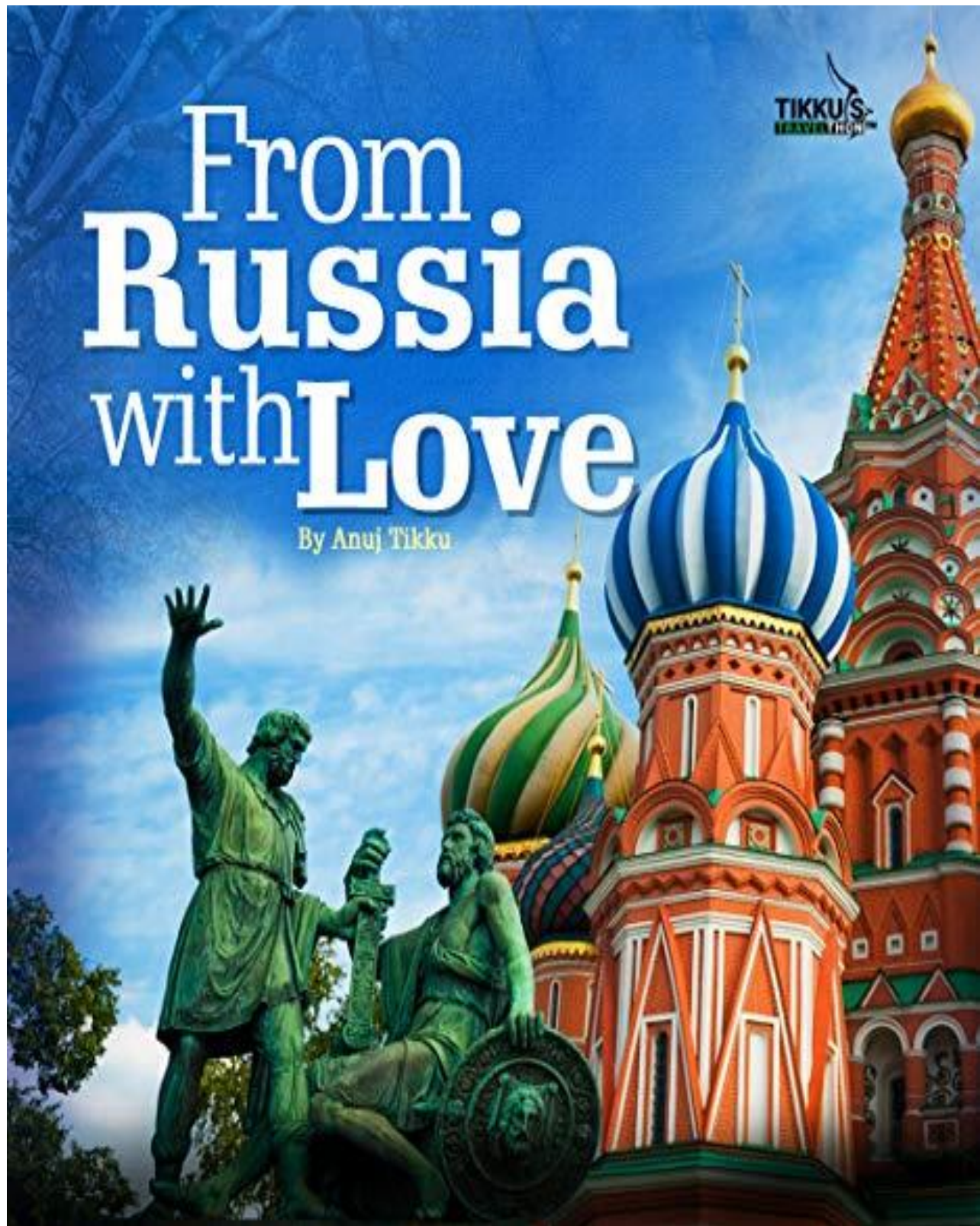


From Russia with love



From Russia with love

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## Introduction

*From Russia with love was my favorite Bond Film with the dapper Sean Connery playing agent 007. Thus it was apt for me to seek this as the title of my book about my travels to Moscow, St Petersburg and Siberia where I saw the house of the mystic Rasputin. I traveled to Ukraine and took a train from Liviv to KIV. Easter Europe is cold, I was amazed that Ukraine has a university that teaches the students about the Veda's and the Upanishads, my guide was even able to recite some stories from the Bhagwat Geeta. The best Europeans admire our ancient books and are inquisitive about this great spiritual land of India. My trip around red square exploring the nightlife of Moscow would not have been complete without the help of a Taxi Driver called Muzaffar, who took me around all the major cites of Moscow in a taxi. So open up your vodka bottles sit back and enjoy Russia and Western Europe through my eyes*

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## Going to Moscow for FIFA 2018

### Travelthon Advice

Now that football fever is in full swing, I would like to shell out some advice to people traveling to Moscow to see the football world cup. As you all are aware, I did a 15-day whirlwind tour of Moscow, Siberia, and St.Petersberg recently and gained enough knowledge of Moscow to advise football fans about Russia and Moscow in specific when they travel to see their favorite football teams.

Make sure your passport is valid for more than a period of 6 months. Otherwise, you could have problems. As you land in Moscow, register yourself as a tourist traveler. The hotel where you stay can also do the needful on your behalf. Be safe on the streets as there are a lot of muggings, thefts, and robberies near the Gorge Park and Red Square area. Do not immediately get friendly with locals and strangers. Foreign football tourists have been in danger before and many have been drugged, attacked and robbed by local criminal gangs. Keep your passport at all times with you, not in your jacket pocket or suitcase in the hotel. Also, carry your Fan ID card and number as it is as good as an entry and exit visa for you.





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Do not take prostitutes to your hotel to make love until you are sure that the lady has a valid passport or local ID. Otherwise, she will not be allowed to enter the hotel with you. Stay out of trouble by not getting involved in fights, slogans or hooliganism. You could be thrown out and deported for your behavior. Drink less, drink right.

Russia is a 'no gay' country, so LGBT people might find their rights restricted. So no kissing and hugging on the street as it is against the law. You do not have to gloat that you are gay, at least, not while watching football.

Stay away from Skinheads and Neo-Nazis. They have been known to beat up foreigners and immigrants and will especially target some minority groups doing the 2018 world cup.



Apart from these, Russia is a great place to party and enjoy and has some amazing cathedrals to see. The food and liquor are fantastic and most people, especially in the hospitality industry, speak good English. Smoking in hotels and public places is prohibited. You can only smoke in designated smoke corners or sheds.

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### Indo-Pak Conversations in Moscow

I stayed at a tasteful hotel in Moscow where there are three hotels in a row called Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. It so happened that I had decided to stay in the hotel while spending a week in Moscow. In the lobby, I started chatting to a Pakistani tourist who was sitting opposite me on a broad sofa. "Hello, I am Ahmed from Karachi in Pakistan. I have a huge marble trading business there. Originally, we were from India. We are Rajputs, you know, from Rajasthan in India." I looked towards him and then glanced at my mobile phone as I was Googling something. "You Pakistani, I am sure you can speak in Urdu. How are you then from India and your forefathers where Rajputs?" I was amazed and got pinned to his chat. "Yes sir, Pakistan is great. I also enjoy traveling a lot. I have been to over 20 countries last month. I was in Singapore and also in Cambodia."

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I started chatting about the politics in Pakistan and how strong Imran Khan was as a leader and a prospective Prime Minister. “Well, Imran, he is all show and glamour. It is true that his party Tehreek-e-Insaf has a lot of young following. The young are its biggest supporters. Nawaz Sharif is the King of Punjab. He has a huge base there and a lot of traders and big businessmen support him. The elites are with him and people see him as more mature and calm. Imran Khan is seen as too emotional and fiery. He is so pumped up that, at times, it seems he will hurt his own chances.” He had analyzed the political landscape in Pakistan brilliantly. “But of course, you cannot keep the PPP and the Zardaris and Bhutto away at bay so easily. They rule Sindh and have been in power before, so they have experience on their side. Benazir’s son has also launched his political career in Pakistan as well and has been seen giving many fiery speeches against India”. Ahmed looked like a confident South Asian man in his mid-thirties. We wandered out of the hotel for a walk around the marketplace and street eaters just in front of our hotel. “I used to be a Bollywood actor and have acted with Shah Rukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee and Imraan Hashmi. I used to do a lot of advertisements and was a known face on Indian Television.” My Pakistani friend got curious. “I like Irrfan Khan and K.K. Menon and, of course, Aamir

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Khan, he is top class,” he said excitedly. “You just have to see their struggle yaar. This actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui who has got famous only now has been struggling in Bollywood for twenty years. It is very tough. You need a lot of patience.” I became nostalgic while I was telling Ahmed about my Bollywood days. We decided to have a plate of lamb shahlik and khaboos bread with a can of coke each.

I turned around from my meal and saw Ahmed venture into a local shop to buy knick-knacks and t-shirts. We decided to venture out at night to see Moscow but that was not to be and our Indo-Pak meet had to end abruptly with a handshake.

### Bye Bye Moscow and Learning about Criminology from Wilson Immanuel

It is time to say bye-bye to Russia as I took the morning flight from Tyumen to Moscow. On the way, my eyes fell on a shop in the airport selling Russian Caviar. I bought a box full of Russian Black Caviar. The 500-gram tin cost me 25,000 roubles. I can't wait to reach home and try it with a slice of toast. Having tucked the tin in my camera bag, I headed for Moscow.



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I reached Moscow in the morning. Moscow has three airports: Domodedovo Airport, Sheremetyevo Airport, and Vnukovo Airport. My flight to Lviv in Ukraine was from Vnukovo Airport. I took Turkish Airlines to Istanbul first and then to Lviv. This is because the Russians have canceled direct flights from Moscow to Ukraine as there is a trade conflict going on between the two countries.

As I sat down waiting for my flight from Moscow to Istanbul, my eyes fell on an African gentleman in his late 30s. Looking at him, I instantly recognized him to be a Nigerian. Having spent 14 years of my youth in Nigeria, I can differentiate people from different African countries. Nigerian men have a distinctively different lip and forehead structure which makes them stand apart from the rest of the men in Africa. "Hi, you are from Nigeria," I said. "Yes, how do you know that for sure?" the man replied. "Well, I spent a lot of time in Africa. My father Arun Tikku was posted there and worked for Vegfru, the company that made tomato paste and orange juice in Nigeria. I have also lived in Lagos, Kano, and Gombe when I was a teenager."

The man was excited to know that "Ah hah. You are well versed in our country. Can you speak the languages as well?" he looked at me with friendly eyes. "Yes, a bit of Yoruba but I have forgotten it now. It has almost been twenty years since I was last

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in that country.” We got talking about the current state of Nigeria about Boko Haram and the rising corruption in the country. “I am now a travel blogger. I travel the world and have a blog where I write about my experiences. You see, social media is the place to be now. We are all in one globe and due to social media, we can interact and work from any part of the world.” I said excitedly explaining to him about the various features of my site and the intricacies of social media.



I then opened my site in my mobile phone and showed him. “Well, I am Wilson Immanuel. I am a professor of Criminology. I teach and study crime and its various facets at the Ibadan University.” Bang! It was as if a light bulb lit up within me. I started pouring my heart out to him and told him about the brutal murder of my father by the serial killer Vijay Palande and how I coped with the brutal tragedy in my life. I then took him through the entire episode on the internet. “Well, Anuj, I am shocked to hear this. I do study serial killers but my focus has been on ritual killing as this is very common in Nigeria. Here, people kill others as part of human sacrifice to please the Gods or to sell the body parts to other people. Ritual killing is done by shamans and people well versed in the art of voodoo.” I asked him to read the book ‘Front Page Murders’ that is based on my father’s murder as it would help him

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understand serial killers better. “You know Immanuel, I visited a shaman in Zambia and asked him to perform voodoo so that the spirits would destroy my father’s killers. But he asked me for 5,000 dollars to perform a camel sacrifice to which I duly declined. Yes, I did see the wooden doll talk though. That was the only piece of voodoo that I saw.”

Wilson was fascinated by my story “Man, you can write a great book on your life when you are through doing all this. I will keep in touch with you and buy the book that you have suggested. All the best!” It was time to board the Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul and with a big wave, I said goodbye to my African friend who followed me into the flight. I guess my journey ‘Tikku’s Travelthon’ is all about these unexpected encounters with strangers who I befriend and find some deep connection with. I felt light and slept peacefully all through the flight.

### The Churches of Sergei Passat

The next town was Sergei Passat. It is around two hours from Moscow and I drove in Muzaffar’s taxi to the town. It is a quiet town full of churches – ancient ones with priests wearing black robes offering prayers to Christ. I was in a happy mood and strolled along with Muzaffar with my GoPro camera. By now, he had also become an expert in taking pictures and videos.



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I ventured into one of the cathedrals and asked Muzaffar to ask one of the priests to pray for my father's soul. The priest who was old and had a long white beard refused as Muzaffar told him that I was a Hindu. He said that only prayers for Christians can be performed in the church. Muzaffar and I were both upset at this and Muzaffar said with some frustration in his voice "Ah Anuj, God is one. He is the ultimate. He is one for all of us. Why did the priest not let you pray for your father's soul? You are as much a part of God as he is". His words made sense to me and the priest's rejection at doing prayers angered me. I was now feeling hungry and felt like having lunch. We had lamb chops with mashed potatoes and beer.

Moscow is a no-smoking zone. You can only smoke in designated areas. I, unfortunately, I did not heed this warning and started smoking in my room. Alas, I had to pay for it and was fined Rouble 5000 for my mistake.

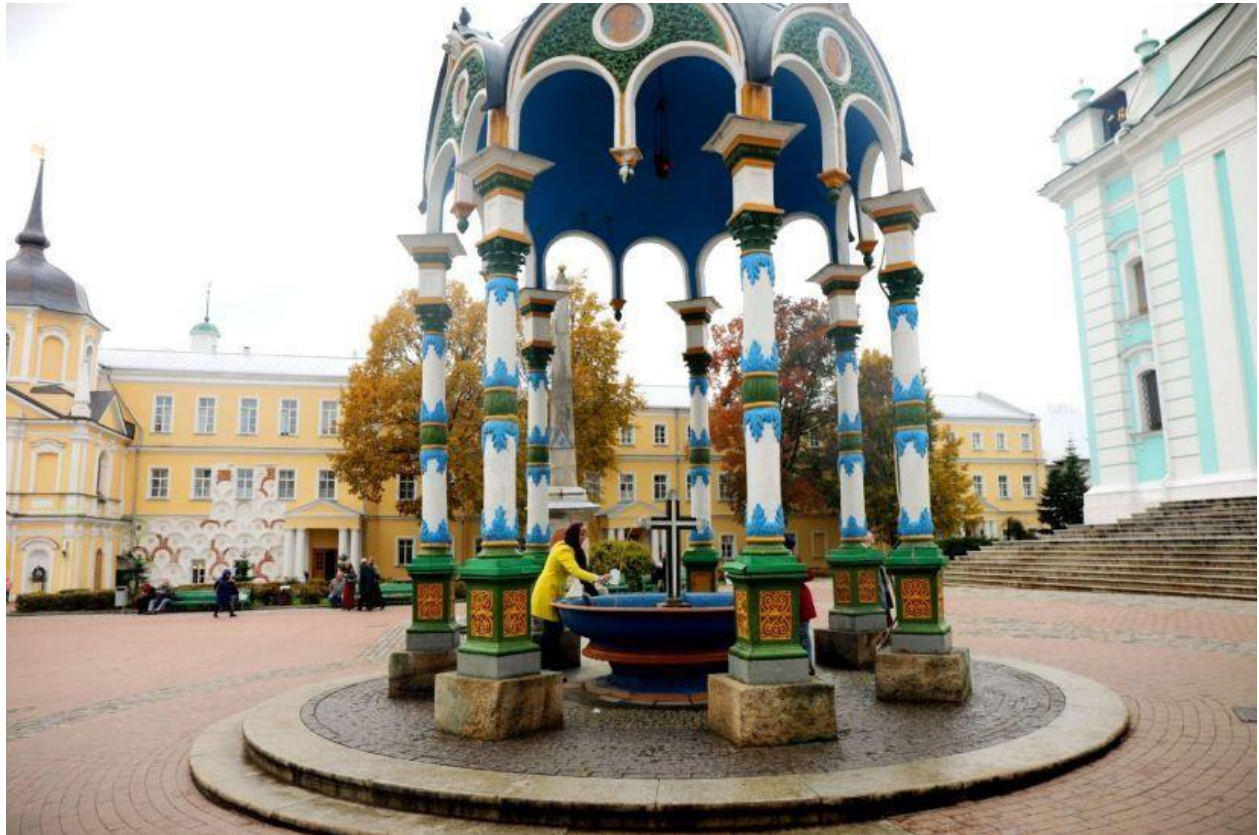
On my way to the hotel, I bumped into some people from Mumbai who instantly recognized me as the Indian actor who acted with Shah Rukh Khan. They stopped over to exchange pleasantries. I was happy that so far away in a distant land, even a small-time actor like me was recognized by people. I guess that is the power of



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Indian Cinema as even Russian people like Muzaffar are fans of Indian films and actors such as Amitabh Bachchan, Mithun Chakraborty, and Raj Kapoor.

The churches of Russia and its flea markets were my home now for a few days and I was loving every bit of it.



### Moscow by Night

I had gotten up late in the morning and realized that I had no energy left for the day. So I slept over till the evening and then decided to call Muzaffar and check out Moscow at night. We meandered through the central part of Moscow and then went towards the Moscow University hovering over the Moscow River with my GoPro camera. Muzaffar was becoming a kind of an expert with my Canon camera and

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now, even he was enjoying taking photographs of the city at night. Moscow was beautiful near the river as the boats sailed through. We stood on a bridge staring into the skyline and shot pictures on the sidewalks where tourists were also taking pictures. I posed with a Russian hottie who was happy to take a picture with me. Muzaffar said, "You know, he is a Bollywood actor." The lady smiled and pulled me closer towards her so that Muzaffar could get a better shot.



After a lot of shots, I walked towards the car and Muzaffar served me some fresh coffee which I duly took a sip of. My GoPro was taking some excellent videos of the city skyline and I was enjoying the breeze of fresh air which blew eastwards.

We truly had a ball till five in the morning taking pictures and videos of Moscow at night. So now, sit back and enjoy the view.

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### Gorge Park, Red Square and Going GoPro in Russia

The great thing about Russia is that the Rouble is almost equivalent to the Indian Rupee. INR 1.1 is equivalent to 1 Rouble. Russia is like enjoying a holiday in Europe at the price of India. I was lucky to find a driver by the name of Muzaffar who spoke good English to drop me to my hotel straight from the airport. I checked in to my hotel which I had booked through Expedia and realized that the breakfast was not included in the total tariff. I had to pay for it separately which was a bummer. Moscow has wide roads and Kia cars. It was cold but my jacket gave me adequate protection from the morning breeze. I struck a deal with Muzaffar – he will take me all around the city and I would pay him Rouble 10,000 for his efforts. Along with that, he will be my camera assistant and guide at the same time. The hotel was comfortable and I had a good sleep as I was suffering from jet lag.



The next morning was my date with Muzaffar as we drove around the city. The first stop was Red Square and Kremlin. I took a dip in my camera bag and got my GoPro camera out. I started shooting the vastness and expanse of the Red Square and got busy capturing the scenic beauty of the city. Then it was time for lunch which was



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steak falafel with roast potatoes. I treated Muzaffar and he was happy to be obliged. Then we marched on to Gorge Park for a stroll. This is a major spot for skateboarding in Russia. Near it flows the Moscow River where people can go for a cruise if they please. The nearby shops sell ice creams and lollipops so that the kids can enjoy themselves.



I was feeling a bit impaired without my spectacles which I lost during my flight from Delhi to Moscow. Muzaffar was however in good spirit as I showed him videos of my Kenyan safari. He was amazed to see my adventures and told me how much he loved Bollywood movies and especially the acting of Amitabh Bachchan and Mithun Chakraborty. He had seen a disco dancer three times. Russians also like Raj Kapoor and, of course, his famous movie is AWARA.

In the evening, we were back in our den. My hotel was surrounded by three more hotels which are called Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. Well, that made life simpler I guess. I also took a stroll around the nearby flea market with people selling coats and caps and all sorts of Russian antiques. With my photography done for the day, it was time

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to retire for dinner – beef steak with mashed potatoes and salmon salad, yum yum!  
And now to wash it all down with cranberry juice. Russia, here I come!

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### Dasvidaniya

I have just checked into my Aeroflot flight and will be heading to Moscow in a while. Russia, once a distant dreamland for me, is quickly going to become a reality as I will be touring the country for two weeks covering St. Petersburg and Siberia. This will be a journey into a foreign land and I am sure that I will face a few language problems as I believe no one speaks English there. But nonetheless, I am excited to set foot on the icy desert of Siberia, the birthplace of the notorious Rasputin, the monk who terrorized Russia during the reign of Tzar Nicholas.



India has long been a strong ally of Russia and I was surprised to find that the Rouble and the Rupee are almost at par in terms of currency value as 1 Rouble is 1.13 Rupees. The flights to Moscow, as well as the internal flights, are also modest in their cost. A Delhi-Moscow Aeroflot flight cost me Rs 13,500 and the internal flights to St. Petersburg and Siberia were Rs 3,800 and Rs 4,300 respectively. I am staying in

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modest hotels costing between Rs 3000 to Rs 4000 per day. All this was, of course, booked through Expedia.

The winter is approaching and it will be cold in Russia. I look forward to the local Vodka to keep me warm and, of course, the local women who, I believe, are quite inexpensive in terms of the base rate. Of course, there will be the Kremlin, Red Square, the Cathedrals and the art museums.

Till then, hold tight and wait for my posts, videos and images from this great land who sent the first man and animal into space and, of course, the first satellite called Sputnik. Get ready to explore this world through my eyes!





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## Moscow Delights

Moscow served as Russia's capital and has one of the best collections of architectural structures in the world. The Kremlin is a complex of palaces, cathedrals, and walls.

Moscow has a huge number of museums as well as displaying artworks from throughout the history of Russia. There is a grand display of priceless jewelry and state regalia in the Kremlin Armoury. The city's nightlife is world-famous and so is the shopping, symbolized by the GUM on the Red Square.

Cuisines from all over the world are available. Fast food joints like KFC, McDonald's and others have their outlets. For local cuisine, there's Russian Salad, Borscht (beef and cabbage soup), Blinis (Russian pancakes) and the famous Beef Stroganoff.

The city is served by a transit network that includes four international airports, nine railway terminals, numerous trams, a monorail system and one of the deepest underground rapid transit systems, the Moscow Metro, the fourth-largest in the world.

The Kremlin

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Not only one of the largest and most interesting museums in the world but also the official residence of the President of the Russian Federation, the Kremlin is the perfect place to begin your tour of Moscow.

For over 800 years, it has been a symbol of two imperial cultures, of medieval Muscovy and of the Soviet Union, a mix of affluence and secrecy. Two-thirds of the Kremlin is barred to visitors but the remaining one-third contains enough riches to occupy several days of sightseeing.

Although there is evidence of human habitation on the site of the Kremlin dating back to 500 BC, Moscow's history really begins around 1147 when Yuri Dolgoruky, Grand Duke of Kiev, built a wooden fort at the point where the Neglina and Moskva rivers converge. Despite being razed by the Mongols in 1208, its power was acknowledged in 1326 when the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church moved there from Vladimir.

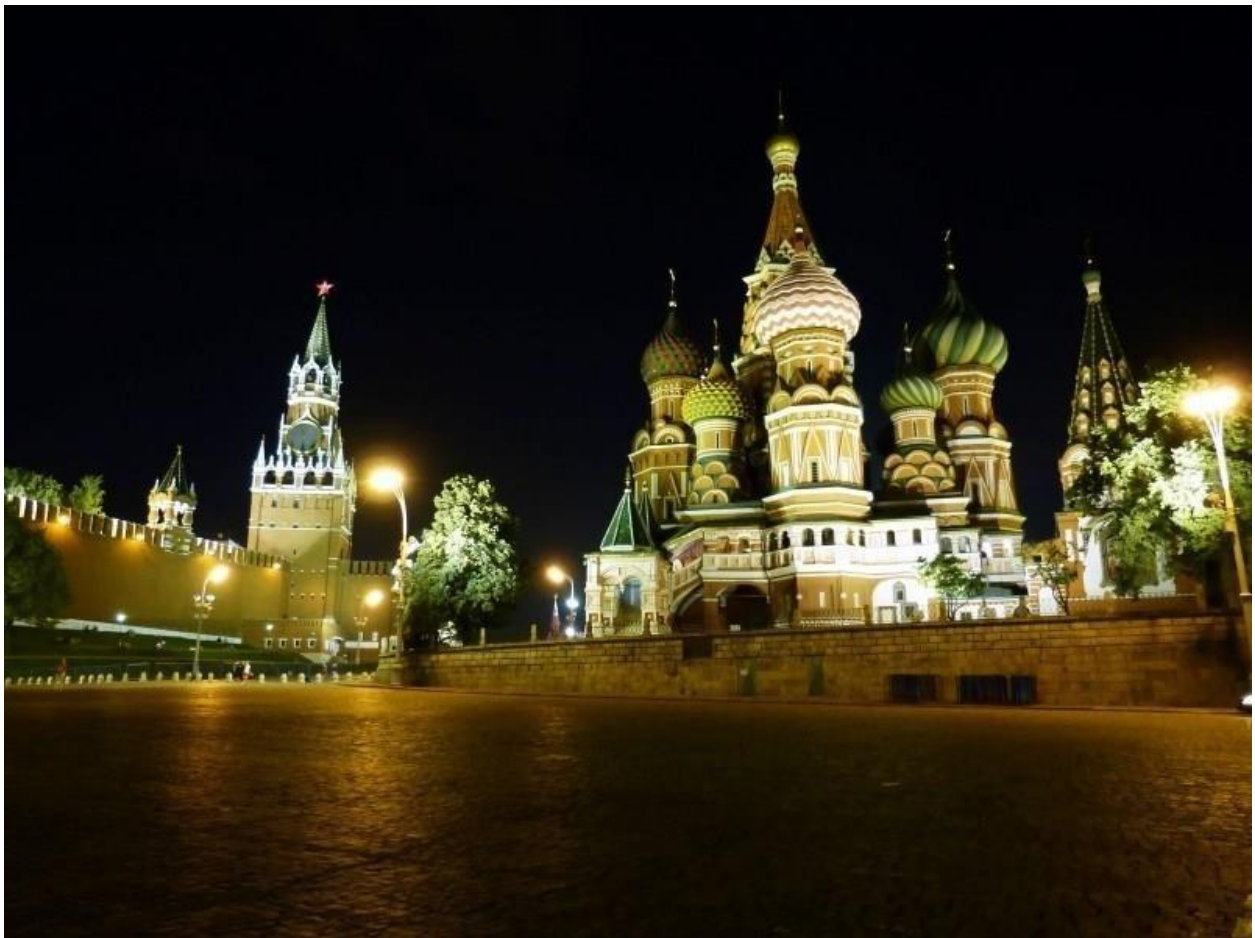
Under Ivan the Great (1462-1505), the Kremlin became the center of a unified Russian state and this period saw the construction of the magnificent Cathedrals of the Assumption, the Annunciation and the Archangel, and the Russian Terem Palace,

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the royal residence. The addition of Ivan the Great Bell Tower completed Sobornaya Square and added to the imposing effect of the Kremlin skyline.

Ivan's descendants further developed and adapted the Kremlin complex and, even when Peter the Great moved the capital to St Petersburg, Russia's rulers continued to leave their mark on the town.

After the 1917 Revolution, the Kremlin regained its rightful place as the seat of the Russian government. The legacy of the Communist era is still visible in the large red stars that top many of the defensive towers and in the vast modern State Kremlin Palace, originally the Palace of Congresses.



Red Square

Red Square, heart and soul of Russia, started as a shanty town of wooden huts beneath the Kremlin walls that were home to peddlers, criminals and drunks. It was

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cleared at the end of the 1400s but remained the province of the mob, the site of public executions and rabble-rousing.

Red Square came into its own in the 20th century. It was famous for military parades to demonstrate the might of the Soviet armed forces to the world. Since perestroika, the Red Square is used for holding rock concerts, classical music performances and events such as fashion shows, a huge firework display, and street parties.

### Cathedrals

Moscow's cathedrals, dating from the Middle Ages to the present day, are in different styles but are all grandiose and awe-inspiring.

Cathedral of Christ the Saviour is a prestigious project of the 1990s as this resurrected cathedral is an impressive symbol of post-Soviet Russia.

St. Basils Cathedral, recently renovated, is a landmark with its onion domes.

Kazan Cathedral, dwarfed by its Red Square neighbors, makes up in charm for what it lacks in scale.

Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow, once the private church of the Czar's family, this 15th-century cathedral is now a museum.

Cathedral of the Assumption is the oldest church in the Kremlin and the original center of the Orthodox Church in Moscow.

Moscow has over 100 parks and gardens, the better-known ones being Gorky Park, Tsaritsyno and the Alexander Garden, with attractions ranging from medieval churches to funfair rides. The city's majestic thoroughfares, leafy boulevards, and ancient side streets tempt you to walk around the sights of the Russian capital. The Bolshoi is one of the greatest theatres in the world with its own traditions and atmosphere. An evening at the Bolshoi really is an essential part of a visit to Moscow.



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### Restless in Siberia

Ah, Siberia! As I had begun planning for my Russia trip, I knew that I had to have Siberia in my must-see places and that I had to visit house Rasputin there. I had booked a hotel in Tyumen town in Siberia. Man, it was cold as we landed in the night. I had a quick exit from the airport and was allowed to go from the green channel. There were ladies in black short skirts and white shirts looking through my luggage like suspicious KGB agents. I had taken a taxi ticket inside the airport and my designated taxi was ready for me. It was two in the night and the roads were dimly lit but it was quiet and foggy. Nearby was a church and a community center with a school in the bylane with a bus stop. A supermarket was situated on the left of my hotel. My hotel was plush with a large bedroom, a large tea sofa set and a huge green chain at the center. The bed was large and covered with a blue bedsheet. The window was a large one and stared into the old oil town. There was some frost on the windowpane as I reached out to the pack of Marlboro that I had just purchased at the duty-free.



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I was finally there. I was lucky as the people at the reception of the hotel spoke in fluent English. My eyes fell on the short petite receptionist who gave me my room key as her assistant, who was fat and bold gentleman, tried taking copies of my passport. He was also trying to give me my forms at the same time. On the other side of the reception was the dining room area with large plush seating and tables with pink table colors. There was a rose kept on each table. On the right of the reception was the most delightful assortment of cakes, eateries, and mouse which were filled with chocolate and cream with assorted fruits and cherries full ripe in all glorious colors. I couldn't but stare at the delightful darlings hoping to work up an appetite later. Yes, I was sure that I was going to taste the desserts here as they looked inviting. The bell boy carted my bags to the room and I operated the lights with the electric key system. Man, it was cold and a hot shower was what I needed. Without a thought, I jumped into the shower to bathe and relax. I came out refreshed and lit a cigarette. My eyes instantly fell on the no-smoking sign and a fine of 4000 roubles if I did smoke in my room. I opened my window which tilted and fell slightly towards me. It was evening and the wind howled into my room as the curtains flew upwards pulled by the current of fast chilly wind into the room. I smoked for a while as ash flew in the air and landed on the table nearby. It was going to be one cold adventure, I thought, a perfect warm-up to my Antarctica trip in December. I placed myself on the soft quilt of my blue bed and connected to wifi using the password that was given to me as I checked in. Thoughts buzzed in my mind of home, of Nani and my many friends that I have left behind in India. I am in Rasputin's birthplace. Well, it is only a two-hour taxi ride from my hotel. The deep-set eyes and long black beard flashed in front of me. Yes, the vilest man in Russia who had the Tsarina's blossom in his hands and was once known to wave his penis from the balcony of the palace during a dinner night. This he did to boast that he had the prick of the nation in his hands and at the Russian court, he was the one in charge. It was he who was indirectly running Russia.

Yes, I was energized after my shower and was getting hunger pains. My eyes fell on the menu in the room. It was great, the menu was in English. I ordered both soup and duck liver with vegetables. My mind transfixed on the satanic vision of Rasputin, the mystic of the USSR as I nibbled at my bread and drank my soup. The nearby lamps threw light and made my dinner plate shimmer. I was now restless, restless

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to start exploring this Town of Tyumen in Siberia. I had an urge, an urge to explore. I was restless in Siberia.



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### Ra Ra Rasputin and the Churches of Tyumen, Siberia

I reached Tyumen from St. Petersburg late at night. It was a three and a half hour flight by Aeroflot. The Siberian chill was getting to me as I reached the airport. It was 8 degrees. I reached my hotel and just crashed out. The next day was foodie day tasting stroganoff, Russian salads, and soups. My window would open abruptly at night as the chilly wind would howl into my room and scatter everything inside. My main aim was to see Rasputin's house in Siberia and so, I hopped into a taxi for a two-hour ride from my hotel to the very street where Rasputin lived with his family in the early 19th century. It was the best house on the street being cream blue in color with exquisite wood carvings. A marble stone marked it as Rasputin's house. I told my taxi driver to drive me back. On the way, I captured the wild expanse of the Siberian deserts with streams flowing through the brownfields.

The next stop was Sleskhoz Academy, City Park, and Zanamensky Cathedral. Here, I bumped into a local priest with a flowing white beard who greeted me with joy. I told him to pray for my father's death and he very politely asked me to go into the cathedral and pray for my father's soul which I duly did. I, then, wandered into the City Park which was full of joy rides for kids, swings and many such fun things for the children to enjoy. This was a wonderful experience for me as it reminded me of my visit to the Pushkar ka Mela when I went there last year. There was a McDonald's bang in the middle of the city park where I had lunch. Then it was a visit to the academy where inquisitive Russian students were bustling down the road to learning new lessons and new crafts.

For me though, the highlight of the day was Rasputin's house. I had seen so many documentaries on the man and his grip on the Russian monarchy and today was the day that I came face-to-face with the place where he once lived.

Russians love their soup and salad. They also like to drown their soups and salads with sour cream which is in great supply in the restaurants here. But it was Rasputin who finally made my day.



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### Special Thanks to Green Tours Ukraine

My travels around Ukraine would not have been achieved without the help, guidance, and expertise that Green Tours Ukraine provided me. They were fantastic, very punctual and internet savvy staff. The tour guides to the cities of Kiev and Lviv were especially well-trained and knowledgeable in their field. Anna spoke fluent English and was a university graduate who had read the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagwat Geeta. She had also traveled to over 25 countries in Europe. She was very friendly and spoke eloquently about the city and its various landmarks. Always relating to the history and relevance of a particular place like the Red University or Sophia Cathedral, she used historical dates and gave a historical background of all the sites that we explored in the city of Kiev. We went around the city in a chauffeur-driven taxi which was very comfortable. It also had a heating system to keep us warm as it rained a lot in Ukraine when I was there.



I had a driver to take me to the railway station. My tickets were all booked and delivered to me and the driver put my luggage in my train compartment. At Lviv, I had another set of people from Green Tours to pick me up and drive me to my pre-booked hotel. At 10:00 am sharp, Mariana was there to pick me up for a tour of Kiev and its cemetery. We drove around the city in hired taxis and walked a lot around the sidewalks of the city. I was then taken back by train to Kiev.

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The Chernobyl trip, which was the last leg of my tour, was an all-day guided tour with audio and visuals telling us about the nuclear tragedy that took place there. The van in which we drove to the ghost towns of Chernobyl was very comfortable and we had a hippy young female guide who took us around Chernobyl. Lunch was served on the way.



All in all, I was very well looked after and so, I give a double thumbs up to Green Tours Kiev Ukraine. Not to forget value for money, all my travels in the country cost me 25,000 hryvnias for an eight-day tour around the two major cities of the country with train, travel, and hotels included in Lviv. That is around 962 dollars only for one person.

Overall, a very pleasant and knowledgeable English speaking staff, efficient transfer services and taxi services. Great hotel bookings keeping the importance of location in mind and a packed itinerary for a tourist. I recommend every traveler to use their services to explore the cities of Ukraine.

Contact Green Tours Ukraine

From Russia with love

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## The Ghost Towns of Chernobyl

A trip to Ukraine without seeing the site of the Chernobyl reactor and the ghost towns around the area is a huge loss. These towns had been deserted since the tragedy struck in 1986 during the rule of President Gorbachev. This was a guided tour where I was traveling with a group in a minivan. Throughout our journey to Chernobyl, a TV documentary kept reminding us of the history of the nuclear leak and why it happened behind the scene as the USSR delayed in announcing that the nuclear reactor had exploded causing harmful radiation to leak in the neighboring area.

Our van drove past deserted villages which were evacuated 36 hours after the leak was detected. These villages remain haunted with wrecked kindergarten and a ramshackle coffee house bearing testimony to what had occurred here in 1986. The world was up in arms as politicians debated the cause of the nuclear leaks in global conferences. My guide was a rather young and almost teenage-looking blonde Ukrainian girl bubbling with energy as she spoke about the history of the village. We then checked the radiation level of the place with our radiation meter. To my relief, we were in the safe radiation zone.

The next stop was the reactor number three at the Chernobyl nuclear plant which was the reactor that exploded. The lead was thrown into the hot spot of the nuclear explosion so that it could melt and seize the core of the fire that arose from the explosion. The ghost town of Pripjat was where we walked into the remains of a dilapidated cinema hall near the hall of a desolate park staring alone into the sky. There was a huge merry-go-round at the center of the park but it was dead, the whole place looked dead and grey.

There were also sheer monuments, statues, emblems and walls celebrating and hounding the valor of men who not only saved themselves but also others from getting sick from the radiation that played havoc in this area. Chernobyl was and is a ghost town, a macabre site keeping a national tragedy in which thousands died alive. It is also a nice way of making money from foreign tourists. At the end of the tour, we had to stand on these machines that would take away any harmful radiation we could have contacted during our visit.

I walked over to the other side of the road to buy a sniper bar and a t-shirt with Chernobyl written on it with bold yellow letters. We had spent more than 12 hours

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exploring all facets of this tragedy and by the end of it, I felt exhausted. I even missed the last walk into the town just before we departed. All in all, this landmark was worth exploring. It is grave well-preserved of a tragedy that the USSR tried to keep quiet. Tall and huge airwave radars reminded us that once this used to be a very important and strategic town which has gone quiet forever frozen in time. It reminded us of the USSR of old.



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## Chernobyl 31 Years After the Explosion

On April 26, 1986, a radioactive release, 10 times bigger than the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, exploded at the Chernobyl nuclear power station's No.4 reactor building inside the former Soviet Union.



One of the worst disasters of its kind, the explosion blasted radioactive gas and dust into the air. It is estimated that 1,00,000 to 4,00,000 people in total died of health issues after having been affected long-term by the exposure to radiation.

The nearby city of Prip'yat was not immediately evacuated. The townspeople went about their usual business, completely oblivious to what had just happened. However, within a few hours of the explosion, dozens of people fell ill. Later, they reported severe headaches and metallic tastes in their mouths along with uncontrollable fits of coughing and vomiting.

Authorities were compelled to evacuate 1,20,000 people from the immediately affected area, including 43,000 from the city of Prip'yat, Ukraine, in the "Nuclear Exclusion Zone", the area in a 30 km radius around the plant. The town of Prip'yat remains unoccupied to this day. The remains of the No.4 reactor building were



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enclosed in a large cover which was named the “Object Shelter“. It is often known as the “sarcophagus” and its purpose is to reduce the spread of radioactivity from the wreckage and to protect the wreckage from the elements.

It was finished in December 1986, at a time when what was left of the reactor was entering the cold shut-down phase. The enclosure was not intended as a radiation shield but was built quickly as occupational safety for the crews of the other undamaged reactors at the power station with No.3 continuing to produce electricity into 2000.



The cause of the explosion was two-fold. The first was that the power station construction was defective. At the time of the accident, the power station had four 1,000-MW power reactors in place. A fifth one was being readied.

One of the many issues was the reactor’s containment structure. Built entirely of concrete, it should have been reinforced with steel. The more direct cause of the explosion was that an electrical engineering experiment went wrong. Engineers



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wanted to test if they could draw electricity from turbine generators while the reactors were turned off but the turbines were still spinning inertially.

To conduct their experiment, they had to turn off many of the power station's automatic safety controls, and also remove a majority of the plant's control rods which absorb neutrons and limit the reaction.

Running short of time, the engineers turned the reactor's power levels down much too quickly. That mistake led to another series of destructive choices eventually leading to a massive chemical explosion.

Pieces of burning metal went in the air, causing fires where they landed. Due to the poisonous radiation, the Chernobyl site was declared a permanent no-go zone.

The city of Pripyat, located a little over a mile from the nuclear plant, was inhabited mostly by power plant workers and their families. The day after the explosion, April 27, civilians were transported out with no time to collect all their belongings.

Tourism has another frontier – the site of the world's biggest civilian nuclear disaster. In 2011, small groups of tourists made the macabre pilgrimage to the crippled plant and surrounding radioactive zone. To enter the city today, visitors must go through security checks and have proper authorization and a tour guide. Radioactive water, soil, and air are still affecting those around the Nuclear Exclusion Zone – the restricted space surrounding the blast area.

Chernobyl has become a hotspot for men and women with cameras and selfie-sticks. More than 10,000 tourists explore the disaster site every year, taking photos at the stricken power plant and wandering the empty streets of Pripyat.

Tourists are told not to sit down or touch items within this cordon and are checked for radioactive particles when they leave. Tour operators, mainly based in Kyiv, who take visitors to Chernobyl, claim the site is safe and even offer overnight stays at a hotel built exclusively for holidaymakers.

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### The Bear Necessity at the Sophia Cathedral and the Vladimir's Cathedral at Kiev

I and Anna had a ball outside the Sophia Cathedral as we were filming the scene with my GoPro as two guys approached us. One of them was dressed as a huge brown bear and the other as a swordsman. They were the entertainment value outside the cathedral. Their job was to dance around and do funny tricks to attract visitors to the cathedral. The cathedral was white with steps of green that formed the border around its tall white walls. The bells on top of the tower of the cathedral rang once in a while as our two clowns dressed as a bear and a swordsman performed their antics. One of them hugged Anna as the other danced around them waving his sword. This was a performance to be seen. It was like Walt Disney in front of the Vatican.



Off then we went to Vladimir's Church. This was a piece of architecture. Many small school children had come to see the church as part of their curriculum. This was an old-fashioned Gothic church building with brown marble walls on every corner of the church with golden light candles placed on shimmering brass candle holders. As very little light entered the church, it gave a gothic and eerie look. Fresca's paintings

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of saints, Christ, and his disciples bore testament to its place in Christian philosophy. Huge golden crosses adorned this church as people came up to perform prayers.



Kyiv has a heritage and a distinct look about it, at times ancient and at times tardy. It is the first peek into an eastern European country that doesn't try to pretend that it is perfect. Sure there is litter on the street and graffiti on the walls and old-fashioned roads, but its heart lies in its cathedrals, churches, gardens and opera houses of which I was able to get a good look. We had the luxury of a taxi that whisked us around from place to place. Anna, who told me that she had read the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads, was also well-versed in the Bhagwat Geeta. She was proving to be an excellent compere. She was like the Sutradhar who was waving the story of Kyiv and its heritage. She was like this encyclopedia who just kept going describing each spot and its history in detail.

I was liking this city with a temperature of around 2 degrees. It did give me chills from time to time as I got a cold and a running nose halfway down our tour around the city. But my tour agency which was a local one by the name of Green Tours had done a good job. I liked the professionalism of Anna and the punctuality of the taxi

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driver that we had hired. From time to time, Anna would also handle the GoPro and click a few pictures. She was getting involved with what I was doing. Without her, I would have been lost in the city but with Anna wondering mindlessly around the city parks and cathedral, it was a sheer joy for me.



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### In Conversation with a Ukrainian Slut at Victory Square in Kiev

It was bitter cold in Kiev. I had just finished my day excursion to Chernobyl. It was a group trip and we reached late at night. The next day was a day of rest for me before I left Ukraine for India. I slept till late in the afternoon and then ordered a late lunch in my room – Beef stroganoff, with bread and mushroom soup along with chocolate ice cream for dessert. I noticed that one had to pay the waiter who brought room service instantly for the meal. Most hotels had the system of paying on the spot for your meal. You had to clear dues instantly. I was more used to Indian hotels where the food, beverages and room service is added to the tab to be paid right at the end when the customer checks out.



Anyway, a friend from Singapore called up and asked me to pick up a yellow page directory for him. I decided to venture out in the cold to the square in the middle. There was an underground market right in front of my hotel and a shopping plaza that sold clothes, fashion ware, fast food, and electronics. The underground market was much cheaper and catered to a lower income group. The underground market

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had a lot of character with small ice cream and soda shops, photography shops and shops selling street clothes and t-shirts along with winter wear.

I strolled around Victory Square. At the center is a huge monument, a tall pillar with a gold plated top with an angel spreading wings on top of it. The victory monument is 30 meters in height. It is a towering figure at the center of the square. It has statues of soldiers in combat and was built to celebrate Ukraine's victory in World War II.

I was strolling down the streets in the area. It was chilly and there was a slight drizzle in the air. As I walked up on the sidewalk near the square, a Ukrainian lady approached me. She was fair, wore sunglasses and a swollen cap. She had a brown skirt and a brown jacket on her to keep the cold away. On one hand, she carried a blue scarf and a polythene bag full of coffee. "Hello, you a tourist to Kiev. Ah, you from which country?" she inquired with a slight smile on her face. Her eyes showed concern for me. She was inquisitive. "Well, me, I am here to see your country. I am from India, you know, Delhi. Yes, madame, Delhi dilwalon ki." I was excited to acquaint with this lady who looked to be in her mid-thirties. "I can serve you with hot coffee. It is very cold out here on the street. Maybe, we can go someplace quiet. It will help you relax and you will find the coffee very good." she said as she struggled with her polythene bag. She had good amount of make-up on her and she wore purple earrings. She moved her hands towards my face and said "See, smell my hand. I have lovely perfume on me. Smell it, it is very good." she stroked my cheeks and I smelled her hand and her fingers. She smelled of jasmine and rose. A very spicy aroma of scent filled the air. She had filed nails polished with dark red nail polish. She came closer to me. I could feel her breathe which was forming a cloudy vapor in the air near my face. "I like you, tourists. Maybe we can go to your hotel and I can make you relax. I have beautiful body. We can have sex. I am good at sucking. You will like me." she was being invited but somehow she looked old to me now. "How old are you? Are you younger than forty?" She wanted to close the deal now. She had offered herself as the bait for my sex this evening. I had an open invitation to get laid in the middle of Victory Square in Ukraine. "Only 60 euros mister. Every tourist has sex in Ukraine like this. It is very common." I stayed close to her and then gently stroked her forehead. She moved back as if to admonish me "No mister, you pay extra 20 euros for touching my face. Extra money for that now!" I tried to get my bearings back and looked into her eyes "No, I don't feel like it, darling. But it was nice talking to you." I gave her 20 hryvnias for the coffee and waved her goodbye. I

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looked back to see if she was still there but she had vanished. No doubt, she was looking for her next customer. But I declined the offer and went to sleep that night all alone in the cold.



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### With Anna at the Park of Eternal Glory

Anna was bang on time again to take me around Kiev. Our first stop was the Park of Eternal Glory followed by the World War II Museum. The park and the museum were built to commiserate the ending of the world war and honor the soldiers who died there. Anna was keen to show me around and I was pleased to see the history of Ukraine and how it was a part of such a great war. The rain had started pouring down and it was getting very chilly now. Anna was her usual self as I opened my GoPro from time to time and she started to compare.



We used to have sandwich breaks in the middle and sipped coffee to keep ourselves warm. This was Ukrainian history at its best.



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### Visa Issues at the Boryspil Airport in Kiev, Ukraine

I arrived from Turkey to Kiev Boryspil Airport and got the shock of my life when I was stopped from getting my visa on arrival. “All my documents are complete, sir. I have my visa form all filled up. My hotel booking is done. I have my return ticket and my dollars and credit card. Then, what is the problem?” I asked the visa officer. “You don’t have your travel insurance document. That is the problem.” I was baffled because my visa service company had not told me about this at all. Otherwise, I would have bought it along with me.



“Sir, I was not told this. Where is it written that I need a travel insurance document?” The visa officer showed me the Ukraine Embassy website and said, “Here, on our website”. I was now stranded at the airport “But sir, I have my Citibank Prestige card that gives me automatic travel Insurance all around the world.” The visa officer wasn’t pleased. “Sir, help me. I assure you, I am a genuine tourist and a travel blogger. I am here to write about your country and tell the world about how great your country is”.

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After some time, the officer walked into another room and I was asked to go and give my interview to a Ukrainian lady who quizzed me on why I was here and the purpose of my visit. She had a stern look on her face and was aggressive in her cross-questioning. I answered calmly to all her questions and showed her all my relevant documents including my website and my blog.

It was over three hours that I had been waiting for my visa and now, I was getting a bit frustrated. I had a few more Indian fellow passengers with me who were equally hassled by the shabby treatment given to them. I called up my visa service company VisaHQ.com to inquire but since it was Sunday, I got no reply. Luckily for me, after 4 hours of wait and a lot of pleading, I finally was granted my visa and was allowed to go.

So this is just a warning to all who are traveling to Ukraine: Please carry your travel insurance document with you if you want a smooth entry into the country. It's possible that the embassy website has not updated this but keep it handy with you anyway.





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## Off to Ukraine

Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, is the center of Ukrainian culture. There is a wealth of theatres, museums, religious sites, modern buildings, and ancient ruins. The Monastery of the Caves, founded in 1015, and Saint Sophia Cathedral, founded in 1037, are World Heritage Sites. The Museum of the Great Patriotic War, topped by the massive Motherland Statue, provides gorgeous views of the city below.



Built mostly on hills overlooking the Dnipro River, travelers to Kyiv are advised to carry a strong pair of walking shoes. The beautiful parks, flowers, tree-lined boulevards and green open spaces mark it different from other cities of Europe.

A trip to Kyiv is incomplete if one has not visited Pechersk (cave) Lavra (monastery) or the Monastery of the Caves. For Orthodox Christians, the Pechersk Lavra is the third most important religious site, being the birthplace of orthodox Christianity, in the world after Jerusalem and Holy Mount Athos.

Pechersk Lavra is comprised of two parts, the Upper Lavra and the Lower Lavra. The Upper Lavra consists of museums and historical-cultural monuments of national importance, and the Lower Lavra is a working monastery under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox church. Plan to visit both parts and give yourself a whole morning or afternoon to fully appreciate all the interesting sights.

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Wear appropriate clothing if you want to enter the caves or religious buildings. Men are required to wear trousers and women are expected to cover their heads with a scarf or shawl, both of which can be purchased next to the ticket booths at the entrance. Being a working monastery, it is important to be respectful during the visit.



St Sophia's Cathedral is situated in an area of outstanding beauty. The beautiful Cathedral and its entire complex are full of interesting museums and calm places. The Cathedral was built in the Byzantine tradition but influences from Bulgaria, Georgia, and Armenia can be observed.

Beautiful mosaics and fantastic frescoes decorate the walls, pillars, and vaults. The Cathedral is the only structure of this period that still stands and retains, at least in the interior, something of its original form. It is one of the finest and most important examples of early Kyivan Rus. As one of the few architectural structures still in existence from that era, the Cathedral represents a tangible connection to Kyivan Rus, giving it both a significant religious and national importance. The site ceased to be an active church in 1934 and has been a government-owned museum.



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St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery is another stunning Cathedral within a complex of beautiful buildings. In 1108, Prince Svyatopolk built a stone church dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel. It was later renamed after him as St. Michaels Golden-Domed Monastery. The white and blue building topped with dazzling golden domes glow in the backdrop of the blue sky. There are beautiful icons and paintings in the Monastery. The Bell Tower (Sofiiskaya Belfry) is nearby and visitors can take some lovely photos looking across at St. Michaels and Kyiv from the top of the belfry.

Kyiv is a city full of energy, a romantic city where old-fashioned values run deep in the culture. Golden domed churches and Soviet Statues share prominence with new modern buildings heralding an era of modern independent Ukraine.

There are more than 100 museums, innumerable theatres, ballet, opera, and art galleries. Kyiv is a city geographically at the center of Europe, looking both to the East and the West as the legacy of communism and the Soviet era are being overtaken with the modern-day capitalist society and mass consumerism.

Some good news for Indian tourists – If you are missing the paneer, mutton tikkas or want to bite into a hot samosa in Kyiv, then the Indian restaurant Himalayas is just the place to visit. It is a legendary place, open since 1997. It is a meeting point for Kyiv's Indian diaspora. The hot and spicy vegetarian, as well as non-vegetarian dishes, garlic bread and different dishes with minty sauces, are superb. Their clay tandoor ensures authenticity in taste. The portions are quite big. The address is 80, Chervonoarmiyska Street. It is easy to find as it is opposite the Olympic Stadium, on the same street, a little further down.

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## The Ghost in the Cemetery

I had just recovered from my cough and running nose after an all-day rest in my comfortable hotel in Lviv. The next morning, I was up and about. After a hot shower and a change, I headed straight for the dining room to have my breakfast. Not before maneuvering my way through two-room cleaning ladies carrying the lining baskets and trays. I rang the elevator bell to the eighth floor where breakfast was being served.

A lovely hostess welcomed me at the dining hall gate, took my jacket and gave me my table number. I showed my electronic key to the gate attendant who let me in. Breakfast in Ukraine is a treaty affair with cakes and strawberry jam, assorted fruits and cereals, lots of ham, sausages, eggs, and bacon. There was also fruit juices and milk to go with sliced cheese and molten butter. I ate what I could and enjoyed the cakes immensely. It was raining outside and the weather became grey and chilly. I could see trams moving about the street with rain belting on the tram lines. It will not be a great day for an outing but the weather in this part of the world has been cold, to say the least.

By 10 AM, I was at the reception with my GoPro and other camera equipment. I was waiting for Marina to arrive who would then escort me to Lychakiv Cemetery and St. George's Church. I have been smoking all through my journey in Russia and now, in Ukraine. I think it must be the cold weather which increased my craving for smoking. I had a soft pack of large Marlboro. So I walked out of the hotel gate to enjoy a smoke.

The morning traffic was up and about and people were crossing the street with raincoats and umbrellas. Suddenly, a ghost of chilly wind blew over my face sinking into my cheeks. Taken by surprise, I reacted with amazement. The wind had a hint of jasmine and white rose. I heard a slight gurgling noise in my left ear, a strange sort of echo. As I tried to light my cigarette, the wind blew away my matchbox. I turned to look down and saw that the box fell into the dustbin nearby. I walked into the hotel through the gate in haste. Calmness was restored as it were. I sat comfortably on the red sofa at the reception waiting for my guide. Mariana was short, fair with rosy white cheeks and had golden blonde hair tied like a bun. She had blue eyes and looked to be in her late thirties. She wore a large brown raincoat and a colorful scarf. In her right hand, she carried a blue umbrella with frills around

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it. I was just about to get my gloves on as she looked at me and said, “Anuj sir, Hello. It is me, your guide today to the city of Lviv. I am Mariana.” she was pleasant and smiled as she shook my hand. “Madame, glad to meet you. I am from India, New Delhi. I want to see the city.” As I waved to the reception staff, Mariana whisked me out of the hotel and its revolving golden gates into a car that was a taxi with an old driver called Igor.

Igor was old with snow-white hair, stubble, and wrinkled face. He had two gold teeth and a jaw that had been rearranged. He smiled rarely but he was going to take us around the city today. We stopped at a coffee shop near a footpath. Just a sidewalk away was the famous Lychakiv Cemetery, the oldest and biggest cemetery in Ukraine. Basically, here is where most Ukrainians bury their dead. I picked up coffee and a ham cheese sandwich and then strode off with Mariana to the large iron gates of the famous cemetery.



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As I was crossing the road gobbling my sandwich, I felt it again. This time, a stronger swoosh, about of chilly fresh breeze paled my face making my cheeks go flush red. So much was its energy that the coffee just flipped out of my cup and on to my shoes. I bent over to clean them and then looked up to the cemetery gate and what waited for us as we walked in. I had switched on my GoPro video camera and was capturing the sights and sounds of this unique place of the dead. The road to the cemetery was wet with the morning rain. Pigeons fluttered around the admission gate where we had to take an entry ticket to the cemetery. With the formalities underway, I and my guide trudged forward into the cemetery.





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## Lviv's Legends and Heritage

Considered Ukraine's cultural capital, Lviv has the most western architecture of all the cities of the country. Lviv is a poetic city steeped in legends both ancient and relatively new. Narrow medieval streets paved with stones as well as architectural decorations done in different styles are all preserved in the original forms.



The historic city center (Old Town) is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is renowned for its beautiful narrow streets, magnificent churches, fascinating museums, and charming atmosphere. It is the perfect place to visit pubs and breweries among the cobblestone roads and Renaissance-era buildings.

The city is welcoming, offering a wide range of themed restaurants, bars, and nightlife. No matter the season, it's popular with Ukrainians who come here for a weekend to feel the Old Town vibes. For them, this is a common summer ritual when the weather warms up. For them, it is no novelty to sit in public places such as sidewalks or parks and partake in a lightly alcoholic beverage.

Lviv is famous for its knaipas which are local pubs that serve drinks and food. One of the most curious ones is Gasova Lampa (Gas Lamp) — a museum-restaurant with

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one of the biggest collections of gas lamps in Europe. In case you are a lamp collector, a visit to Gasova Lampa at 20 Virmenska Street is a must. Similarly, the Lviv Chocolate Factory is a must-visit for chocolate lovers.

Founded in 1256 by Danylo Halytskiy, a prince of the Galicia-Volhynia principality, Lviv is 50 kilometers from the Polish border. Under the long reign of Danylo's son, Lev (1264-1301), Lviv became the capital city of the Galician-Volhynian kingdom. It is full of culture and historical significance to Ukrainian history. No wonder that, many who visit the city carry back lasting memories for Ukraine.

In spite of all the whims of history, the city has not lost its Ukrainian spirit and Lviv's delicate architecture has not suffered from ravages of the Soviet era. The St. George's Cathedral is a popular tourist attraction. The Cathedral is one of the finest examples of Rococo church architecture in Europe. From 1817 to 1946, it served as the seat of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The cathedral's complex, consisting of the church, the bell tower (its bell dates back to 1341), the metropolitan's palace, office buildings, a wrought-iron fence, two gates, and a garden, stands on a high terrace overlooking the old city of Lviv. The high exterior walls are decorated with simplified Corinthian pilasters, Rococo stone lanterns, and a cornice.

The Armenian Cathedral is part of the tapestry woven by more than 100 nationalities. Armenians began inhabiting the city in the 14th century and established their own quarter complete with a small cathedral completed in 1370. This original building perished in the fire of 1527. The structure that stands today blends a few architectural styles including Old Russian, Gothic and Armenian. The courtyard gives a tranquil setting for the decorative column and figure of St. Christopher. The neighboring buildings are those of a former Armenian bank, established in the 17th century, and Lviv's oldest pawnshop.

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The Chapel of the Boim Family was constructed in the early 17th century on the grounds of what was a city cemetery. This quaint structure was originally intended for use as a crypt by the Boim family. George Boim, a Lviv merchant and moneylender of Hungarian origin, started the project and his son, Paul-George, put the finishing touches on what would become a permanent feature in Lviv's stunning center. The side of the chapel is decorated with fretwork that gives the impression that the entire structure has been turned inside-out.

Other Places to See:

The Dzyga Cultural Center is a contemporary art space with a music hall and bar. The National Museum in Lviv comprises of two buildings: the original museum and the newer museum across from the Grand Hotel. Enjoy a grand view of Ukrainian icons from the 14th to the 17th century.

The 220 spiral metal steps of Castle Hill, northeast of the city center, lead to the remains of a castle that is supposedly on the spot where Danylo founded Lviv. Enjoy the spectacular views of the city and the distant Carpathian Mountains from the summit.

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As a day trip from Lviv, visitors can follow the Golden Horseshoe route: a tourist trail around the most prominent regional castles — Olesko Castle, Zolochiv Castle, and Pidhirtsi Castle.



From Russia with love

Russia with Love

From Russia with love is a collection of travel essays on my visit to Russia, Ukraine, and Kirkistan. I visited Siberia and saw the home of the legendary Rasputin, I roamed the streets of Red Square with an Uzbek taxi driver who loved watching Mithun's movies. I walked the streets of Moscow at night capturing its vivid beauty at night. So come with me lets walk together on the Siberian snow. I strolled across the various Catholic Churches in Liviv and even managed a visit to Chernobyl where the big nuclear lek took place in the mid-1980s here. I wrote about my conversations with a Ukrainian slut who tried selling tea to me. I also tasted caviar for the first time in my life and relished it with sour cream, butter, and sweet bun. My first taste of true Eastern Europe.

**(Include a quote from Raju Srivastava)**



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From Russia with love



# FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

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## Book Lovers Reviews

*Anuj has used his personal tragedy to transform himself and others through his books.*

*- Raju Srivastava*

## ANUJ TIKKU

*is a famous Bollywood actor and the leading face in several TV commercials and Bollywood films. He has a Management Degree from IMT Ghaziabad and an Engineering Degree from the University of Manchester.*

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