russians have been restoring it. We saw many of the reception and dining rooms. My big impression is of gold decoration everywhere and huge tile stoves covered in Russian copies of Delft. One room was the Amber room with amber from floor to ceiling.

After the palace there was a walk in the garden but I cut the walk short. I was very tired when we got back to the ship. I had a brief lunch and nap and declined to take the afternoon city tour. I needed some down time!

Charity got back about 7 and we had dinner with a retired navy couple (his name is Jack). Then we went to the Cossack show, held in a tent right on the pier. I was disappointed that no horses or horsemanship was included but the troupe did give us a good show. Highly energetic dancing included some wonderful legwork.

Tuesday, June 28, 2011. There was an optional tour to the Peterhof Palace⁹, billed as the Versailles of Russia, but I am not up to another palace and opted to stay aboard ship. I'm sure Charity will give me the details on her return.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermitage_Museum

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inline_skates

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_Palace

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_the_Great

⁶ <http://www.ticketsofrussia.ru/kirov/eng/>

⁷ <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/virtual-tour/pushkin-and-pavlovsk.asp>

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Bartolomeo_Rastrelli

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peterhof_Palace

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In the afternoon we had a canal trip through St. Petersburg. It was relaxing to see the city from this prospective and to admire the lovely 18th and 19th century architecture.

Back on board we dressed for the Captain's welcome party, held on the sky deck. Captain Igor Stepanov introduced his staff with Valera translating. As this was going on we sailed away and finally started our journey to Moscow.

Wednesday, June 29. My day started at 8 with the Qigong¹⁰ class conducted by Cruise Director, Chris Swennen. This is somewhat akin to Tai chi and of course yoga. I was able to do a lot of it sitting down.

Then there was a lecture by Valera on our cruise. With 202 passengers we are almost at capacity. Russia will not allow new ships to be built. Thus the Pakhomov has recently been completely reconditioned.

The largest and second largest lakes in Europe are Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, connected by the River Svir. We sailed all night up the Neva River through Lake Ladoga. Our goal was the village of Mandrogy that was completely destroyed in the Second World War. In 1996 the rebuilding began and it has emerged as an all-wood log construction village of the 19th century. At present about 150 people live in Mandrogy.

We went in various buildings to observe the crafts and, of course, had an opportunity to buy. Some of the best craftsmen in Russia are here and do everything from lace making to wood carving.

When I decided to go back to the ship they were shifting the ships and I could not board so I watched the scrub soccer match between our ship's crew and another ship. We lost.

Thursday, June 30. We arrived very early at the island of Kizhi¹¹ in Lake Onega. It was first settled in the 15th Century. The island is known for its unique churches. There were two that dated from the 18th century: the Church of the Transfiguration is the larger one, with 22 domes made entirely of wood, was built 1713-1714, and the smaller Church of the Intercession, built 1764, with 6 domes, is used in the winter for it can be heated. We went into the smaller one. It was very simple with a wall of icons being about the only decoration.

We then walked to a nearby house and on the second floor saw how the traditional farm family lives in one room with a huge stove providing a space for cooking. Older people sometimes sleep on top of it for warmth. In one corner were the icon and other valuables. A large table and chairs was the main furniture although there was a seat at the loom and a cradle hanging from the ceiling.

In the adjoining room were stored the family belongings such as a sleigh and farm equipment. Nearby was the granary with a cat "port" so the cat could get in a catch the mice! A man was demonstrating with an axe how they make the shingles for the roof and nearby was a garden being tended with hand tools.

We walked on to a small church that is said to date from the 17th century. Like everything else it was build of massive logs.

Back onboard we were invited to a class of the Russian language. I have learned that "dobraye utra" is "good morning" and the response to "how are you" is "kharasho". I never did get past this through the voyage.

After lunch was a wheelhouse tour but I opted for a nap instead.

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qigong>

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kizhi>

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Then we had a lecture of the Romanovs¹², which was very disorganized and mainly about names and dates, ignoring the more interesting stories of the royal dynasty.

After the evening briefing we had the cocktail party for repeat passengers. Almost half the ship is eligible for this party. I did not feel so hot and went to bed early.

Friday, July 1. I went to the Qigong class before breakfast. Today's lecture was on Russia under the communists. None of the guides has as good a delivery as Valera. I skipped the Russian lesson and took a nap, also skipping lunch.

We docked at Kuzino and set out by shuttle bus for Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery (St. Cyrils' Monastery)¹³. Monasteries were not only religious places but they also were bastions to protect the territory under Moscow's control. In 1387 Sergius of Radonezh first dug a cave here and then built the wooden Assumption Chapel and a loghouse for the other monks. At its zenith the monastery owned 20,000 serfs, 400 villages and a salt mine. In 1969 the Soviets turned it into a museum.

It is now a complex of churches and monasteries but only St. Cyril's has been restored and at present there are 6 monks in residence. Highlight of the tour was the Father Superior's house, a museum that houses icons from the 15th century. Our guide pointed out many of the other buildings and then we walked out to the lake where people were bathing on this beautiful day with the temperature in the low 80s. The only bad part of the tour was the guide on the shuttle bus. It was her first time and all she could do was drone statistics at us about the region. It was hard to pay attention.

In the souvenir shop I found a Matryoshka¹⁴ with my name on it. Instead of the usual nesting dolls, it is four cats nested together, the fifth and tiniest figure being a small mouse. There were copies of Viking ships on the dock.

Then we went to Russian high tea. After five pastries and blini pancakes¹⁵ with custard on it, I had a real sugar high and felt bloated. Thus I had a nap and skipped dinner. Charity has signed us up for vodka tasting in the evening and more food will come with that. However, I am having Cipro¹⁶.

Saturday, July 2. I overslept and missed the Qigong. After breakfast I went to hear Olga talk on Mikhail Gorbachev¹⁷ and Perestroika (restructuring). It was probably the most interesting lecture yet. She felt he had good ideas but did not know how to implement them. He was very popular with Americans but not with Russians.

We passed the town of Tutayev¹⁸ with its fairytale looking churches and everyone rushed on deck to take pictures.

The Volga River¹⁹ is Europe's longest river and connects Russia's five seas by a network of canals. It flows eventually into the Caspian Sea.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Romanov

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirillo-Belozersky_Monastery

¹⁴ <http://www.google.com/search?q=mastroyka+doll&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>

¹⁵ <http://tasterussian.com/blini-pancake.html>

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ciprofloxacin>

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev

¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tutayev>

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_River

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We stopped at Yaroslavl²⁰. It is named for one of Ivan the Terrible's sons, Prince Yaroslavl the Wise, who was wise enough to marry his daughters into most of the surrounding countries so was protected from Wars. A World Heritage town, it developed into a commercial center in the 11th Century. Catherine the Great renovated the entire town into the neoclassical style. It is today, a lovely restored town of 18th century buildings.

Our first stop was the market with its stalls of vegetables, fish and cheeses. I was impressed at how clean it all was. Then we were given almost an hour to shop. Charity and I wandered to a pedestrian street where we found a café that had ice cream. I had 2 scoops of pistachio and some cranberry tea. Then I went to the nearby park to look at the various "sculptures". One was a peacock with a flowerbed for a tail. There was a bear, the symbol of Russia, and other things to see.

At last the guide appeared and we walked to view the lovely 13th century Church of Elijah with impressive frescoes on the walls and vaulting. We looked into the main part of the church, but there was a service going on and we could not enter.

We walked on, pausing at the eternal flame where brides leave bouquets. The cathedral is a modern church but we stepped inside. The archbishop was chanting from behind the iconostasis. In front of the church was a collection of bells. Later as we left a man was playing them using pulleys to make the various bells ring.

We walked to the point where you could see the two rivers meet, the Volga on our left and the reservoir to our right. Lovely fountains decorated the esplanade and many people were out enjoying this summer day. The nearby gazebo was decorated with padlocks. Brides and grooms leave them here, throwing away the key, although our guide says that a year or two later many come back looking for that key as the marriage is breaking up. It was a long hot walk but I really enjoyed seeing the town.

Our briefing was after dinner and then we went to bed.

Sunday, July 3, I had a restless night and do not feel very well. I ate a minimal breakfast and skipped the tour of Uglich. For lunch I had a small bowl of minestrone. Others also are suffering. I believe it must be the salad bar for I have not eaten much of anything off the boat and I am careful to use the bottled water.

I went to the lecture on Vladimir Putin who came to rule Russia in 2000. He inherited many problems from the struggling economy, and, according to Zhenja, has made strides that have helped Russia recover. I got the impression that he is popular with the people.

In 1932 Stalin devised the Great Volga plan. The Volga and the Sheksna rivers were dammed to create the Uglich reservoir. 700 villages were flooded. We all went out on deck to photograph the lonely belfry of Kalyzhn²¹, which is all that remains of a 17th century church

They had the Captain's farewell dinner tonight where the officers and guides all lined up to greet us as we entered the dining room. There was the traditional baked Alaska, but it was just one enormous cake that the chef paraded.

Monday, July 4. I am finally feeling well again. We had our last qigong session. Perhaps it is because I do many of the exercises sitting in a chair, but today Chris introduced new exercises for everyone sitting in chairs.

We traversed the Moscow canal and docked in Moscow at lunchtime.

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaroslavl>

²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalyazin>

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After lunch we had a Moscow city tour. We started with a pause at a lookout for a panoramic view. I was surprised at the lack of tall buildings in Moscow. Most prominent are seven tall skyscrapers built in the Stalin years²². They are a combination of Russian Baroque and Gothic styles. One is the Hotel Ukraina and one the Kotelnicheskaya Embankment Apartments. The Ministry of Foreign affairs occupies another and one is the main building of the Moscow State University. They are such a contrast to the ugly boxy buildings that the communists usually built. There was a large souvenir market at the lookout as well.

Then we were taken to the famed Moscow Subway²³. As we went down some steps to an extremely long escalator, I couldn't help but wonder if I would have to climb steps when we left. The station where we boarded the train featured a mosaic frieze of Napoleon entering Moscow. The inhabitants had all left so he was left wondering what it was he had captured and he soon turned and went back to France. Where we disembarked there were huge statues of workers in the communist era. Luckily we could just step out on the street and we were near the entrance to Red Square.

Red Square! The name congers up memories of the pictures I saw during the cold war, of May Day celebrations, and military demonstrations. I never thought I would come to this place. So intense was my dislike of the USSR that I did not want to spend my capitalist dollars in a communist country.

At the far end of the square is St. Basils Cathedral,²⁴ looking like some sort of oriental dream with its colored domes and multicolored facade. It was built 1555-1561 on the order of Ivan IV to commemorate the capture of Kazan and Astrakhan.

To our left was Gum's Department store²⁵, much larger than I envisioned. To our right was the Kremlin behind high red walls. In front of that was Lenin's massive mausoleum²⁶. His embalmed body has been on display since his death in 1924, but it is now closed. There is a feeling that he should now be buried. During the Soviet years the top of his tomb was a platform for speakers and dignitaries to sit.

There were many tourists, even a beggar woman. The happy faces were those of the tourists. The Russians do not look happy for their country still has many problems. Older people worry about the pensions that are now gone. Many younger people do not know what to do now they are free to choose.

Charity went to check out St. Basil's. I was dissuaded to go for there are many steep steps inside. I did check out Gum's. The present building was completed in 1893. It is full of upscale shops like Lancôme, LaCoste, and even the South American H. Stern's jewelry store. There appeared to be more tourists than shoppers. It is a huge shopping mall on two levels. Charity came and treated me to ice cream before we left for the bus.

We had been given box lunches and were taken to Bolotynaya Park to eat our supper. At one end of the park were some unusual sculptures by Mihail Chemiakin. The seventy-five figures are an allegory of the fight against evil. Entitled 'Children are the victims of adults,' two blindfolded children, with Alexander Pushkin's book 'Fairy Tales' between them, sit before huge animal

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Sisters_%28Moscow%29of speeches

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Metro

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Basil%27s_Cathedral

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GUM_%28department_store%29

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin%27s_Mausoleum

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statues depicting such things as alcoholism, and poverty.²⁷ Nearby were artificial trees covered with the padlocks placed there by newlyweds.

We then walked to a theater to hear the Moscow Folk Orchestra in concert. It was a highlight of the trip. They played many types of Russian music ranging from folk to Tchaikovsky. There were balalaikas and accordions and a wonderful percussionist. Many soloists were featured. I particularly enjoyed one man who started out playing a saw and then other funny instruments.

Tuesday July 5, 2011. I took the all-day tour to Sergiev Posad²⁸. Charity opted for a museum tour instead. Sergiev Posad grew in the 15th century around one of the Russian monasteries. It is now the spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church. Today it is also a monastery and educational center. Boris Gudunov²⁹, who ruled Russia 1598-1605, is buried there.

It took almost two hours to get there. The guide showed us a beautiful room of icons and one church. Then she excused herself because she had another group and we were left on our own to explore further.

There was an interesting well where people were filling bottles with the holy water to take home with them. One Church was full of devout people crossing themselves multiple times, taking communion and so forth. I sat on my stool (no pews in an orthodox church) and listened to the singing. The service lasts all day so people were coming and going.

Then we had lunch in a restaurant built to look like a refectory before the two-hour ride back to the ship. It was all interesting but because of so much time in a bus, I would not opt for this tour again.

Wednesday July 6. I signed up for the New Maiden Convent or Novodevilhcy tour³⁰. It was founded by Tsar Vasily 11 (1479-1533) commemorating the capture of Smolensk from Lithuania. Noble ladies were exiled here and it was also a prison for rebellious royals. What surprised me was that it was also a burial ground and there are graves scattered throughout the complex. Most of the current buildings date from the 1680s. The several churches were closed after the revolution and in 1922 it the site was turned into a museum. In 1988 an Episcopal see was once again established here. It is still officially a museum but there is a small monastery of nuns.

Nearby was Novodevichy Cemetery where most of the Russian notables are buried. Massive busts and monuments were most interesting. We saw the graves of Nikita Khrushchev and Raisa Gorbachev. Boris Yeltsin's monument is most unusual being three types of marble, some of which were imported from abroad.

In the afternoon we had a tour of the Kremlin³¹. We started almost forty-five minutes late because one couple was stuck in the elevator. I am not surprised since it creaks and groans when you use it.

We entered the Kremlin over a bridge that used to span the moat, now dry. The Kremlin is a triangular fortress and inside are many buildings. The site has been occupied since the 2nd Century BC, at the junction of the Moscow and Neglinnaya Rivers. The Mongols destroyed the original fortress in 1237³². After the invasion, the East Slavic people were divided into three nations, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

²⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IR5tE9MCYs&feature=related>

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergiyev_Posad

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Godunov

³⁰ <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/russia/moscow-novodevichy-convent.htm>

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Kremlin

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_invasion_of_Rus%27

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The first stone buildings were built between 1320 and 1330 when Peter the Great had to move his government from Kiev to Moscow. None of these first buildings survived. The walls were fortified about 1366 and Vasily 1 resumed construction of the churches and cloisters in the Kremlin. The Annunciation Cathedral was completed in the very early 1400s and the Chudov Monastery and the Ascension Convent were finished in 1397. Grand Prince Ivan 111 completed the Deposition Church and the Great Bell Tower. These are extant today.

We went into the magnificent Dormition cathedral where the Russian Tsars were crowned. In a land of beautiful icons and frescos, the ones we saw inside were really spectacular.

At last we came to the Armory³³, one of the most amazing museums I have ever seen. It was here the Tsars stored their treasures. There was a large collection of gold and silver services and regalia. There was a wonderful cabinet of crowns. Another display was the coronation dresses used by the Tsarinas. There were Bibles with jewel covers. There were carriages from various eras.

Peter Karl Fabergé³⁴ (1846-1920) was a Russian jeweler of German-Danish and French origin. I really enjoyed studying the case full of his designs. There were five of the famous Easter eggs³⁵ that were given to the royal family. They are made of precious metals and jewels and are considered masterpieces of the jeweler's art. There were many other objects in the case including a gold train to commemorate the building of the Siberian Railroad.

Returning to the ship we got caught in yet another huge traffic jam and had to rush into dinner. Then it was time to pack.

Thursday, July 7. We had a leisurely morning, as our plane does not leave until after lunch. Delta flies into an airport fairly nearby so the bad traffic did not affect us. It was ten hours to New York. Then we had a five-hour layover. It was not too bad in the business class lounge, but I really wished I were in Atlanta. Finally we boarded the flight to Atlanta. We were under seat belts almost the entire way because of weather. I was exhausted when we finally got to Atlanta at 11:20 PM. Evans was there to meet Charity and I had my limousine. I got home a little after midnight.

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kremlin_Armoury

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Carl_Faberg%C3%A9

³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faberg%C3%A9_egg