

Trans-Siberian Rail Trip Albums

1. China, August 21-23, 2016 (83 photos)

In Beijing we visited the summer Palace, Forbidden City and the Great Wall; then went by bus to Datong where we saw the Hanging Temple (dedicated to Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.) Next we were off to the Buddhist Grotto where monks had carved hundreds of images into natural caves. That evening we boarded the Trans-Siberian Rail Road, which was completed in 1905, and settled in to our compartments. After one sleepless night when the ride was rough Tom wrote: The train grinds, shakes, jerks, creaks, sways, thumps, clangs, vibrates, squeaks, slams, jolts and careens. It has its own discordant rhythm.” (Credit Steve Shuel who provided eleven photos.)

2. Mongolia, August 24-27, 2016 (79 photos)

In Ulan Bator, Mongolia’s capital, we attended a concert of 80 performers playing classical music on original Mongolian instruments, and enjoyed dancers and acrobatics. We visited museums and monasteries. I loved hearing the monks chant, their bells and deep throated singing. We stayed overnight in a yurt at a tourist park and paid a visit to a local family. We were entertained by wrestlers, archers and horseman. However, what we experienced was not typical of the wandering nomads of the steeps who endure harsh winters and are poor according to a German I met who had traveled among them for weeks. Several statues of Genghis Khan and other Mongol leaders are found in Ulan Baton. (Thanks to Steve Shual who contributed eleven photos and Handric Sarder, who contributed eight photos of Mongolia’s heardsmen.)

3. Siberia, August 28-31, 2016 (128 photos)

Our group was greeted with bread and salt and entertained by dancers when we got off the train in Siberia. A huge bust of Lenin’s head reminded us that this dictator ruled with an iron had. Any dissenters and/or political prisoners, including Tar Nicholas and family, were exiled to Siberia, imprisoned and often killed there. Lenin believed “religion was the opium of the people” and attempted to stamp it out by destroying churches and building beautiful concert halls to remind the Russian people of their rich cultural heritage. Irkutsk boasts the largest concert hall in the world. Since 1990, many churches have been rebuilt and monuments placed to honor those who were imprisoned and died in Siberia. We enjoyed an open air museum and a visit to an Old Believers village where we were entertained by a musical performance. We went through an old woman’s house, a local church and thru a private museum. Lake Baikal is the deepest lake in the world. We waded or swam in its crystal waters and enjoyed a picnic on the shore. Today the Russian Federation allows freedom of religion. However Mormon missionaries are called “volunteers” and may not proselyte or wear

badges. (Steve Shuel contributed two wide lense photos and five additional photos in this section.)

4. Kazan and Moscow, Sept. 2-4, 2016 (88 photos)

Oil rich Kazan, the old Tarter Capital on the banks of the Volga, was first established in 1,000 A.D. Banners honor famous citizens in the town square. Heads of important military leaders are carved into a wall and the statue of a local freedom fighter (with barbed wire) is featured nearby. The ancient Grand Mosque was recently rebuilt. Universities and boarding schools abound in Kazan. Students from a local music academy entertained us. Lenin studied there briefly as did other Russian luminaries. Kazan's architecture is unique, unlike that in other Russian cities. After Kazan, we continued on our Trans-Siberian rail trip to Moscow. Colds and coughs swept through the train striking virtually everyone. Other than this contagion and hard mattresses to sleep upon, our journey was a good one. In Moscow, Marina was our excellent local guide. She led us down into the subway and through Red Square where we visited Orthodox churches housing the bones of past rulers. Some marching bands assembled to perform but we were off to buy souvenirs in the open-air gift shops. On our last night in Moscow, Tom and I attended a performance of traditional Russian dances. (Steve Shuel contributed five photos, including two wide lense photos in this section.)

5. Baltic Trip, Sept 5-12, 2016 (186 photos)

For centuries the lowlands have been invaded by agressors. Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Poland needed to fortify themselves with castles for safety and defense. In the mountains near Riga we saw a church and the "Statue without Hands." Michael Wilcox lectured on two Poles who made a difference in the medieval town of Sigulda. He talked about Madam Curie, who discovered Radium and Coshtushka, George Washington's brilliant military strategist. In Minsk, Belarus Titania, our local guide, led us to the town square where Tom and I performed with two local actors enacting three periods in this town's history. Belarusians are proud of their large beautiful concert hall. In preparation for visiting Auschwitz and Birkenau near Krakow, Michael Wilcox lectured on the extermination of the Jews. Only Denmark resisted Hitler's racial cleansing extermination order. In Warsaw we walked through Lazienks Park and the grounds of the Royal Palace. Thence we took a walk to the wall of the Jewish ghetto. We saw Schlinder's factory where hundreds of Jews worked whom he saved (movie, Schlinder's List.) Then caught a bullet train from Warsaw to Krakow, Poland's first capital. There kings were elected, crowned, and lived in the beautiful castle. (The country did not have hereditary monarchs.) We visited Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps where millions of Jews were gassed, their bodies burned and used for field fertilizer—such a human travesty. We toured the Krakow Town Square. There Tom and I witnessed mass in the most beautiful Catholic Cathedral we found in the Balkans.

6. Salt Mine, Sept 12, 2016 (29 photos)

Salt mine in Wieliczka Poland which we visited the last day of our trip.