



Travel Journal: Russia

I spent four days in Moscow and four days in Siberia. The time in Moscow felt like a vacation, for the most part. I visited Moscow in 1976 as a very young man. I was surprised at just how much it had changed. Capitalism has arrived in Moscow. It is a city of about 12 million people.

The people mostly live in apartment buildings, although there is an emerging neighborhood called America that has single-family dwellings. The city is quite modern, and there are new buildings being constructed in different parts of the city.

I was disappointed that the concert I gave last Wednesday was primarily for Americans. They enjoyed it, but I think the Russian people would have enjoyed it, too. I hope to return sometime.

The Russian pianist who played for me was excellent, and he is interested in working to bring me back for a concert tour of major Russian cities. I would love that! Of course, I did the typical things like visiting Red Square and going to the Gum Department store and visiting historic sights.

One of the concertgoers was an administrator from the Russian-American Christian University. She invited me to the University, and was interested to know if I would be interested to teach there in the summer. We shall see. It seems that my plate just gets fuller and fuller!

Moscow is huge and different city to get around in. The traffic is a problem. The people, however, were very welcoming, and I made a few new friends. I went with the Cross Links delegation to a few orphanages. It breaks my heart to see so many beautiful children without parents. I sang for them and they sang for me. It was a meaningful time of sharing our humanity with each other.

On Friday June 2nd we traveled to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. It was about a five-hour plane trip from Moscow. Upon arrival, we were taken to a camp about two hours outside the city, where we stayed over night. The camp is on the edge of a very primitive village and is intended to provide a place for youth to go in the summer.

I met a few people in the village and attended a program in the evening. Everyone wanted to take a picture with me. I was the first person of African descent that many had seen. I felt like a bit of a spectacle. But they were kind and gracious people.

The next day, we worked at putting sheetrock up on the outside of a building. With hammer and nail, we constructed the kitchen for the camp and had fun doing it. That evening, we went back to the city of Krasnoyarsk to meet our host and stay for three nights. My host was about 70 years of age and was a delight. Even though we could not speak much to each other, we had a very good connection. She arranged two evenings with Russian people at her home for me to learn from and get to know. I arranged to have an English interpreter there so that I could visit easily. Those two evenings were very good for me.



I also sang in church on Sunday morning, and was greeted with applause when I greeted the congregation in Russian. At least they could understand me! That felt very good! The music provided a connection for me with the people, and it was there where I met the young English interpreter who assisted me. I also had the opportunity on Monday to meet troubled youth at a rehabilitation center. That contact was good as well.

I arrived today in Moscow and will leave tomorrow for Amsterdam, where I will be until the 12th. I will sing a concert at the Harlaam Mennonite Church while there, and will fly to Uganda on the 12th.