

tourism&leisure in RUSSIA

THE
PUBLICATION
"NATIONAL
TOURIST ROUTES
OF RUSSIA"
ISSUE 1(4) 2020

56

shades of
ice on Lake
Baikal

New routes

Travel from the Arctic to
the North Caucasus



KAMCHATKA

Hiking to the
Tolbachik volcano

TYUMEN

The black
gold capital

YAMAL

Nenets
nomad life

PRIMORYE

Discover the
Far East

SAKHALIN

Five reasons
to visit
the island



New e-visa
to Russia
from 2021



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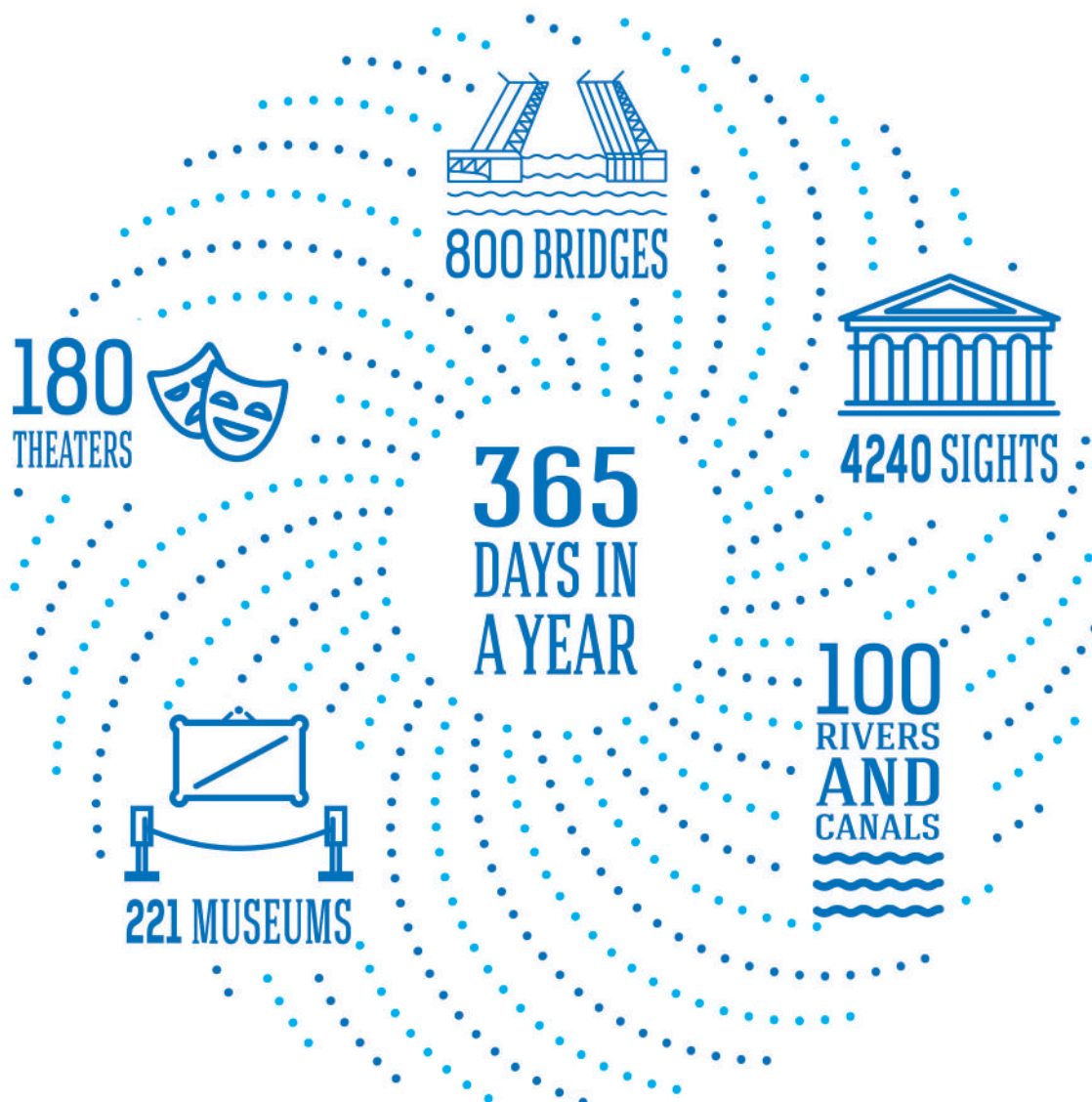
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"NATIONAL
TOURIST
ROUTES OF
RUSSIA"



On the Cover

The great Russian poet Nikolai Nekrasov, in his famous poem "Frost, Red Nose", wrote about Russian women: "She passes by like a radiant sun! A look from her eyes melts any heart!" Throughout the ages, artists and poets have devoted works and lyrics to the Muses who inspired them. Our magazine has had a similar tradition for several years now, of publishing images of our beauties on the cover. All the more so, given that no guests to our country fail to notice that there are only a few other places in the world where one can see so many attractive women, as in Russia.

Photo: Allkin/shutterstock

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Russia Becomes Even More Accessible

The goal that the entire national tourism community has been striving for has finally been achieved. Beginning on January 1, 2021, a single electronic visa for foreign tourists will be introduced in Russia. It is available to citizens of 52 countries for a fraction of the cost of a regular visa and can be processed in no more than four days.

Just five years ago, this was something people could only dream about, but even then, conversations about the need to simplify the visa system were ongoing. Russia conducted the 2018 World Cup according to the highest standards, acquiring tremendous experience in how to receive foreign guests, including those entering the country using the FAN ID system, which replaced standard visas. In 2017, an experimental program was launched to provide electronic visas to tourists entering Vladivostok, and the same system was used for foreign guests in Kaliningrad, Saint Petersburg, and the Leningrad Region in 2019. This experiment was recognized as a success, and now residents of more than fifty countries can come to Russia without visiting a consulate or going through unnecessary formalities.

The only thing limiting foreign guests' ability to receive visas like this today is the global coronavirus pandemic. Many countries have temporarily closed their borders, and Russia is no exception. We believe that the pandemic will be defeated soon, and tourists will be able to travel the world freely and discover new countries.

The fact that the Federal Agency for Tourism has developed a new national project entitled "Tourism and the Hospitality Industry" is also cause for optimism in our business. It is anticipated that this project will be finalized by the summer of 2021; it is to operate for nine years and its budget will exceed 6 billion dollars. The concept of this project calls for the export of tourist services to rise from 11 to 22.3 billion U.S. dollars, while the number of domestic trips should increase by a factor of 2.2. Only time will tell whether tourism will become "the new oil" for the Russian economy, but the authorities expect the industry to recover and expand as early as 2021.

In this issue of the magazine, already our fourth, we have tried to show the world the full breadth of our country, from the Far East and Siberia to the Arctic and the Northern Caucasus. Whatever the time of year, you will find an activity to suit your tastes, from mountain climbing and river cruises to intellectually stimulating urban tourism featuring visits to museums and the finest restaurants specializing in local cuisine. The stories and photographs from our contributors will help you get a clearer sense of Russia and understand its people, culture, and traditions. Once you have settled on the experience that's right for you, go right ahead and buy your ticket — we will always be eager to welcome you!

Anton Semenov,
General Director, Editor

RUS SIA

OPEN TO
THE WORLD



Russia takes good care of its unique cultural traditions and is happy to share the riches of its natural resources giving joy and beauty to the world.



This turkey cock is a traditional Dymkovskaya toy, one of Russia's oldest crafts which emerged in the 15-16th centuries.

Russia is the largest producer of diamonds in the world.

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When it's morning in Kamchatka, the rest of Russia is still asleep. Kamchatka is different in every way.
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An endless ocean, full of killer whales, dolphins, and



two species of sea lion, hot springs, mud volcanoes. Sakhalin is sure to impress you with these sights and more.

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It's impossible not to fall in love with the Kuril Islands: its grandiose volcanoes, innumerable waterfalls, fantastical cliffs, clear-blue lakes, golden sunsets.
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Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands are privately considered to be the homeland of Russia's most delicious seafood.



Veliky Ustyug



Krasnaya Polyana



Sheregesh



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Lake Baikal



Murmansk

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Tourists from various regions come to the Primorsky Territory every summer to swim, sunbathe, dive and enjoy the local delicacies.
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Irina Cherdakova, a volunteer, shared her impressions of work



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The city of industrialists, revolutionaries, and the birthplace of Yeltsin. How I once again found myself in the city of my childhood after 28 years.
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The Tyumen Region, located within a two-and-a-half-hour flight from Moscow, may well be one of the most unusual destinations for a long weekend.
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Its rich history, inestimable centuries-old cultural heritage, natural treasures, all combine to make Tobolsk one of the most popular tourist destinations.
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In Tver region, for the first time in 40 years, a real,



- old-fashioned steam locomotive set off on a regular route.
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In Vologda, a city known chiefly for its lace, you can try the creamy local butter and attend a saltmaking workshop, or take a fairy-tale journey to visit Father Frost.
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Every week, hundreds of tourists come to see skyscrapers, mosques, majestic mountains and the unique lake Kezenoy-Am.
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The plants of the Sochi Arboretum are also interesting, as is the history of one of the country's most famous botanical gardens.
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Russia's only bird park is located 80km from Moscow, in the Kaluga Region. Everyone who goes there is invariably amazed by its size and by what it contains.

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Vyatskoe

BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES AND SMALL TOWNS OF THE RUSSIAN NORTH HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED IN THE YAROSLAVL REGION.

The expedition team visited more than 30 villages and towns along a 5,000-kilometre route within 19 days. The list of the world's most beautiful villages has been expanded to include six Russian villages: Fera-pontovo, the Vologda Region; the towns of Kargopol and Solvychegodsk, and the villages of Zekhnova and Tcherevkovo, the Arkhangelsk Region; and Lalsk, the Kirov Region.



Tomsk

CYCLING ACROSS SIBERIA

Yegor Kovalchuk, a member of the Russian Geographical Society's branch in Tomsk, made his first bike tour along the brand-new Golden Ring of Siberia tourist route. He included the top natural, historical, and cultural landmarks of Siberia. Over 33 days, Yegor covered 2,500 kilometres on two wheels and visited 10 Siberian regions exploring local cultures, cuisine, and everyday life. An experienced bicycle traveller, he was a team member of such international tours as the International Bicycle Tour Across Antarctic Yakutia, the Round the World Bicycle Tour, and the Trans-Africa Bike Race. This time, he started from Tomsk, cycled across the Novosibirsk Region, Altai Republic, Kemerovo Region, Khakassia, Krasnoyarsk Region, Tyva, Irkutsk Region, Buryatia, and back to Tomsk. This route will open for mass tourism in May 2021.



Moscow

ONE BILLION FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Russian government has established Tourism Development, an autonomous non-commercial organization to promote travel to Russia, to be managed by Rostourism, the Federal Tourism Agency.

This new marketing centre will help pursue the 2035 tourism development strategy. With RUB 1.3 billion (\$20 million) investment from the federal budget in 2021, the centre will monitor awareness and customer satisfaction for the Russian travel brand, as well as developing and promoting new websites, apps, and other digital efforts.

NEW E-VISA

Moscow

Russia will introduce a unified electronic visa for foreign travellers from 52 countries worldwide on January 1, 2021. Travellers can apply for a Russian e-visa online at evisa.kdmid.ru, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or by using their mobile phones. E-visas will be available for tourism, business, cultural purposes and private visits. E-visa applicants are not required to submit invitations, hotel reservations, or any other documents to confirm their visit purpose. Just complete an online application form and upload a photo and scanned copy of your passport, and pay a \$40 processing fee (children under six are exempt from the fee) and wait for visa approval. E-visa processing time will not take more than four days. The visas will be valid for 60 days from the day of issuance. It will allow foreigners to stay in Russia for up to 16 days. Entering Russia through a border crossing, a traveller will need to present a printed copy of their e-visa notification as well as a valid passport at border control.



Crimea

BACK TO THE NEST

The Swallow's Nest, a symbol of Crimea which was built in 1912, will reopen for tourists after restoration in January 2021. The palace was closed more than a year ago for a renovation which cost RUB 87.5 million (\$1.2 million) and funded under the federal Crimea development program. Renovations include the facade with its decorative elements, the building's interiors, landscape lighting and railings, doors and windows, roofing, pipes, and fireplaces, as well as the installation of granite flooring. Special efforts were made to strengthen the foundation and the rock on which the palace is built and to improve the landscape design.



Zaryadye Park

TOP CAPITALS

Moscow has been named the world's leading city destination by tourism industry standard the World Travel Awards in 2020 for the second year in a row. St. Petersburg won the World's Leading Cultural City Destination 2020. The Moscow Tourist Information Centre in Zaryadye Park hosted the online award ceremony.



FLOATING HOTEL

For the first time in 60 years a Russian company has built a river- and sea-going vessel housing a floating 5-star hotel. The ship was built by Vodokhod at the company's Krasnoye Sormovo plant. The four-decker ship, built according to the project PV300 "Mustai Karim", made its first cruise from Moscow to St. Petersburg in August 2020. It houses 329 hotel rooms with panoramic windows and balconies, and boasts three saloons — a dining room, a reading room, and a conference hall.

THE THERMAL CAPITAL

In early November Tyumen was the first Russian city to open the thermal bath season. Alexander Moor, the governor of the Tyumen Region, opened "LetoLeto", a modern, new thermal bath resort. He said that Russian travellers have long neglected Siberia's wonderful natural thermal baths. Zarina Doguzova, the head of the Federal Tourism Agency, attended the event and presented a symbol of the thermal capital to the governor.



CHARTER FLIGHTS TO THE MOUNTAINS

Sheregesh



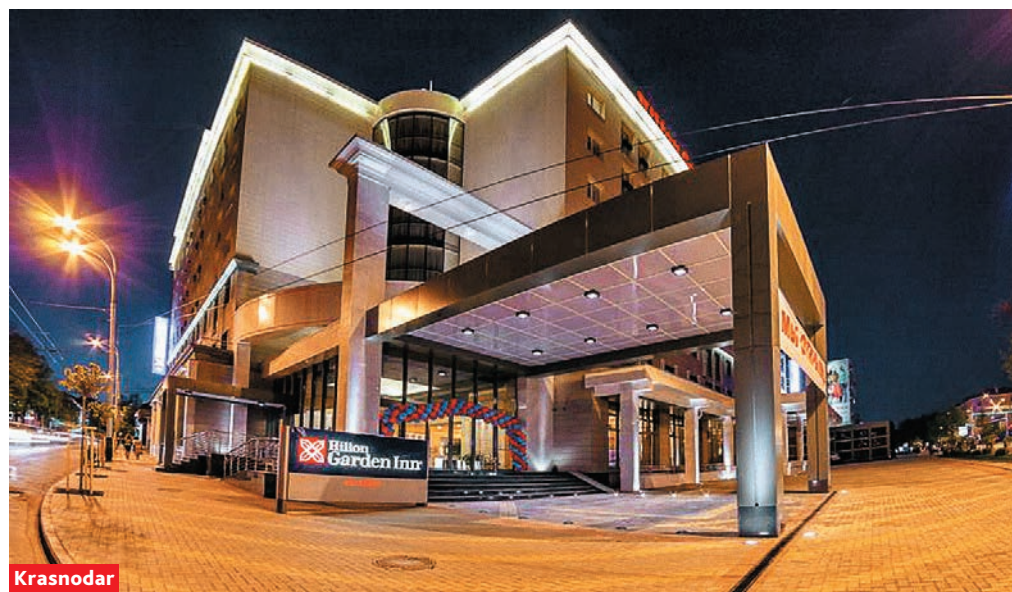
TUI Russia, a travel company, has this winter season launched charter flights to the popular mountain ski resort of Sheregesh, located in the Kemerovo Region. Ural Airlines will fly from Moscow to Novokuznetsk once a week on Saturdays. The passengers can bring their ski gear free of charge. With 14 scheduled flights, the company will carry 3,080 tourists to the resort. TUI Russia has also scheduled charter flights to Murmansk on the Barents Sea this winter. The travel program will include general excursions around Murmansk and Severomorsk, visits to the Lenin ice-breaker, bus tours to Teriberka, where Leviathan — a famous 2014 Russian drama film — was shot, a visit to the Lapish open-air ethnographic museum Sam Syt, and a trip to hunt for the northern lights.

PHOTO: ATORUS.RU / BCUZEL_RU / BLOG.GESH.RU / DEPOSITPHOTOS / INFOYAR.RU

THE KURIL CLUSTER

The Kuril Islands THE ONEKOTAN ARCHIPELAGO IS A TOURIST CLUSTER WHICH IS SOON TO BE OPENED ON THE NORTHERN KURIL ISLANDS OF THE SAKHALIN REGION.

Funded by the Federal Tourism Agency and the Ministry for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic, it will bring together 10 travel projects to be implemented before 2025. In particular, in 2021 it is planned to build a 3-star 92-room hotel called Alaid in Severo-Kurilsk, a town on Paramushir Island. Paramushir will also house a tourist village in Shelikova Bay with a VIP house and 10 smaller guest cottages. A new air strip is also being built in Severo-Kurilsk.



Krasnodar

ANOTHER HILTON

Despite a challenging year for the tourism sector, a new Hampton by Hilton Hotel has been built and opened in Krasnodar. This is the city's second Hilton Worldwide hotel. "I would like to thank the Krasnodar government for its support throughout the construction project. We hope that this hotel will attract both visitors and the city's residents," said Vladimir Ilyichev, Director for Russia and the CIS with Hilton Worldwide. The hotel has 105 rooms, a spa facility, a 400-square-metre conference hall, fitness facilities, a restaurant, bar, work zone, and covered parking.

Smolensk

THE FORTRESS BECOMES A MUSEUM

The Smolensk Fortress Federal Museum has been founded in the city of Smolensk. It will include the renovated walls and towers of the city walls, two of which have already been opened for visitors. Other museum sites will be completed during 2020-2023 and will also form part of the museum. The Smolensk Kremlin, built in the early 17th century, is a monument of Russian fortification architecture and the world's largest preserved brick fortress.



PHOTO: EMAZE.COM / FOTO-TRAVELLER.RU / YUGOPOLIS.RU / VISUALRIAN

A large bronze statue of a Soviet soldier stands atop a dark, grassy mound. The statue is illuminated from below, casting a long shadow. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, angular structure with a glowing orange light pattern. The ground is paved with small, glowing lights.

SOULS TAKEN TO THE SKY

THE RZHEV MEMORIAL TO THE SOVIET SOLDIER HAS BEEN ERECTED AT THE LOCATION OF FIERCE BATTLES AROUND RZHEV TO COMMEMORATE THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR OF 1941-1945.

Rzhev

It has become one of Russia's most prominent monuments thanks to its size and the high quality of its execution. A 25-metre bronze statue stands on a 10-metre high mound. It consists of 600 parts moulded in the Solnechnogorsk plant near Moscow. Granite walls in front of the sculpture hold artificially rusted metal panels featuring more than 17,000 names of the soldiers who died on this battlefield. The opening ceremony was attended by veterans, as well as the presidents of Russia and Belarus.



Lake Baikal is a popular attraction for tourists from all over the world.

THE GREAT BAIKAL SEA

IN BURYATIA, THEY COOK DELICIOUS FOOD, PLAY DICE, AND BELIEVE THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF A PAST LIFE CAN BE REMEMBERED. THEY ARE ALSO ENGAGED IN A NON-STOP STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL — A STRUGGLE JUST AS FIERCE AS IT WAS CENTURIES AGO. OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT **GRIGORI KUBATYAN** TRAVELLED TO THE REPUBLIC TO SEE THE WINTER BAIKAL WITH HIS OWN EYES.

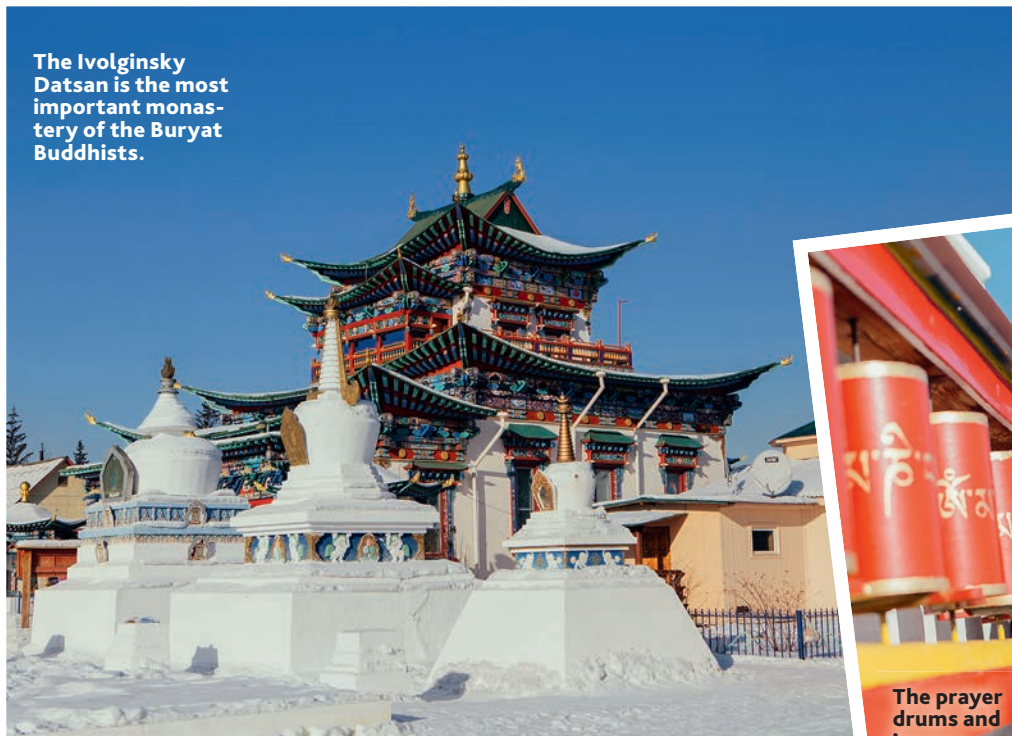
We are sitting in a restaurant-yurt (a large type of tent unique to central Asia). It has eight walls, a heater in the middle, portraits of Genghis Khan on one of the walls, and stand-up comedy on TV. A wooden *toono* wheel hangs under the ceiling. It doesn't perform any useful functions, but its spokes symbolically unite the different parts of the yurt into a single space. A waitress brings us steaming hot *buuz* — perhaps the best-known Buryat national dish.

Buuz and Poza

The *buuz*, or *poza* as they are also known, aren't merely a traditional dish and the republic's main gastronomic attraction. They are an essential part in the celebrations of all the significant events in the lives of Mongolian people. *Buuz* have had poems dedicated to them, been celebrated with festivals, and been honoured by a national anthem of their own, by a monument, and by an annual prize initiated by the Ulan-Ode restaurant association — not to mention revered by an army of fans all over the world.



The Ivolginsky Datsan is the most important monastery of the Buryat Buddhists.



Empress Elizabeth was the first ruler to approve Buddhism in Russia, thus earning herself the status of the incarnation of the goddess of wisdom.



The prayer drums and incense burning at the datsan.



The Buryat adhere to the Yellow Hat form of Buddhism adopted from India.

Hot *buuz* are similar to *khinkali*, only without tails. But you eat them the same way — by picking them up with your fingers, gently biting one of the warm sides and sucking out the aromatic broth, and only then gnawing into the hot pulp.

Bowls of *salamat* are placed in front of us. *Salamat* is sour cream whipped with flour. It's very filling, although perhaps an acquired taste. As it happened, not everyone at our table relished it, although I certainly did.

"Eat some *salamat* and you won't feel hungry until the evening," explains Darima. "Sometimes it is served to guests at wedding banquets before the main courses in order to save money on food. This makes perfect sense. Our traditional weddings usually have about 400, or even 600 guests — not every family can afford to feed so many!"

How Medvedev Became The White Tara

The morning sun is low. Smoke rises over the single-story houses.

We're on our way to the Ivolginsky Datsan, the most important monastery of the Buryat

Buddhists. The Buryat Buddhist tradition is part of the wider Gelug (meaning Yellow Hat) tradition within Buddhism. The tradition's leader, the Dalai Lama, lives in India. His deputy in Buryatia, the Khambo-Lama Damba Aysheev lives at the datsan.

The head of the Buddhist community is very active. One day he will distribute the so-called "social flocks" to the poor, the next, donate three hundred sheep to the Archery Federation, and yet the next, arrange a sheepskin dressing contest. The datsan has a sheepskin processing shop of its own. The stadium where local sporting heroes compete is there too.

It is believed that Buddhism in Russia was first allowed by Empress Elizabeth, for which the East Siberian Buddhists declared her to be the embodiment of the White Tara, the goddess of purity and wisdom. Then this title was inherited by Catherine the Great. And, in 2009, when the then President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev came to Buryatia, and visited the datsan, he too was proclaimed the White Tara. Mr. Medvedev didn't seem to mind.



JOURNEY Buryatia

"Why wasn't Putin proclaimed the White Tara as well?" I asked at the datsan.

"Once we had offered this title to Medvedev, we felt it wouldn't be very polite to offer the same to Putin," was the somewhat regretful reply.

The Ivolginsky Datsan looks like a Russian village with its cabins, window shutters, and chimneys. The front doors of the cabins are guarded by statues of Chinese lions, while large, bright pagodas are scattered everywhere.

The datsan has several functioning temples. Monks spend their time chanting prayers, banging the gongs, or blowing into large seashells, an act which symbolizes the victory of knowledge over ignorance.

The Past Lives of the Buryat Lamas

One of the pagodas belongs to Khambo-Lama Itigelov, who served as the head of Russia's Buddhists before the revolution. Itigelov was buried in a cedar box, sitting in the pose of the lotus, but his body is believed to have remained intact. A sort of mausoleum has been arranged in his pagoda, with the body exposed behind a glass pane. In front of the glass pane stand vases with food offerings. Sometimes the cat that

lives in the mausoleum comes and takes a bite of the offerings — the monks on duty at the pagoda have nothing against this.

You can make the Khambo-Lama a gift of a blue ceremonial scarf, or *khadak*, by placing it on the box next to him, and then taking another one with a blessed knot.

Previously, the *khadak* was not a scarf, but a belt into which you could tuck weapons. If a nomad took off his belt and gave it to someone, it was a token of friendliness and sincerity, like an open hand. You cannot hide a knife in an open belt, after all.

At the datsan, prayer drums begin to spin and incense is being burned, as the small, multicoloured flags known as "*khee morin*" (meaning "the horses of the wind") flutter in the wind. The forest beyond the fence is filled with such flags. I was told that lamas were buried there in the past.

During your visit to the "Nomad of the Steppes" complex you can see a real Buryat wedding.



Itigelov games in Buryatia. The guests are greeted with a traditional scarf, the *khadak*, the symbol of hospitality in Buddhism.



Before the war, the Atsagatsky monastery housed a Tibetan medical centre.





Fishing on Baikal is an expensive pastime.

At the yurt you will be invited to join a “yokhor” round dance or to play a game of dice. The bones of the dice stand for one the “Big Five” animals. Which one you get is decided by how the dice fall to the board. If they fall on their side, it’s a cow or a sheep.

The Ivolginsky Datsan is located to the east of Ulan-Ude, with the Atsagatsky Datsan located to the west of the capital. While the first monastery looks lively, even festive, the second one is full of reflection. Before the war, it housed a Tibetan medical institution, and then an orphanage based on a juvenile colony. The 1990s saw the beginning of the datsan’s restoration, and the Dalai Lama came there to personally bless its revival. Today, in addition to being a monastery, it is also an academy.

“We study Buddhist philosophy, astrology, medicine, secret sciences, and art,” says the 62-year-old rector of the datsan, Tarba Dorzhiev. “It will take a student 20 years to study even one of these disciplines. A lifetime would not suffice to study them all. Fortunately, we have begun learning a lot of it in our past lives.”

“So, you’re not learning, you’re remembering, correct?” I ask.

“Yes, that’s correct. I’m remembering,” the rector agrees.

Throw the Dice and Win a Horse

The sculptural group located opposite the datsan depicts a horse, a bull, a goat, a sheep and a camel — the Buryat “Big Five” of the animals that provide sustenance for the nomad.

The “Nomad of the Steppes” complex is located nearby. In summer, it houses a large number of folk music festivals. The winter season, however, has other attractions. You can take a sleigh ride, give a camel a pet, and try your luck at shooting with a bow and arrow. Inside the yurt the round dance — the *yokhor* — is often performed, and you’re always welcome to join in, unless you choose to play dice instead.

The dice used in Buryatia are made of real bone. They play two types of games — trials of strength and board games. To demonstrate your strength, you need to firmly grip a ram’s backbone, take a swing, and hit it with your fist as hard as you can. This is very →

Calendar of Events

ICE MARCH

At the end of March, Baikal sees the “Baikal Ice March”, a re-enactment of Russian troops’ march across the lake in 1904-1905.

FISHING UNDER THE ICE

Spring would not be complete without the popular ice fishing championship named “Baikalskaya Kamchatka”.

DOG RACES

One of the main events of the winter contest “Zimniada” is the dog sled race, the “Baikal Race” over 56- and 155-kilometre distances.

THE YORD GAMES

The ethno-cultural festival “The Yord Games” is held in June by the mountain of Yokhe Yord.

MUSIC FESTIVAL

The “Baikal Jazz” music festival held in April features concerts by renowned jazz masters.

THE BAIKAL MARATHON

The Baikal ice marathon, which will be held for the 18th time this year, is one of the world’s top five endurance races.

Take a camel ride at the “Nomad of the Steppes”.



JOURNEY Buryatia

You can find 56 different types of ice on Lake Baikal. Among them are ice grottoes, lakeside cliffs covered in wondrous icicles, and these fantastically beautiful methane bubbles.



likely to hurt your fist, but there are experienced masters who can split dozens of such bones in a contest. The stakes are quite high — apartments and cars, for example.

In the board games, lamb vertebrae that symbolise the animals of the “Big Five” are used — which one you get depends on how your dice fall on the field. If a bone lands on its side, you get a cow or a sheep. If it stands upright, then a camel. Ideally, you need to throw your dice in a way that will get you a horse. Then you can move the bone to the next mark.

A stove stands in the centre of the *yurt*, making for a warm and cosy interior. The most feared curse among the nomads is: “may the fire die in your hearth.” The best wishes you can give someone, then, must be: “may the fire in your hearth never go out.”

Where Did the Omul Barrel Go?

The wind is blowing over the vast steppe outside. Mountains are silhouetted in the distance. We are continuing our journey onwards, to Lake Baikal. On the way, we stop by all the places where spirits live to sprinkle them with alcohol. It’s no bother for us, and it keeps the spirits happy.

In the past, the Trans-Baikal mountains were home to gold mines worked by convict-labourers. Sometimes the convicts working there managed to escape. They travelled on foot through mountains and forests, homeward to the west. Between them and home, however, lay a giant, sea-sized lake.

The songs from those times are at once sad and frightening. One such song is “Over the Trans-Baikal steppes.” Its lyrics go like this: “A weary wanderer takes a boat to cross Lake Baikal alone, and under his breath he hums a sorrowful tune, a song of returning home.” These words seem to express a glow of hope of deliverance and a happy life. But as the song goes on we learn that the wanderer is to be met with sad news once he crosses Baikal: “Your father’s long-since cold in his grave, your brother’s long been bound in shackles.”

Another well-known song is “You, glorious sea, o blessed →

JOURNEY Buryatia

Baikal; an *omul* barrel is a good vessel.” It has been performed by many — a choir of convicts, the Ministry of Internal Affairs ensemble, and the Russian musician Boris Grebenshchikov. In the latter’s interpretation the protagonist seems to be sailing on his boat somewhere in Ireland. The song talks about how the runaway couldn’t find a boat, so he ventures across the endless lake an empty *omul* barrel (an *omul*, by the way is a type of fish found only in Lake Baikal). In the original version he is sailing for four days, and it is unclear whether he will make it or perish.

“He must have set sail from here, where Cape Svyatoy Nos makes a deep curve. The mountains and taiga were perfect for hiding from the gendarmes. The wind and the current would have carried the barrel to the opposite bank, so he had a chance,” explains Sergei Volkov who works at the United Directorate of the Barguzin State

Natural Biosphere Reserve and the Trans-Baikal National Park. Nothing like this would work these days. The State Inspectorate for Small Vessels wouldn’t have an unclaimed barrel floating about without permission.

You won’t find an empty *omul* barrel on Baikal’s banks either. Commercial *omul* fishing has long been prohibited. One can still catch it for their own household, but not more than 5kg per person. If you’re lucky, you can still taste *omul* soup made by village fishermen, but you can’t buy any in the city. If you ask about it in a shop, the staff will look at you in terror, as if you’re asking for cocaine.

A Race for Survival

The road is frozen over and the reserve’s UAZ-452 (popularly known as “breadloaf”, due to its shape) is running smoothly and at a good speed. Almost all the land around Baikal is a nature reserve or a national park. That’s good for the environment, but not so good for the people who live here. For centuries they have been fishing in the lake and cutting down trees in the forest, but now these traditional activities and others have been outlawed.

“They are labelled poachers, but it is not they who came to the national reserve area, it was the national reserve that came to them,” Volkov explains. “There aren’t any other jobs. What means do people have of earning their living? Tourism development is being encouraged, but

In Soviet times, work and electrical power were provided by fish factories on Lake Baikal. Today the factories are closed and their fishing vessels lie helplessly on the shore like whales washed up by the waves.

Archery is an old tradition in these parts.

You should try newly caught fish cooked by the village fishermen.

The game uses real ram vertebrae.

how can tourism be developed when building is forbidden on the reserve territory? There’s no way of opening a hotel, a restaurant, or a store. You can’t get electrical power or build sewage treatment plants. Approval of any works on the reserve territory is very costly. Infrastructure needs to be in place before the status of a reserve is assigned to an area. Afterwards it isn’t possible to build anything, nor even link up to the water mains.

In Soviet times, work and electrical power were provided by fish factories located on Lake Baikal. Today, the factories are closed and their fishing vessels lie helplessly on the shore like whales washed up by the waves. The village houses are equipped with solar panels, to which they have turned out of despair rather than from any wish to maintain an eco-friendly lifestyle. Other energy sources are non-existent.

“It’s pointless to wait for the *omul* to multiply,” says Sergei Volkov. “We need to stock the lake. This was done in the past, but not today. If the *omul* is plentiful, the fishing and the processing will come back. The people wait and hope.”

Baikal freezes over in winter. There are several fishing camp-sites on the



riding snowmobiles. When not covered in snow, the surface of the frozen lake looks like glass. The grottoes of Baikal's islets are adorned with incredibly long icicles.

The area of frozen lake by the village of Maksimikha has been turned into a skating rink. Skate rental is available at the nearby tourist base for anyone willing to try out the ice. It's right in the middle of the lake, with mountains all around, and such beautiful sunsets!

"This is so lovely," I exclaim.

"It is," agrees the owner of the

The Baikal Mile festival is all about speed and genuine excitement!

Rent a pair of skates to try the ice on Lake Baikal near the village of Maksimikha.



Sparkling ice. Incredibly long icicles adorn the grottoes on the islets.

lake. They offer accommodation in *yurts* complete with stoves and beds, located right on the ice. There are holes cut in the icy floor. You can rent a *yurt* like that for a few days and wait for a bite. But it won't be cheap — renting a *yurt* costs 1,000 rubles (about \$13) per person per day. Your catch would have to be literally goldfish to justify that!

There's a motorway that leads right over the ice. You will see speed limit

signs as low as "10", but in reality, the traffic moves at highway speeds. The ice is smooth and hard. Even car races are held on Lake Baikal, similar to those in the American state of Utah. The racers at the "Baikal Mile" reach speeds of up to 250 kilometres per hour.

In summer, yacht regattas are held on Lake Baikal, while popular winter activities include ice hockey and ice golf, skiing and

tourist base, Anna Maslichenko. "But if someone offered me money, I would sell everything and leave at once. All the coastal sawmills stand empty since December. We're not allowed to use coal for heating, we're out of firewood, and electricity is expensive. We have installed solar panels, but they are useless. Our future here is uncertain.

We want to believe the best. We want to believe that the government will start guarding the interests not only of nature, but also of those living in it. To guard in the good sense of the word, not in the way that makes people want to set sail across the lake in a barrel." **TLR**



TEXT: ANNA IVANOVA

IN SEARCH OF THE COLD

WINTER IS THE BEST TIME TO TRULY UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY THE BEAUTY OF YAKUTIA. TRULY EXCITING ADVENTURES AWAIT TRAVELLERS: ICE FISHING, HUNTING, DOG AND REINDEER SLEDDING, EXTREME SPORTS, AND NATURAL WONDERS.

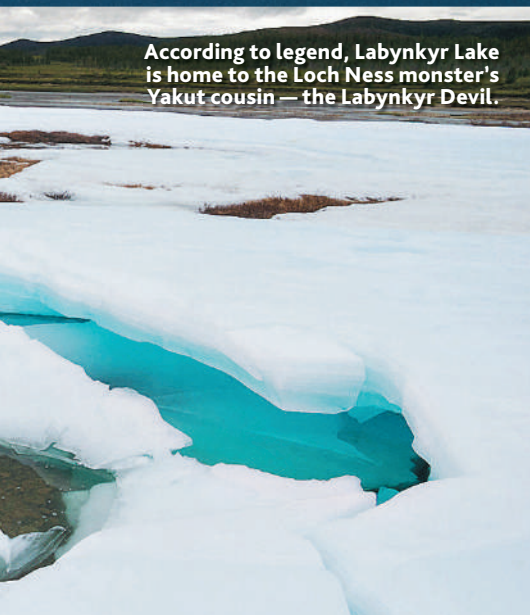


Another great entertainment for the cold season is winter "make-up".





Oddly enough,
boiling water
makes the best ice
fireworks.



According to legend, Labyntyr Lake
is home to the Loch Ness monster's
Yakut cousin — the Labyntyr Devil.



"Oymyakon is the Pole of
Cold". Father Frosts from
various lands have come
to visit Chyskhaan.

Regardless of where you choose to stay — in the capital of the republic, in its coldest place (the Pole of Cold), or in the wild engaging in extreme and relaxing activities — the experiences will be unforgettable.

The Kingdom of Snow and Ice

Oymyakon is the coldest inhabited settlement on Earth and a must-see for anyone who is exploring wintertime-Yakutia. The unofficial temperature record in the settlement was recorded in 1938: - 77.8 °C.

In the Yakut language, "oymyakon" means "non-freezing water". It's nothing less than a miracle that there are ice-free rivers, streams, and lakes at the world's coldest point, right on the edge of the permafrost. The brave souls who dare to swim in those streams in winter talk about it with deserved pride.

OYMYAKON IS THE COLDEST SETTLEMENT IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE, AND A MUST-SEE FOR THOSE WISHING TO DISCOVER THE TRUE WINTERTIME-YAKUTIA.

Oymyakon is about a thousand kilometres away from Yakutsk. From the airport, tourists are taken by off-road vehicles along the Kolyma road either to Oymyakon itself, or to Tomtor, a village in the very centre of the Oymyakon Plateau, one of the harshest places on Earth. One can also get from Yakutsk to Tomtor by plane by taking the Yakutsk — Ust-Nera flight and onwards by car.

A view of the majestic mountain glaciers and the legendary ice-free Labyntyr Lake will open up before your eyes. The lake has long been subject to searches for a mysterious underwater creature called the Labyntyr Devil — known as "Nessie's Yakut cousin" and a character in the "Russian Fishing 2" computer game.

Chyskhaan, the Guardian of the Cold

For twenty years now, Oymyakon has hosted the international Pole of Cold festival: a folk event where authentic Yakut and Evenk cultures intertwine.

The festival can teach you a lot about the everyday life, history and culture of local residents: their national costumes, traditions, sports, cuisine, music, dances, and legends. Another must visit attraction is the ice residence of Chyskhaan, legendary "Guardian of the Cold". The palace was created inside the sacred Ebe Haya mountain, where an underground ice

gallery and luxurious corridors lead you to the throne hall of the Lord of the North.

During the festival there's traditionally a fair when one can purchase pieces of local folk crafts. But the most anticipated event of the program is the rally to the Pole of Cold — an extreme rally along the Yakutsk — Tomtor route, passing stunning views of the mountains and northern nature. Also popular with the audience is the "Miss Pole of Cold" contest which attracts the most beautiful Yakutian girls. →

DESTINATION Yakutia

In the meantime, the strongest and most dexterous of men compete for the top spot in the “Chyskhaan Games” sporting event.

And in addition to all that, here you can also enjoy reindeer sleigh rides, national cuisine tasting master classes (“Taste of the North”) and quiet nights in an authentic Evenk *chum* (raw-hide tent). Extreme sports fans can enjoy ski tours and climbing the Muus-Khaya (2,959 m), Aphrodite (2,054 m) and Yurbe (2,111 m) mountains of the Pole of Cold.

Winter Adventures Capital

If you’re limited in time, Yakutsk alone can make for a wonderful trip — there are lots of interesting places to visit and things to do here. The Permafrost Museum is definitely in the top ten. It was established in the underground geocryological laboratory of the Permafrost Institute (also the museum’s main exhibit). The Daily Telegraph included the laboratory in its list of Russia’s 20 most interesting attractions.

Another of Yakutsk’s gems is the Mammoth Museum. It exhibits several animal mummies found in Yakutia, some of which are over 12 thousand years old. You can also get a souvenir made from animal bones or tusks at a kiosk anywhere in the city.

Another must-visit is the famous Krestyansky (“peasant”) fish market (in Yakutia they freeze only freshly caught fish). Those market people selling fish “bouquets” on foggy, frosty days are quite colourful characters. Restaurants too will offer you frozen fish,



Dog sledding across the snowy expanse of Yakutia.

including the delicious *stroganina* (sliced fish), along with other culinary delights from local chefs: *salamat* (custard made of flour and butter), foal meat, and venison (much loved by the locals and guests alike), northern fish dishes, khaan blood sausage, and a fantastically delicious *kerchekh* dessert (whipped cream with berries).

Traditional Yakut cuisine even has its own festival, “Taste of Yakutia”, held in the capital annually in early December. It coincides with another festival (with a very telling name), “Winter begins in Yakutia”. Indeed, where else can the coldest season of the year begin? Every year during the festival, Father Frost (who visits from his hometown, Veliky Ustyug) and Chyskhaan, Lord of the Cold, meet in Yakutsk and light the country’s first New Year tree.



The Permafrost Museum in Yakutsk, one of the city’s most interesting attractions.



Inside the sacred mountain Ebe Haya, the ice residence of Chyskhaan, the Guardian of the Cold.



Local beauties, young women of the indigenous peoples.

YAKUTIA HAS PLENTY OF TOURIST CENTRES WHERE GUESTS CAN ENJOY SKIING, SNOWBOARDING AND TUBING, DOG SLEDDING, AND FISHING — EVERY TYPE OF WINTER ENTERTAINMENT.

One of Yakutia's most important tourist attractions and a true natural wonder, the Lena Pillars are located not far from Yakutsk. These majestic cliffs, stretching for miles along the banks of the Lena River, are over 400,000 years old. The sight is wonderful regardless of the season, but only in winter can you get to the pillars by ice, driving a car or snowmobile along one of the world's most powerful rivers.

Hunting, Fishing, and a Snow Selfie

Yakutia has plenty of tourist centres where guests can enjoy skiing, snowboarding and tubing, dog sledding and fishing — every type of winter entertainment imaginable. The sledge dogs used here are the famous Yakut huskies. Since ancient times, this local breed has helped people to transport goods and has been used for hunting. Many believe they even drive evil spirits away from homes. Brown- or blue-eyed, with a luxurious fur coat, these dogs are very friendly and not at all aggressive.

Always remember that everything in Yakutia has its ritual, and both hunting and fishing are sacred acts wrapped in tradition. Fishing and hunting tours are one of the most popular pastimes in the republic — in winter that means ice fishing for muncha or kuyuur, and hunting for what's considered the best trophies: wild reindeer, wolf, fox, Arctic fox, wolverine, lynx, and sable.

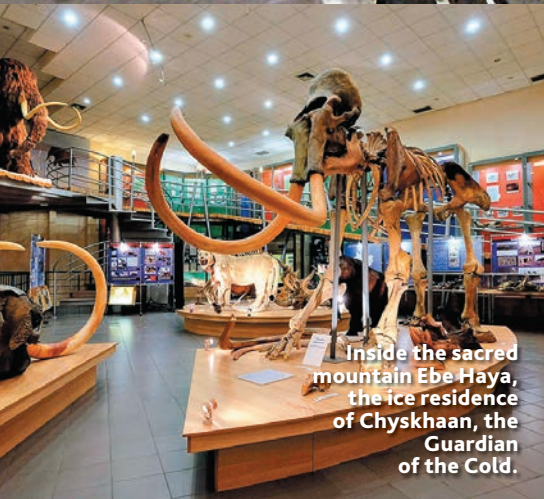
No one coming to Yakutia in winter ever leaves without taking the famous snow selfie with “winter



Muncha, or winter ice fishing, always turns into a celebration.

fireworks”, the ones you make by throwing hot water up into the freezing air. Water instantly freezes in the extreme cold, creating a cloud of icy fireworks. And remember, photos are best taken at sunset. Also, don't forget to try “snow make-up”. To get those thick snowy eyelashes, cover your mouth with your hand or scarf and breathe fast — after only a couple of minutes you won't recognize yourself.

Enjoy and explore wintertime-Yakutia, embrace its fresh and vivid flavours and colours! **TLR**



Inside the sacred mountain Ebe Haya, the ice residence of Chyskhaan, the Guardian of the Cold.



“Taste of Yakutia”, festival of traditional Yakut cuisine.



PHOTOS: SERGEY KARPUKHIN

Nomad Life

THE POLAR URALS ARE THE NORTHERNMOST PART OF THE URAL MOUNTAINS, WHICH MARK THE BORDER BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA. IN WINTER, THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE YAMAL PENINSULA, THE NENETS, RELOCATE HERE FROM THE TUNDRA FOR THE FORESTS, WHICH PROVIDE PLENTY OF FIREWOOD. IT IS ALSO EASIER FOR THE REINDEER TO FEED ON MOUNTAIN SLOPES WHERE STRONG WINDS BLOW AWAY SNOW. IN ADDITION, A RAILWAY LINE RUNS NOT FAR FROM HERE AND PROVIDES ACCESS, WHEN NEEDED, TO THE NEAREST VILLAGES, WHERE THERE ARE SHOPS AND OTHER FRUITS OF CIVILIZATION.

The Nenets have very expressive and distinctive faces, which along with the national dress and difficult nomadic living conditions make for a unique look.





Children are always wary of strangers at first, but this quickly passes.



The lack of gadgets and internet access means children spend lots of time outdoors.





The Nenets never lose their composure in unexpected situations, and will even laugh at misfortune.



Panteley, Taking portraits of the Nenets is a worthy activity for photographers.




Nenets winter camps are often situated in forested river valleys, although sometimes one *chum* (a type of temporary dwelling) may be set up in the mountains in order to keep an eye on the reindeer herd.

There are countless interesting subjects to photograph in a Nenets camp.




The Nenets do not gather in one large camp; usually, there are many camps scattered around the area. But families pay each other visits and socialise.



A young Nenets child stands in a snowy, open landscape. The child is wearing a thick, light-colored fur parka with a dark belt and a fur hat with a red pom-pom. The child's cheeks are noticeably red. The background shows a snowy field with some bare branches and a large, light-colored rock or piece of driftwood to the right.

The little red cheeks of Nenets children always attract attention. In fact, beneath the delicate skin on their cheeks, they have many thin capillaries.

A woman is seated inside a chum, holding a young child. She is wearing a dark, patterned robe. The child is also wearing a similar robe. To the right, a large metal pot sits on a stand over a fire, with steam rising from it. The interior of the chum is made of animal skin and has a wooden floor. The scene is lit with warm, low light, creating a cozy atmosphere.

The stove occupies the central space of the *chum* and is a very important feature, as it ensures survival.



The reindeer are sometimes driven to the camps for vaccinations and other necessary procedures.



The stunning
Northern Lights
are but one more
very convincing
reason to visit
the Nenets in the
Polar Urals.





HIKING TO THE VOLCANO

WHEN IT'S MORNING IN KAMCHATKA, THE REST OF RUSSIA IS STILL ASLEEP. KAMCHATKA IS DIFFERENT IN EVERY WAY. THE LOCALS CONSIDER POISONOUS HOGWEED SWEET, ASIANS PRETEND TO BE AMERICANS, THE POLICE CHASE BEARS, AND RESIDENTS PREFER FLYING TO BUILDING NEW ROADS.

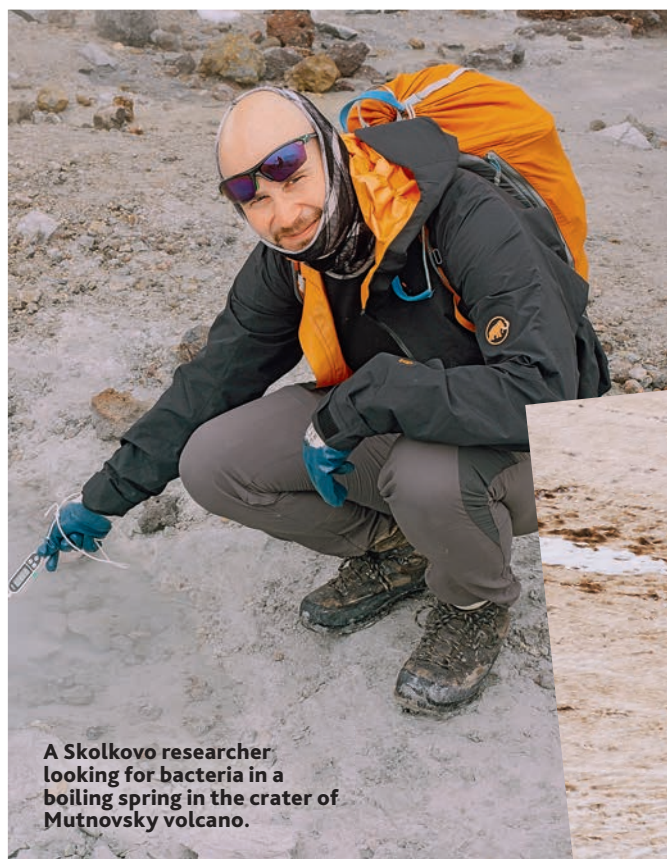
TEXT: GRIGORI KUBATYAN

A roaring KAMAZ truck struggles across massive potholes. Branches lash against the windows. The seats in the cabin are equipped with seat belts, and you'd better fasten them — otherwise you could go flying. We had a flat tyre on our way, but, fortunately, the driver of the KAMAZ behind us stopped to help us change it.

Why Do We Need Roads?

Kamchatka trucks drive in pairs, afraid to remain bogged down in the mud if something breaks. While helping each other is a tradition, truck drivers and jeep

Photographers and travellers come from around the world to capture volcanic eruptions. The volcanic eruptions of Tolbachik were accompanied by a powerful gushing of lava.



A Skolkovo researcher looking for bacteria in a boiling spring in the crater of Mutnovsky volcano.



Kamchatka is home to more than 24,000 brown bears.





You can take a helicopter to reach the bubbling crater of Mutnovsky volcano, but most travellers prefer to walk there.

drivers belong to different clans... between which little love is lost. Jeep owners drive their customized monster machines without license plates, and their gigantic wheels cause havoc with tracks, which can lead to KAMAZ trucks getting stuck. If a truck driver sees a jeep stuck in the mud, there is a good chance that they will just pass by — “let them make their own way back to town, it’s too far to tow them all the way.” Ahead rivers, mud, and lava lie across their path.

We are driving through the Volcanoes of Kamchatka National Park. Travelling around Russia can be a pitiless experience, but it is far from pointless. While local natural sites are breath-taking, the roads will require all your courage. If in doubt, choose a helicopter trip at \$530 (RUB 40,000) per hour, though be warned that one hour will not be enough.

Some people believe that Kamchatka should welcome only wealthy travellers for helicopter trips with an average trip price of \$1,300 (RUB 100,000) or higher, rather than thrifty backpackers.



Despite being the most reliable and powerful vehicle in Kamchatka, even KAMAZ people carriers sometimes fail to cope with local roads.



It takes courage to reach the volcano crater but the experience is an unforgettable one.

KAMCHATKA TRUCKS OFTEN DRIVE IN PAIRS, AFRAID TO REMAIN BOGGED DOWN IN THE MUD IF SOMETHING BREAKS. HELPING EACH OTHER IS A CUSTOM HERE.

It would certainly remove the need for building more roads!

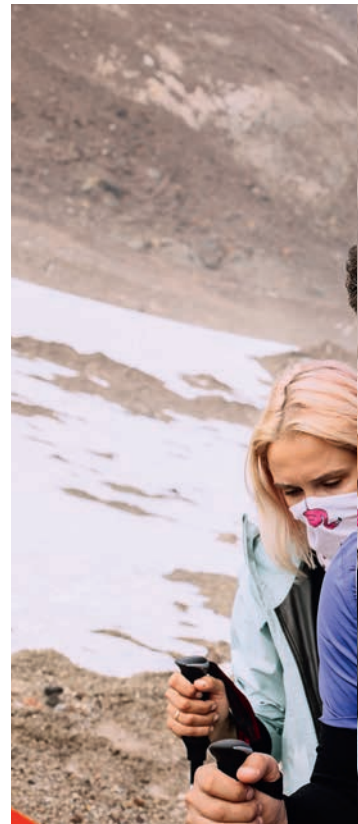
Everything in Kamchatka matches its epic size, including oversized car wheels and the shoe-sized *pirozhki* (stuffed pastries) served in roadside cafes. Giant burdocks and hogweeds tower by the road side. *Puchka* (windy) is the local name for hogweeds, which was used by the pioneering Cossack settlers for distilling moonshine vodka, which gave drinkers wind. Reportedly, in the past the people of Kamchatka used to grow head-sized turnips. On the other hand,

there is very little livestock to be seen in Kamchatka, and it has one of the lowest populations of cows and pigs in the country – despite the almost limitless potential source of feed!

Jean-François de Lapérouse, a French explorer, wrote about his trip to Kamchatka back in the 18th century: “Natural meadow grass grows up to 4 feet (1.2 meters). It would be possible to stack enormous amount of hay for winter, which lasts seven to eight months in this climate. But the people of Kamchatka find this idea too troublesome, as it would→



A three-seat light Robinson is Kamchatka's best priced helicopter, available for lease at RUB 45,000 per hour.

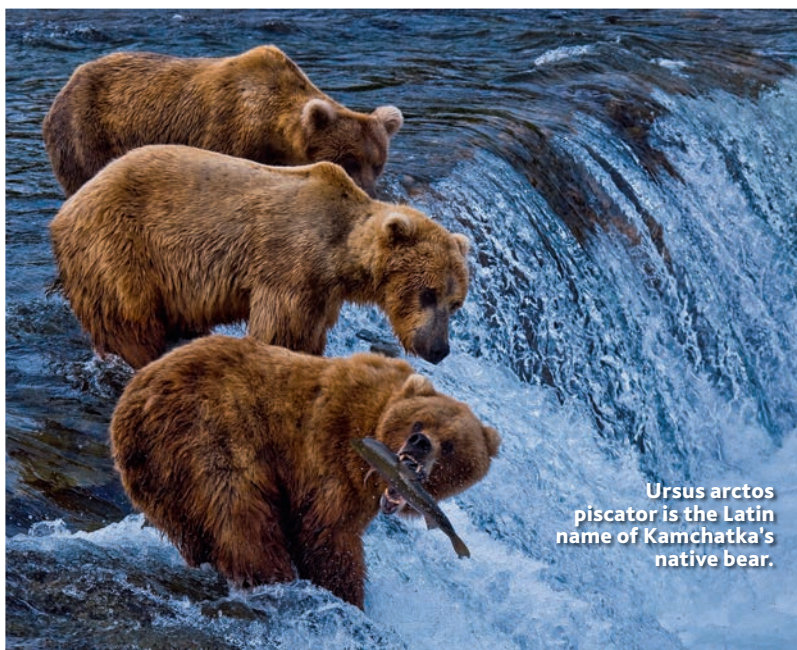


require large weather-resistant hay-lofts and barns. They prefer to live by hunting and fishing, in particular, salmon, which is a godsend to their rivers, arriving like manna from heaven annually to fill their fishing nets and provide food for the whole year."

Nothing has changed in the two centuries since. The few cattle breeders face a formidable challenge in delivering milk and meat to buyers along local roads.

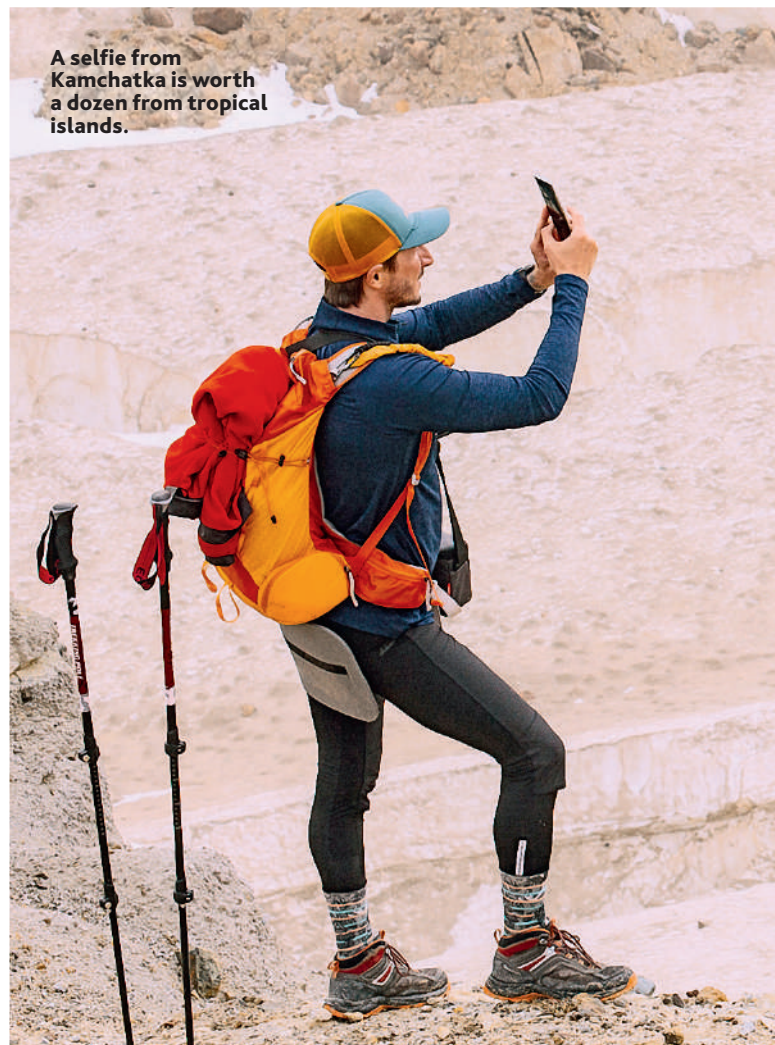
See a Bear and Live to Tell the Tale

Although there are certainly lots of bears in Kamchatka, illegal fishing is stripping local rivers of spawning fish. Bears can no longer catch enough fish to accumulate sufficient fat to sleep through the winter. Hunger wakes them up in mid-winter and they cannot get back to sleep. There is no food in winter, so insomniac bears turn to people



Ursus arctos piscator is the Latin name of Kamchatka's native bear.

A selfie from Kamchatka is worth a dozen from tropical islands.



Good company, a reasonable outfit and an hours-long expedition along volcanic slopes will be well rewarded.



because it will follow and catch you.”

We saw a large bear poking around at the side of the road from our bus. We stopped and rushed out, but didn’t get too close. It was huge. I’d like to see someone try and scare a bear like that!

We saw another one walking along a glacier. Why? There is no food for it up in the mountains. Perhaps it was just enjoying the view?

“Oh, that’s all kid’s stuff. Sometimes bears take a walk in the city. Last year, a bear with cubs took a stroll in Yelizarovo,” Alexander said. “The police drove them off with sirens. And not long ago we had a forest warden eaten by bears. He found a dead bear and wanted to take out its teeth and nails as a souvenir. But this bear had been dead for quite a while, and other bears were already eating it. So, they came and saw this forest warden... And ate him too.”

Alexander recalled his first experiences as a tour guide in

the early 1990s. Kamchatka had just been opened for foreign travellers and some Dutch tourists came to take pictures and enjoy the sites. They also left some feedback, wondering why we had such weird footpaths in the forest, with branches hanging low overhead and forcing people to stoop down the whole way.

“Well, we didn’t make those paths, the bears did!” Alexander says. “Bears walk on all-fours and don’t care about low-hanging branches. Back then we made all our routes along bears’ pathways in the Siberian pine forest. Predictably, bears prefer to walk along rivers. They trample their paths so hard it looks as if a hundred people have passed by. We had no other pathways to offer at the time.”

Kamchatka’s Indians

Explorer Stepan Krashenninikov recorded some interesting facts about Kamchatka’s indigenous people in the 18th century. Their favourite pastime was retelling and discussing their dreams. Seeing lice in a dream signified →

ILLEGAL FISHING STRIPS LOCAL RIVERS OF SPAWNING FISH. BEARS CAN NO LONGER CATCH ENOUGH FISH TO ACCUMULATE SUFFICIENT FAT TO SLEEP THROUGH THE WINTER.

The Kamchatka bear’s nails can reach 13 centimetres in length.



in search of something to eat. At the end of summer and in autumn, however, there are still plenty of fish and berries. If you hear a rustling in the bushes, it may well be a bear — but they rarely attack humans.

Our guide is Alexander, a 59-year-old ex-gamekeeper who is now an educator and tour guide.

“The bear is a strong, but very timid, animal. If you see it, just shout loudly and put up your hands up to look taller,” he says. “But if you run, you’re in trouble,

Kamchatka was a restricted region in Soviet times, with no travellers allowed here before 30 years ago.



the Cossacks coming to collect tribute. To dream that you were vomiting meant that your relatives were coming to see you. To see sex meant that you would be lucky hunting or fishing. They also used to tell fortunes by shooting arrows from bows — the one whose arrow flew highest would live longest. Women also engaged in sports competitions, including wrestling with other amazons. The deceased were put in hollow logs which were then hung on trees, under which their belongings were laid out. People also used to strangle sacrificial deer with their bare hands. After adopting Christianity, nomads would carry their icons with them using specially blessed sacred deer, while they embroidered their clothes to drive away evil spirits.

Our first stop was at the village of Esso. It houses a Koryak nomad camp Chau-Chiv, also known as the Andrianovka community. Alexandra Andrianova, the community host, welcomed us at the entrance gates. The community, which houses several houses and *yurts* (teepees), is a local museum.

Alexandra told us about the Koryaks in a huge super-yurt, recalling her childhood over fish

soup and blueberries: “As a kid, I was taken away from my parents, put into a cold truck and brought to a boarding school. I hated it there.”

The Soviet government wanted to turn nomads into settled people and educate their children. The Koryaks and other nomads were unwilling to build communism. They lived in dug-outs in unsanitary conditions and were illiterate, but seemed quite happy with their deer and fishing. They were loaded with favours against their will and were forced to live in villages and on collective deer-breeding farms. Now they are very much upset both with the Soviet Union and its collapse, because their collective farms have been terminated and their deer have been killed.

Nulgur, a well-known Even ethnic dance ensemble, came to the community to give a concert. It was a professional ethnic performance rather than an amateur talent show, and they have toured around the globe. The group includes not only Evens, but also Koryaks and Chukchi. Some dancers emulate the American Indians and wear bun hairstyles. In fact, if they swapped their drums for

A Koryak woman performs a folk dance against the background of her *yaranga* and a snow-covered volcano.



The Koryak house is big enough to host a dozen people.





PHOTO: DEPOSITPHOTOS / TOPKAM.RU / VESVETER.RU / WALLBOX.RU / GRIGORY KUBATYAN



Nulgur dancers in a sea gull pose.



Traditional Koryak souvenirs and other hand-made objects are displayed in the Chau-Chiy community museum in the village of Esso.

KAMCHATKA DANCES MAY SEEM FRIGHTENING, VIVID OR EROTIC. THEY DANCE WITH THEIR ARMS AND SHOULDERS, NOT USING THEIR FEET.

tomahawks, you might not be able to tell them apart.

Kamchatka dances can seem frightening, vivid or erotic — it is a theatre show with lots of shouting and jumping. According to Jean-François de Lapérouse, “The dances of Kamchatka are comparable with the convulsions of the Convulsionnaires (a French religious sect) at the grave of de Pâris in Saint-Médard. They dance with their arms and shoulders, not using their feet. Their lamenting chesty shouts are the only music that sets the rhythm.”

The wild jumps of this dance are a far cry from delicate French

quadrilles, but they certainly have their own charm. It is an archaic round dance that gradually turns into a shamanistic ritual. You feel like jumping on stage and joining them in shouting and gyrating, and waving the tambourine’s drumstick in front of the round-faced women.

A 13-Kilometre-High Plume

The Koryaks are said to have shunned volcanoes, while the Evens sought to settle next to volcanoes because they loved to bathe in their hot water. The main thing was to feel the signs →



Any physically fit person can ascend the volcano with the help of tracking sticks.



During a volcanic eruption, lava reaches 1,200 degrees Centigrade.

of the upcoming eruption and move the camp away in time. The Tolbachik volcano has erupted twice in the last fifty years. The 1976 eruption was so large that even astronauts saw it from space. The smoke plume rose 13 kilometres high and threw out 3 billion tons of hot stones.

Researchers and journalists rushed to explore the event from all over the world, and the consensus was that it would be at least a century before the

next eruption. However, the volcano erupted again in 2012 and destroyed some decrepit nearby buildings and the highway leading to the valley. The local government was waiting for federal aid to cut a new road through lava, but local activists decided not to wait, and have built their own road through the forest using only one bulldozer. Ten kilometres cost them RUB 150,000. This sum was raised by voluntary donations from around



The valley summers are cold. It takes about eight hours to ascend Tolbachik or even six for the most fit travellers.



The slopes overlook volcanic cones in the valley, the tips of the Klyuchevsky volcanic group and the cloud cover far below.

the world. Not strictly legal, of course, but the tourists need to get there somehow.

Tobachik is a tourist hotspot. It consists of two volcanoes: the extinct Ostry (3,682 m) and the active Plosky (3,140 m) volcanoes.

Tourists stay in Kleshnya camp, a.k.a. Rodnik. The former name refers to one of the volcano cones and the latter to a nearby well. The camp's amenities are limited to a pair of tiny wooden toilet booths and a canteen. Development has progressed no further, and what has been built is regarded as unauthorised construction because the park's executives haven't been able to get approval for the required utility infrastructure for many years now. However, the camp hosts up to a hundred visitors on weekdays and

faces constant challenges with KAMAZ and jeep parking on holidays and weekends.

Anyway, there is enough black, cooled lava to go round. It is an endless sea of twisting, wrinkled stone. "Beneath, there are endless tunnels to explore and get lost in, with volcanic stalactites hanging from their ceilings.

While it remains cold in the valley even in summer, the tunnels are hot like a sauna thanks to the heat from the active volcano. The park's team has painted arrows to keep travellers from getting lost, especially when it's foggy. In the absence of any signs or paths these arrows are a great help because it is easy to go off course and wander across the lava field for hours on end.

THE COOLED LAVA IS AN ENDLESS SEA OF TWISTING, WRINKLED STONE WITH TUNNELS UNDERNEATH IN WHICH IT'S VERY EASY TO GET LOST.

The Ascent

You can only see the odd helicopter hovering above the valley, because Tolbachik is beyond the range of ordinary helicopter routes. Most helicopters offer reasonable one- or two-hour flights around the environs of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky: to Gorely volcano, or to the smoking Mutenovsky volcano. But out here your only option is to walk.

The day before our ascent, my boots came apart. No wonder, if you take your old pair you haven't worn in years rather than buy a new pair. The sole fell off, and with snow on the ground here even in August, forget about walking barefoot. The guide offered me gumboots, so my group-mates were wearing hiking boots but I had to make do with those and two pairs of woollen socks. It proved to be a godsend. On our route, we had to cross snow, streams, and waterfalls. My peers were jumping from stone to stone like wild mountain goats while I could stride through any obstacle. It turned out that gumboots are the best for climbing mountains.

Kamchatka's summer feels more like a cold and foggy autumn. Climbing up above the clouds, you find yourself in a sunny and warm spring day with melting snow and running brooks. The winter with knee-deep snowdrifts comes a few kilometres up in the mountains.

It takes about eight hours to climb Tolbachik, although it depends on your fitness. Six hours would be enough for some travellers and others would be exhausted after two hours and turn back home. Tolbachik has a unique crater — or caldera, in academic terms — which is 1.8 kilometres wide and 400 metres deep. It's large enough to fit a small village.

The slopes overlook volcanic cones in the valley, the snow-covered summits of the Klyuchevsky volcanic group, and the cloud cover far below. The only other view which could possibly compete with this in terms of beauty is the view from a neighbouring volcano. There is a booming sound nearby. It might be an avalanche or lava grumbling underground, hinting that a quiet volcano is never quiet for long. Both the beautiful Klyuchevsky, belching smoke, and sleepy Tolbachik could surprise us any time.

We put up our flag, took a picture, and headed home. The way down feels easier, as if you have left all your problems and burdens back on the summit. You can even try to ski on the snow in your hiking boots. Going down is twice as fast as going up. We followed the crude painted arrows backwards, through the snow, across brooks and cooled lava.

Further down the valley there is a dead forest. The first eruption covered it in ash like Pompeii, sucking the moisture from the ground and drying up the forest. For a long time, it was simply a frightening place which reminded people of Russian folk tales featuring Baba Yaga, but now it is a local tourist attraction with a comfortable glamping site built next to it. The view of the dead forest and towering mountains from these space-age tents with their wall-length windows is simply stunning in its beauty. **TLR**



DESTINATION Sakhalin Region





5 Reasons to Visit Sakhalin

AN ENDLESS OCEAN, full of killer whales, dolphins, and two species of sea lion. Hot springs, mud volcanoes, and unparalleled skylscapes. Aniva Lighthouse and bridges built back in the time of Imperial Japan. Sakhalin is sure to impress you to the core with these sights and more.

TEXT: ANGELINA NADEZHDINA

DESTINATION Sakhalin Region

1 BOAT TOUR TO ANIVA LIGHTHOUSE

In order to experience all the charm of Sakhalin, you should take a boat tour to one of the island's most famous lighthouses — Aniva, built in 1939. During this trip, tourists can see the most beautiful sites of the island: Cape Three Stones and Cape Marble, seashore bird colonies, possibly killer whales and dolphins, and, of course, the lighthouse itself — Sakhalin's signature landmark.

2 TOUR OF CAPE GIANT AND BIRD'S CAPE

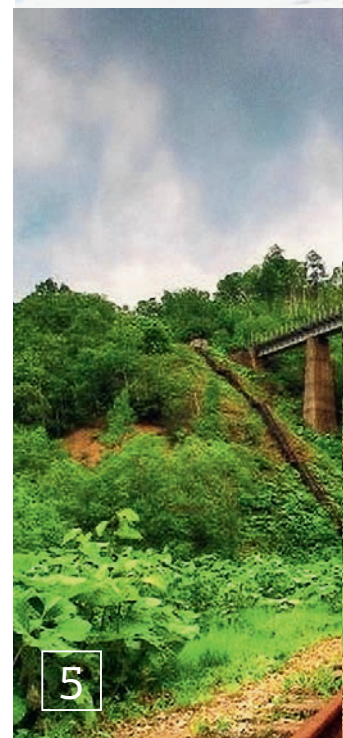
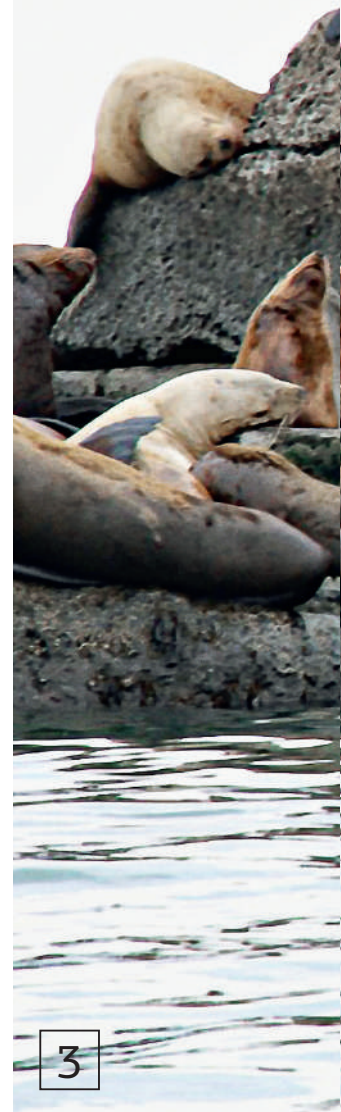
Along the coast from Bird's Cape to Cape Giant you can find many grottos, formed by the wind and waves, caves rising right out of the sea, and arches and pillars of various sizes and fantastical forms. Colonies of sea birds live in this area, and the coast itself is rich in rare flora and fauna. You can reach the cape from

Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in a good off-road vehicle, driving around 100km along a road with stunning scenery.

3 SEA LION ROOKERY IN NEVELSK

Right within the city of Nevelsk itself is a unique natural zoo — a sea lion rookery. Every spring,

PHOTO: RUSPEKH.RU / TWING.COM / YURIY TSYGANKOV / TIC SAKHALINSKY





several hundred sea lions swim up to the shores of Nevelsk and settle on the old breakwater. These sea lions only form such rookeries in two other places on earth besides Nevelsk: in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and Seattle, USA.

4 PUGACHEVSKY MUD VOLCANO

This is an enormous mud field covered in craters, almost completely lacking in vegetation. Once here, you'll feel as though you're on a completely different planet! The volcano periodically expels streams of mud.

5 WITCH'S AND DEVIL'S BRIDGES

This is a complex of unique railway facilities, built during the Karafuto era in the 1920s. The road leads to the entrance of the tunnel, which is almost a kilometre in length, and

passes under the bridge and loops around inside the mountain so that the upper part comes out just above the entrance. After passing across Devil's Bridge and through another tunnel, tourists will find themselves at Witch's Bridge. It's 50 metres high and extends around 200 metres. Unfortunately, Witch's Bridge is not preserved as well as Devil's Bridge, and it is dangerous to walk across it. But vibrant photo souvenirs are guaranteed. **TLR**

Want to see it all for yourself? Check out our website: gosakhalin.ru/en

THE ASTONISHING KURIL ISLANDS

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO FALL IN LOVE WITH SAKHALIN AND THE KURIL ISLANDS: IT'S AS THOUGH NATURE HERSELF GATHERED ALL HER BEST ATTRIBUTES INTO ONE AREA — GRANDIOSE VOLCANOES, INNUMERABLE WATERFALLS, FANTASTICAL CLIFFS, CLEAR-BLUE LAKES, GOLDEN SUNSETS, AND LANDSCAPES THAT ARE SIMPLY OUT OF THIS WORLD. MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL IS THE ATMOSPHERE OF BEING AT ONE WITH NATURE, FAR FROM CIVILIZATION, NOISE, AND CROWDS OF TOURISTS.

TEXT: DENIS FEDOSEEV



Shikotan is the largest island of the Lesser Kuril Chain. It was here that the Soviet film "The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe" with Leonid Kuravlyov was shot. Director Stanislav Govorukhin really liked the endless blue expanses and the picturesque landscapes of the island.

Let's get to know the islands of the Kuril Chain a bit better, and find out why tourists from all over the world want to come here. One visit to the only island region of Russia will leave you with unforgettable memories for the rest of your life.

Shikotan — "The Best Place"

According to one legend, the native people of Shikotan, the Ainu, named the island "The Best Place". One thing is for certain: it's the northernmost and largest island of the Lesser Kuril Chain. The climate here is mild, the volcanoes are dormant, and the island has no bears. But, on the other hand, it has its own Edge of the World.

The island's main landmark is Cape Edge of the World. The cape protrudes almost a kilometre out into the Pacific Ocean, ending abruptly in cliffs of 40-50 metres. Looking out over the endless blue expanses and buffeted by a strong wind, you really do feel like you're at the edge of the world — the nearest dry land is 5,400 kilometres east of here.

Near the cape is Nameless Bay, where the Soviet film "The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe" with Leonid Kuravlyov was filmed. There are small uninhabited islands in the waters around Shikotan.



Kunashir is probably the richest of the Kuril Islands in terms of its variety of landscapes, flora, and fauna, as well as in terms of landmarks. One of those landmarks is Cape Stolbchaty, which is composed of innumerable basalt columns.



The Basalt Columns and Volcanoes of Kunashir

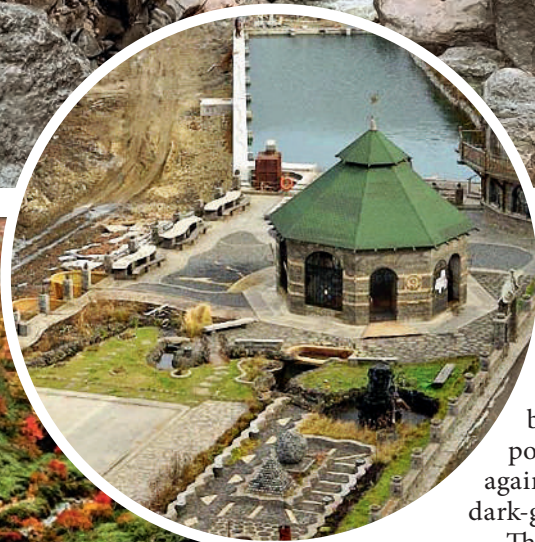
Kunashir is the southernmost inhabited island of the Kuril Chain. It is made up on a chain of active volcanoes: Tyatya (1,819 metres), Ruruy (1,485 metres), Mendeleev (886 metres) and Golovnin (541 metres).

It is probably the richest of the Kuril Islands in terms of its variety of landscapes, flora, and fauna, as well as in terms of landmarks. In the language of the Ainu people, the island's name means Black. It probably earned its name thanks to the abundance of pine forests on the island, as well as the dark cone of Tyatya volcano.

Tyatya, the highest of the volcanoes and also known as "Father-Mountain", is located in a hard-to-reach part of the island. Tourists don't often go there, but it is still possible to get there by foot along the coast (a three-day trip, more or less), or, in good weather, by boat (trips take at least three hours). The ascent itself takes around seven hours: three hours to Otvazhny crater, then another four hours to the summit. The descent takes half the time.

Another unusual natural feature of Kunashir Island is Cape Stolbchaty. It comprises of innumerable basalt columns. They make up four-, five-, and six-sided prisms, formed by a volcanic eruption and the slow extrusion of lava, which hardened afterwards. Similar natural phenomena are incredibly rare. The cape also has the remains of cliffs, the outlines of which look like monks wearing cowls. →





The Hot Springs of Iturup

Iturup is the largest island of the Kuril archipelago, and some consider it the most beautiful as well. The nature here is incredible: volcanoes stand side-by-side with thermal pools, and unusual white cliffs stand out against the background of emerald forests and dark-grey sandy beaches.

The white cliffs range from a height of 17 to 114 metres. They are formed from grey-white pumice, and have been carved into fantastical canyons and crevices by powerful erosive forces.

There are around 20 different volcanoes on Iturup. Baransky Volcano (1,134 metres) is a popular tourist destination with a variety of hot springs, mud pools, and steam vents. Atsonupuri (1,205 metres) is considered the most beautiful volcano on the island thanks to its nearly perfect conic form. Yankito plateau is made of solidified volcanic lava. Tourists at the plateau can not only take their most “out of this world” photos, but can also admire the black western coast of the island.

The Vannochki thermal spa complex is an ideal place for relaxation, with a view of the Kuril Bay and water temperatures of around 46 degrees Celsius.

In 2009, a spa complex was built on the coast near the pools.

PHOTO: ANDREY GRACHEV / KONSTANTIN ANTIPIN /
EVGENY KASPERSKY / SERGEY KOZINTSEV / MITYA RAZUM

Sakhalin Region DESTINATION



Hot mineral springs, a strikingly exotic local feature, also number among Iturup's natural resources. They are called "white gold" for their unique healing properties. There are several thermal spa complexes located on the island.

The Therapeutic thermal spa complex Zharkye Vody is located four kilometres from the village of Reidovo in the valley of the Mineralny River. Hot mineral water from deep underground allows for year-long therapeutic and relaxing baths both outdoors and in a tent, where six wooden pools are set up. You can also undergo treatments using healing muds at the complex. This is where you will leave behind problems with your joints or skin. After a therapeutic course of hydrotherapy and balneotherapy at Zharkye Vody, you'll feel young and beautiful again, and sleep like a baby.

Another thermal spa complex, Vannochki, is the ideal place for relaxation with a view of Kuril bay and water temperatures of around 46 degrees Celsius. It is located on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, two kilometres from the city of Kurilsk. The gaseous waters of the complex pleasantly relax and relieve tension. At the complex, you will find peace and tranquillity, and feel strength returning to your reborn body.

There is a camping centre at the foot of Baransky volcano, located on the largest (by volume) thermal river in the world, known as the Kipyaschaya (Boiling) River. The temperature of its water is almost 42 degrees.

These are the most picturesque mineral springs of Iturup island, and in addition to their therapeutic and relaxing effects, you will experience the true delight of their bright colours and the incredible beauty of the local nature.

Don't forget that you need to be careful in visiting hot springs, and before a thermal bath you should consult a specialist.

A journey to the Kuril Islands could become the most remarkable experience of your life — don't put it off! **TLR**

Getting a closer look at the "boiling" lakes of Baransky volcano is scary, but very interesting.

Atsonupuri is another active volcano on Iturup. It is a somma strato-volcano ("a volcano within a volcano"), like Mount Vesuvius.

White cliffs, formed from white-grey pumice, can reach heights of 114 metres.



i HOW TO GET THERE

The Kuril Islands of Kunashir, Shikotan and Iturup are more accessible than they seem. Aurora airline's flights from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk to Iturup or Kunashir are conveniently coordinated with the helicopter flights of Aviashelf airlines, connecting the two islands with one another. This creates the possibility of flying to Shikotan through Iturup in one day (on Mondays and Wednesdays), and from Shikotan to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk via Kunashir (on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays). Aviashelf airlines carries out regular flights on Mi-8 MTV-1 helicopters between the Iturup, Kunashir, and Shikotan islands of the Kuril Chain. The cost of a flight in one direction runs from 2,300 to 3,100 rubles (\$30-40).

Aurora advance ticket sales are carried out on their website, flyaurora.ru

SEAFOOD PARADISE

SAKHALIN AND THE KURIL ISLANDS ARE PRIVATELY CONSIDERED TO BE THE HOMETLAND OF RUSSIA'S MOST DELICIOUS SEAFOOD. WHERE ELSE COULD YOU ENJOY SUCH A VARIETY OF FRESH SEAFOOD? OUR CORRESPONDENT **INNA ZOTOVA** TELLS ALL ABOUT THE DISHES OF ISLAND CUISINE.



Any food lover will delight in the variety of delicacies available.

It's worth a trip to Sakhalin just to try the masterpieces of the island's cuisine. Local dishes perfectly combine the best traditions of their nearby neighbours Korea and Japan. It's no wonder that the island's cuisine took second place in the National Geographic Traveller Awards 2018 in the category "Gastronomic Tourism".

The majority of the ingredients used in cooking are freshly-caught. Many of the ingredients grow underfoot, as the saying goes, or live in the sea, which is within a stone's throw. They include ferns, ramson, burdock, seaweed, sea grapes, squids, crabs, and scallops.

When choosing Korean dishes, be ready for a hearty lunch or dinner — in Sakhalin restaurants, traditional Korean appetizers are served with the main meal, usually spicy radishes, starchy noodles, *kimchi*, or Korean carrot salad.

For lovers of Japanese cuisine, Sakhalin is truly a happy hunting ground. *Sushi*, *sashimi*, *maki*, and dozens of other world-famous dishes stand out thanks to the particular freshness of their ingredients and careful observance of traditional Japanese cooking technology. On Sakhalin, you'll find no few chefs who have worked in Japan itself, and some representatives



Many ingredients for restaurant dishes grow underfoot, as the saying goes, or live in the sea, which is within a stone's throw. They include ferns, ramson, burdock, seaweed, sea grapes, squids, crabs, and scallops.



Tourists come to Sakhalin just for the taste of freshly-caught crab.

The Kamchatka crab is the pride of local cuisine.



within. The cooking process takes up to 20 minutes; there is no need to hurry. Boiled Kamchatka crab has a distinctive bright red colour. When they are ready, arm yourself with patience, and... to scissors! After breaking off an appetizing limb, cut along the sides and remove the juicy and tender meat from within.

Salmon caviar is still the most popular foodstuff among the island's inhabitants and guests. In the summer, you can try "five-minute caviar" — which is almost raw. For export, on the other hand, choose a more salted variety.



Salmon caviar is the most popular foodstuff among the region's inhabitants and guests.



Boiled crab has a distinctive bright red colour.

Sea urchin caviar is called uni in Japanese. It is considered a powerful aphrodisiac, and has rejuvenating properties. Uni has around 30% polyunsaturated fat content (Omega-3 and Omega-6), a large number of vitamins (A, B, C, E, D, B3), and a high iodine content. Thanks to its healthy make-up, this caviar can cleanse your blood, and whole body, of toxins. Some believe that the regular consumption of uni in various dishes drives the record longevity of the Japanese.

Lovers of tender and juicy scallop meat prefer it raw. Often, natives of Sakhalin go to the coast in search of these shells for themselves. Unlike their European counterparts, oysters on Sakhalin reach gigantic sizes of up to 20 cm. Shrimp, especially the large ones known here as *chilim*, delight the island's visitors. Of course, a plate of the island's seafood wouldn't be complete without trumpet-fish, octopus, squid, and other shellfish.

You can buy all these kinds of seafood at the fish market at any time of the year, where these valuable, delicious goods are expertly packaged to ensure the best possible preservation of their freshness. **TLR**



Shrimp, especially the large ones known here as *chilim*, delight the island's visitors. Of course, a plate of the island's seafood wouldn't be complete without trumpet-fish, octopus, squid, and other shellfish. You can buy these delicacies at the fish market.

of the Land of the Rising Sun have even founded their own establishments here.

Some tourists specifically come to Sakhalin for the unparalleled taste of freshly-caught crab, prepared according to all traditional rules. As a matter of fact, freezing fresh crab is not recommended — after cooking it, you risk coming across "empty" limbs.

To cook a fresh Kamchatka crab, you need a large pot or saucepan with a capacity of 15-20 litres, in which you can cook several crabs at once. Fill the pan with sea water, bring it to the boil, and then place whole crabs



Sakhalin Tourist Information Centre
Tel./WhatsApp 8-924-880-60-80
gosakhalin.ru
#GoSakhalin

COLOURFUL PRIMORYE

IN SUMMER, "ALL ROADS LEAD TO SOCHI", AT LEAST FOR RUSSIANS LIVING IN THE WEST OF THE COUNTRY; THOSE IN THE EAST, HOWEVER, YEARN FOR PRIMORYE. GO TO ANY BEACH IN AUGUST-SEPTEMBER AND THE NUMBER PLATES ON DISPLAY WILL BE A GEOGRAPHY LESSON ON THE FAR EAST.

TEXT: EVGENY KONOVALOV



Diving in Primorye is very popular among lovers of the depths.

Primorsky Territory is much more than just sea, although the sea means a lot in these parts. Tourists from various regions come here every summer to swim, sunbathe, dive and enjoy the local seafood delicacies.

On Sochi's Latitude

Vladivostok, the capital of Primorye, almost shares the same latitude as Sochi. Although you won't find palm trees here, the summers are hotter than those of the Caucasus's Black Sea coast. Still, the weather is quite capricious. In June, Vladivostok can be shrouded in a fog which brings a certain mysticism and charm to the city. Local photographers often hunt for beautiful shots in the pre-dawn hours. In July, Vladivostok is sunny and hot, and the city is almost

dead on weekends when everyone rushes to the sea. In August, typhoons pay a visit, bringing the long-awaited freshness and coolness of their rains to Primorye.

The best season, however, comes in September. They also call it "the fourth month of summer". It's sunny every day, but without the stifling heat. The water temperature in the Sea of Japan stays at around 20 degrees until October. In general, the mellow autumn season is the best time to visit Vladivostok. Also, September is the high season of various cultural events of every size in Vladivostok. One such event is the Pacific Meridian Film Festival, which gathers Russia's most prominent film stars for the entire city to come and see on the red carpet.

During the festival, famous guests visit faraway provinces →



The Gamov Peninsula (260 km from Vladivostok) is one of the most picturesque natural sites in southern Primorye.



DESTINATION Primorsky Territory

to hold creative meetings, where they are greeted with true far-eastern hospitality.

Of course, the guests also enjoy the nearby islands, swimming in the wonderfully clean sea, scuba diving, and tasting local seafood delicacies like mussels, sea cucumber, and scallop. Some of the film stars are so engrossed by the seaside beauty that they come here several times a year.

A European City in Asia

The phrase “Vladivostok may be far, but it’s still our city” belongs to the leader of the world proletariat, Vladimir Lenin, and everyone coming to Vladivostok by train sees it engraved on the wall of the train station. On the platform itself there is a sign, “9288 kilometres” — the distance between Primorye and Moscow. Vladivostok is the last station of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

The city is often compared to San Francisco. The first one to make that comparison was Nikita Khrushchev, and it has become a popular one. Nevertheless, Vladivostok has its own unique image. This is a city surrounded by the sea on three sides, a port city with all the elements of port life. It is surrounded by volcanic hills which

offer breath-taking views while narrow streets in the city centre are filled with Japanese cars buzzing around.

Two things strike a visitor to Vladivostok: the complete absence of domestically-produced automobiles and an abundance of beautiful women. The nature of Primorye is truly very generous in producing beauties.

Foreigners often call Vladivostok “a European city in Asia”, and that is one of the reasons they are drawn here. Of course, proximity to Asia has left its mark on the city: you’ll see that in the old city quarters which were built by the Japanese and Chinese, of whom many lived in Vladivostok at the beginning

of the 20th century. When visiting the Primorye capital, be sure to take a tour around the Asian landmarks of the city, which are very interesting and colourful!

During the Russo-Japanese war, Vladivostok was turned into a fortress. One of the landmarks of the city is the Vladivostok Fortress, a museum of fortification architecture. The numerous forts have many secrets to tell. It is said that underground tunnels were dug under the entire city (one of them even leading to the Russky Island). Local diggers are glad to show tourists the dungeons and catacombs, sharing all sorts of horror stories.

It is believed that anyone visiting Vladivostok should achieve



Funicular cars decorated for Tiger Day.



The Golden Bridge — the beloved landmark of Vladivostok.



A perfect view of the Lazurnaya Bay.



Lighthouse on the Basargin Cape in the Eastern Bosphorus.



three things: take a ride on the funicular, take a photo with the Golden Bridge in the background, and visit the extreme point of the mainland at the Tokarevsky lighthouse. The rest is optional, but the city has enough to offer: museums, theatres, art galleries, restaurants and nightclubs. And, of course, the sea...

Southernmost Russia

The name Primorye ("the land near the sea") speaks for itself. The coastline of the region exceeds 900 kilometres, plus about a hundred large and small islands. The Russky, Popov, Reineke islands, the Peschany peninsula — there are plenty of destinations to choose from. The lucky owners of yachts, cruisers and motor boats (of which the number is growing every year) who prefer more secluded locations have plenty of uninhabited islands to choose from.

Interestingly, the southernmost islands of Russia are located in Primorye - the Furu-gelm Islands. Go any further south and your next stop will be Korea. However, getting to those islands is not easy for a mere mortal. The islands belong to the only Marine Reserve in Russia.



Famous Russian actors enjoy participating in the Pacific Meridian Film Festival held in Vladivostok.

Two things strike a visitor to Vladivostok: the complete absence of domestically-produced automobiles and an abundance of beautiful women.

President Vladimir Putin was once so enchanted by this place he spent a whole week here, also enjoying the fresh seafood delicacies. Soon after his visit, the idea of building an oceanarium where guests of Primorye could gaze at the sea and ocean creatures from around the world was envisioned. Primorsky Aquarium is now the largest in Russia and one of the most large-scale scientific and educational complexes in the world.

Primorye's underwater world is abundant and varied, a true El Dorado for divers. Local dive

centres will fully equip you for diving at any spot in Peter the Great Bay, including the area of the Marine Reserve.

Pearls of the Coast

The most well-known of Primorye's beaches outside the region is Shamora. The famous Russian rock bands, Mumiy Troll and Alisa have both glorified Shamora in their songs. Officially it's called the Lazurnaya Bay ("Bay d'Azur"), and a mere twenty years ago the bay was as attractive to tourists as the famous Cote d'Azur. A common scene →

DESTINATION Primorsky Territory

from the old days: thousands of colourful tents occupying every tiny spot of coastline, almost falling into the sea. People from all over the Far East would come here for holidays by the sea. Today Shamora's main visitors are Vladivostokians — on weekends and days off the beach is absolutely packed. Once quite wild, Shamora is now “refined” by guest houses, summer cafés and barbecues, with no tourist tents in sight...

Another famous city beach is Steklyashka (“small piece of glass”). It got its name due to an unusual phenomenon: the

entire coast is covered in small rounded colourful pieces of glass. Steklyashka is one of the only two “glassy” beaches on the planet, the other one is in California.

Every year, when the summer comes, hordes of beach lovers rush to the Primorsky Territory. The entire coast of Primorsky Territory is covered with cars from Khabarovsk, Amur region, Magadan and all across the Far East. The south-west of Primorye, the Khasan region, remains the all-time Mecca of independent wildlife tourism. It's no coincidence that this place is called the "pearl of the Primorye".

Every year, when the summer comes, hordes of beach lovers from across the Far East rush to the Primorsky Territory.



Immerse yourself in the beauty of this land, forget all your worries on the white sand beaches and glorious volcanic hills.

coast". Until very recently, economic activity here was strictly limited as 37% of the Khasan is a protected nature area, making the region ecologically pristine.

Khasan has a welcoming, mild, almost subtropical climate. It's known and loved for its cosy coves and magical beaches, turquoise sea and rich underwater scenery, as well as its fretwork of rocks overgrown with Japanese red pines. The beauty of Khasan is an endless source of inspiration for artists and photographers.

Into the Fog for the Taiga Spirit

Primorye is much more than seas and beaches. After all, the symbol of Primorye is a tiger, the lord of the Ussuri taiga — an audience with whom is not as difficult to get as it may seem. Located within an hour's drive from Vladivostok is a safari park, where about 70 species of the Primorsky region fauna live in close to wild conditions. Those species include two very rare big cats: the Amur tiger and the Far Eastern leopard.

Primorye has always been considered a promising region

The most popular area for kayaking is the coast of Russky Island.



The Amur tiger, symbol of Primorye, can be seen in local reserves and national parks.



The famous city beach, Steklyashka. There are only two "glassy" beaches on the planet, the other one is in California.

for developing ecological tourism. Its mountains, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, ancient extinct volcanoes, and caves are equally unique from the scientific, educational and aesthetic perspectives.

One can choose to be a true pioneer and head to the very north, the most road-free part of the region. These lands offer an unforgettable change to people bored with Thailand and the Maldives (or reluctant to ever go there): life in tents, days filled with fishing for trout and red fish in the refreshing mountain rivers, and rafting.

Not many choose this style of vacation now, but it will

undoubtedly catch on. Each of the six reserves and four national parks in the Primorsky Territory are devoted to developing ecotourism. For instance, the Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, has developed several routes for exploring deep into the taiga and along the coast.

The array of places and types of recreation in Primorye is wide and diverse: from chilling on a pristine beach to studying the geography and biology of Primorye in the wild or going on gastronomic adventures in the local restaurants. Vladivostok and Primorye can fulfil your every wish. **TLR**

"GAME OF THRONES" FANS SHOULD BE HAPPY: IN THE SOUTH OF PRIMORSKY TERRITORY, NEAR THE VILLAGE OF CHISTOVODNOE, THEY CAN VISIT A REAL-LIFE DRAGON KINGDOM.

If you're looking for a vacation equally interesting for adults and children, we recommend you set off on an adventure in search of fairy tale dragons.

The astonishing and mesmerizing rock formations which make up Dragon Park can be found near the village of Chistovodnoe in Lazovsky district. It's impossible not to think of George R. R. Martin's fictional world of the Seven Kingdoms, his famous King's Landing with its Blackwater Bay, and, of course, the gigantic dragons themselves.

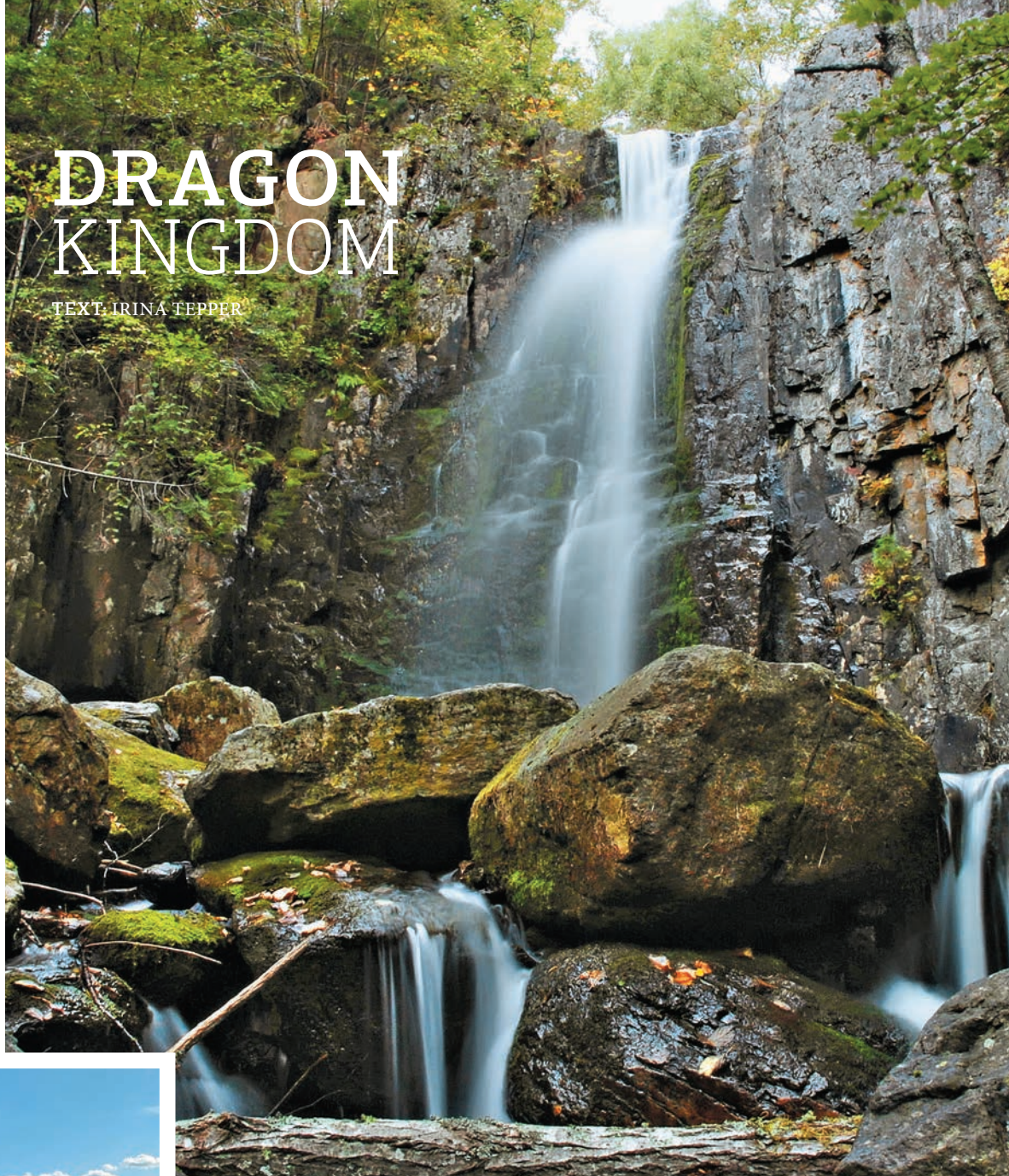
Gigantic Ridges

According to one legend, the spiky rocks in this place are real dragons, turned to stone, that lived here long before humanity. Another version maintains that the rock mass took on these fantastical forms, attracting masses of tourists and photographers, as a result of a centuries-long process of weathering and erosion.



DRAGON KINGDOM

TEXT: IRINA TEPPER



From the village, the climb to the remains of the cliffs by forest path takes around an hour and a half. At the top of the hill, two giant ridges, dragon-like, will captivate your gaze. If you approach and take a closer look, then you can see a dragon's footprint, head, and even baby dragons. Some rocks lie as though strewn about by some cosmic hand. This led to another legend about the origin of these rocks: that they're alien.

The local natural beauty is particularly striking in autumn: numerous oaks with their crowns of yellow leaves stand side-by-side with bright-red maples and emerald cedars. You don't have to worry about ticks in the forest, nor suffer from summer humidity during the upward climb.

It's worth going to this region for at least two days, as there are many interesting sites to see on the way. You can get there by car or as a part of a tour group. Primorsky Territory's Tourist Information Centre will recommend a trustworthy tour company with a tried and tested route.

Waterfalls of Primorye

On the way to Chistovodnoe, you can make a stop at the Benevsky waterfalls, also known as the Yelomovsky waterfalls. It's best to come prepared, as the route to the falls is along a forest path above a stream that takes around five hours for a round trip. The first waterfall is called the "Star of Primorye", and is considered the most beautiful waterfall in the Territory. It is 25 metres tall. A stream of water falls from

the cliff above and breaks loudly upon the rocky ledges below. When setting off on your hike, be careful: plan your timing so that you don't have to go back through the forest in the dark.

There are not many places to spend the night in this district. The bravest of tourists pitch tents right on the rocks of the park, while others go down to

the Kievka river, which loops around the road, and camp out there in their tents or cars. Eight kilometres from Kievka village there's a camp site called "Khutor Zapovedny" where you can spend the night, but you need to book in advance. Additionally, there's almost no cell-service here. We recommend that you set off on this journey

The "Star of Primorye" is considered the most beautiful waterfall in the region.

From above, the spiky rock faces look like dragons turned to stone.

You can see "wings" and other body parts of those mythical beings in the rock formations.

Doesn't it look like the print of a giant paw?

From the top of the hill you can see two gigantic ridges.

as part of a tour group, whose organizers will secure your safety and lodgings.

Red Deer and Radon Baths

Another interesting place on the road to the "dragons" is the red-deer farm. It is a 10-minute drive from Lazo village, in the direction of Benevsky village. The farm is home to red deer, brought there a few years ago from the Altai Territory. At the farm, you can feed the animals or take a photo as a souvenir.

The final destination of the route is Chistovodnoe (around 330 km from Vladivostok). The village is located in a valley between two hills, and is a dead-end —



the road doesn't go any further. There's also a sanatorium in the village, where musculo-skeletal disorders are treated by means of health-giving radon baths. It just so happens that in the valley of the Chistovodnaya river there are seven mineral water outlets containing the radioactive gas radon.

There's no doubt that a trip to Lazovsky district is an unforgettable adventure, whose sites will leave you with many powerful emotions. **TLR**

For detailed information, consult the Tourist Information Centre: visit-primorye.ru. Instagram: @visit.primorye.



A VISIT TO MANPUPUNER

TEXT: **ALEXEY EGOROV**

THE UNTOUCHED BEAUTY OF NATURE CAPTIVATES NOT ONLY TOURISTS, BUT ALSO THOSE WHO WORK TO PROTECT IT. **IRINA CHERDAKOVA**, A VOLUNTEER, SHARED EXCLUSIVELY WITH "TOURISM & LEISURE IN RUSSIA" HER IMPRESSIONS OF WORK IN THE PECHORA-ILYCHSKY NATURE RESERVE IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOMI.

Back when I was a very young child, my family had a framed photograph of the Stone Pillars hanging in our kitchen. I would point at it and say, “I want to go there!” The childhood dream remained just a dream until two years ago, when I learned that the company “Severn Ural” (Northern Ural) was recruiting volunteers to build an ecological trail on the Manpupuner plateau in the Pechora-Ilychsky Nature Reserve. Two weeks on the plateau! Food and accommodation included! It was a gift of fate. I packed my rucksack and was off. At the end of my two weeks there, I realized that I wasn’t ready to leave. I ended up spending the whole summer there, and came back in 2017, also for the summer season; I plan to do the same this summer.

A Trail by the House

In 2016, together with the other volunteers, I was involved in building a path from the house of the Reserve’s inspectors to the Pillars themselves. We collected stones on the slopes, took them in barrels to the location of the future trail, crushed them with a stone crusher, and tamped them. We worked full days, from morning until evening. It was physically hard work, mosquitoes and midges were a nuisance, and sometimes the weather was horrible. At first it was difficult to keep up. We got tired, we cried, we put balms on our calluses and scratches. But once you get accustomed to it, all you ever notice is the unspeakable beauty around you — and the results of your labour. The plateau has damp areas where water collects. On their way to the Pillars tourists would try to avoid these damp areas and make new paths, thus destroying the natural landscape of the plateau. A year after our work first began, the trail laid out by the volunteers blended into the mountain’s landscape, and animals started using it too. The old paths remained only in mossy areas: moss regenerates very slowly.

Last year, volunteers built a bridge across the Pechora River and two of its tributaries. Some volunteers from Lithuania and Great Britain tried so hard that on the first day — or rather in the first ten minutes — they managed to break two sledge hammers used for hammering the supports of the bridge into place! It was also then that some of the muddiest sections of the trail were covered with footbridges on stilts. These works are planned to be continued this year.

Girls March Ahead!

Last summer I wasn’t working with a sledge hammer. My task was to accompany groups of tourists from the Vologda border — the edge of the reserve — to the Pillars and back. We offer the tourists the chance to take part in the improvement of the route on a voluntary basis. Men would walk straight ahead with stakes on their shoulders, occasionally allowing themselves to swear. They simply could not throw their loads down — not when in front of them a young woman was walking along, carrying the same kind of stakes, saying, “Just throw it down if you’re tired!”

The number of volunteers helping out at the reserve varies from year to year. What doesn’t change is that they are always wonderful people. They’d go to the ends of the earth with you — or more appropriately, →

From afar, the Pillars look like giants suddenly turned to stone. An old Mansy legend tells of the giant Torev and his brothers who were thus punished for attempting to abduct the fair Aym.

Today only taking pictures by the Pillars is allowed; however, there was a time when tourists would leave writing on them, or even climb them with Alpinist hooks.

From the windows of a helicopter flying above the reserve the taiga is visible. Bears and moose live here in abundance, and in the spring and summer period so do mosquitoes and midges.

Two weeks on the plateau! Food and accommodation included! It was a gift of fate. I packed my rucksack and was off. At the end of my two weeks there, I realized that I wasn’t ready to leave.



NATURE RESERVE **Komi**

perhaps, to the heart of the forest. Most of them are family men. At the end of the day those strong, weather-beaten men would talk about missing their wives and children, and that was really very sweet! As for myself, well, a woman in the house always means tidiness and comfort. I was good at handling different rags, processing leftover food into pancakes, and motivating tourists to help us carry construction materials.

The absence of a shower was the most difficult thing for me personally. We city dwellers take washing the dishes, showering or having a bath at any time of the day absolutely for granted. Here, tap water is non-existent, you must bring it. Every drop is precious. At some point, a helicopter brought us a sanitary module: a bath-house with a bio-toilet. That new addition put an end to our “wild” living.

The tourist flow increases every year. Before the helipad and the trail were built, the reserve was closed to the public (apart from some illicit guests). Today 1,200 visitors per season are officially allowed. They fly in by helicopter, come on foot from the Dyatlov pass or from Ivdel, or by vehicle in ATVs and jeeps. Transport, of course, is only permitted to go as far as the edge of the reserve — the rest of the way to the Pillars is on foot only.

Many interesting people, all of them eager for adventure, have come here. I particularly recall one young lady who cut her leg on a stone and walked to the border of the reserve on pain killers. The guys who were there helped her out by carrying her things. They were running out of meds, and in fact, she needed surgery on her leg. We came to the Vologda boundary in the evening. A helicopter was due in the morning. She was to be evacuated, which meant that she would be →





Before the helipad and the trail were built, the reserve was closed to the public (apart from some illicit guests). Today 1,200 visitors per season are officially allowed. They fly in by helicopter, or by vehicle in ATVs and jeeps.

All visits to the Pillars must be supervised by the reserve's inspectors.

Everyone who comes to the Manipuner plateau now walks only on the gravel path to allow nature to restore itself.

The pillars are beautiful at all times, but especially in the rays of the setting sun.

The Dyatlov Pass. Nothing special, just stone outcrops and a past tragedy.

One of the Pechora taiga's signature features are berry fields in sphagnum swamps, with bright spots of cloudberry, cranberry and blueberry adorning the white moss.

There are many places suitable for a tent on the way to the reserve.





The landscapes of the reserve are beautiful at any time of the year, but especially in late summer and early autumn, when the mountain tundra is replete with an abundance of colours and the northern berries ripen.

The Pechora-Ilych taiga sea at sunset.

The 11km trail from the Vologda boundary to the Manpupuner plateau. Without it, the road to the pillars would be extremely muddy.

The Pechora River is the water gate of the reserve.

The reindeer is one of the reserve's most beautiful inhabitants.

Although considered tame, the reindeer lead a semi-wild life. After all, it is the human who follows the deer in their constant wanderings, and not the other way round.

missing her chance of going to the Pillars and back. In the morning, she was hysterical: the entire group was getting ready to walk to the plateau, leaving her behind. And yet she had walked all that way! Was it only to stop and turn around barely 10 kilometres from the destination she had dreamed of reaching! It was very difficult to get her to calm down and explain to her that health was of a far greater importance.

My Wild Beasts

There are quite a few different zones on the reserve, each of them an attraction in itself, each in its own style and with its own inspectors — or “locals”. Take, for instance, the Torreporeiz, ridges of stunning beauty — the name translates from Mansi as “Stone City”. I had dreamed of seeing them, but it turned out that the territory was closed. Besides the Pillars, you can also visit our country’s first ever moose farm. Founded in 1949, it is located in the village of Yaksha. Another beautiful zone is Shezhym-Pechorsky. It stands on a small cliff on the Pechora river; several of the reserve’s pedestrian and water routes pass by it.

Bears frequented our trails, sometimes overturning the wooden walkways across swampy places as they played. To be on the safe side, I always carried

bells with me. In theory, this was to warn the animals that I was approaching, so that they would get scared and leave. In reality, I once experienced the opposite. It was a warm sunny day. I was walking on an old track winding between the trees when, some 20 meters before the turn (I counted the steps later — when you’re afraid, you naturally exaggerate), I spotted something moving, and looked up. At that moment, a large hairy beast jumps from the path into the thicket and almost noiselessly makes its way through the fallen trees and driftwood into the wilderness. My first thought was: my, it’s so big and fluffy! At first, I wasn’t frightened or alarmed, but wondered to myself what touching its fur, so beautiful in the sun, would have felt like. And then, when I realized that the bear had heard and smelled me from afar, but stayed there to look at me out of curiosity, I felt afraid. Had the animal chosen to act differently, the outcome, too, would have been different.

One evening before going to bed, I went to the Pillars to watch some buzzards hunt at twilight. Ahead of me, perhaps a hundred meters away, I saw the silhouette of a fox next to the trail. I stopped, and the fox walked in my direction — I was jubilant that it was about to run right past me! But when the animal, having run up to two meters from me, lay down on the ground right there, I was shocked. I did not expect this from a wild animal. It was a very young, lean male fox... and a very curious one. I got down and sat motionless. We spent about ten minutes like that. Then the fox grew bolder, approached, pushed my sneaker with its nose, and then, tried to bite it. I untied the lace and handed it to the fox. A game began. Like a little playful dog, he pulled the lace with his teeth, tried to rip it from me, falling on his front legs and jumping around me. He didn’t allow me to touch him and didn’t follow me home. But he left me with a memory for life. **TLR**

GETTING THERE



How to Get There

The easiest, but also the most expensive way to visit the Pechora-Ilychsky Nature Reserve is to order a helicopter tour from Perm.

A one-day excursion will cost you 45 thousand roubles (about \$600). Another option is to gather a group of friends, take a train to the city of Ivdel, order a local “GAZ-66” or a “Ural” transfer to the Auspiya river and walk with your backpacks along the trail for about 110 kilometres. You need to get a pass to the Reserve six months prior.



Where to Stay

As an option, you can stay in the mountain modules on the Reserve’s territory on the Vologda boundary. If you are hiking or skiing, bring tents. In winter, you will need two- or three-layer tents made with the use of

a stove in mind. Last year, a five-day trip that included coming to and from by helicopter, accommodation in a mountain camping site and daily trips to the plateau on snowmobiles cost 80 thousand roubles (\$1,050).

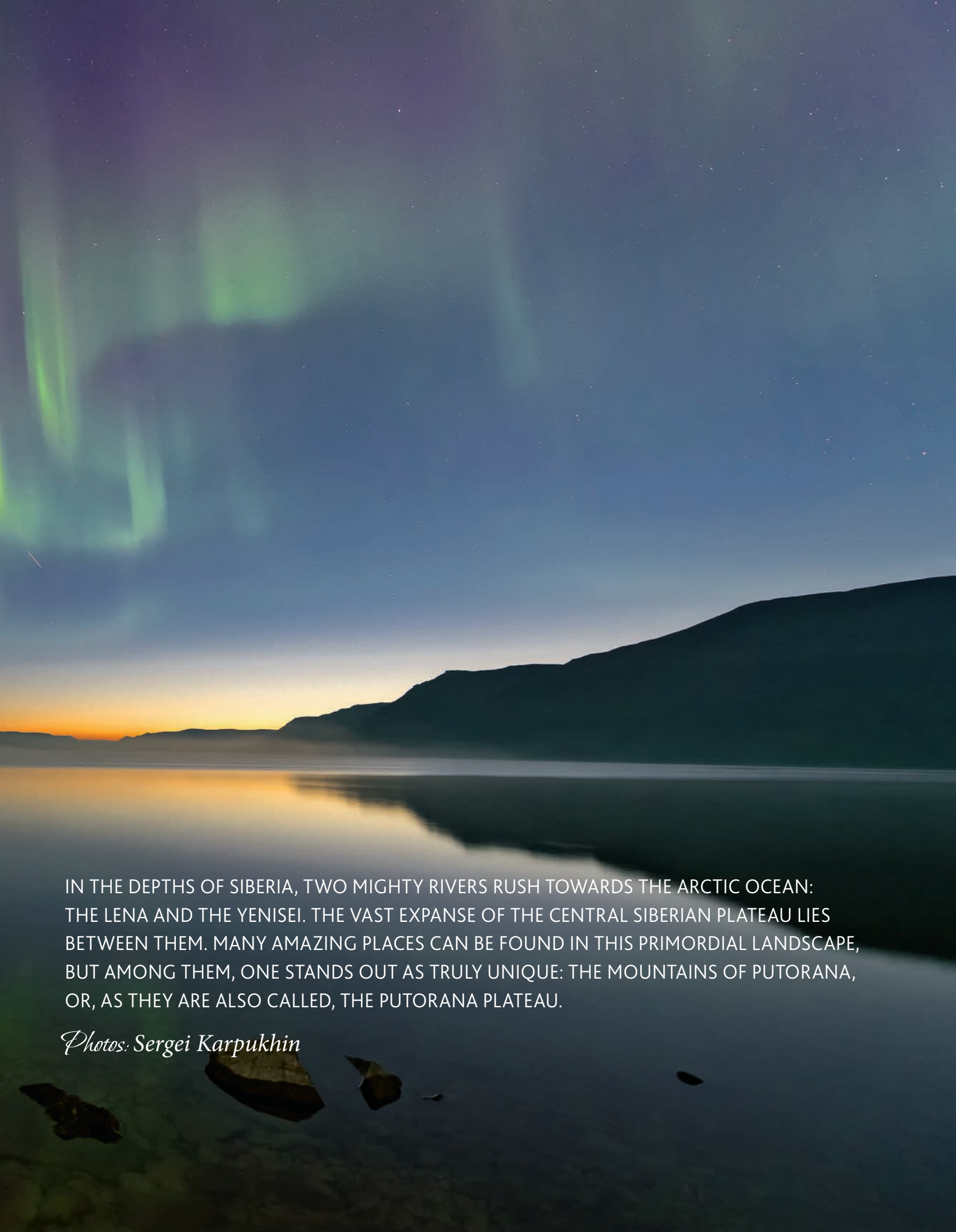


What to See

The Dyatlov Pass, Mount Otorten and the stone “gate” at its foot... It was this mountain that Igor Dyatlov and his team were attempting to reach back in 1959, when the notorious incident occurred. In the village of Yaksha you can pay a visit to the world’s first elk farm. The reserve features numerous sections, each unique in its own way, but Shezhym-Pechora is probably the most picturesque of them all. Don’t miss out on a trip to find the source of the great northern river Pechora in the mountains.

Early September is a very interesting time in the Putoranas. While in the summer the midnight sun circles the sky day and night, by September the darkness is returning little by little, meaning the Northern Lights are visible. But the sun only dips below the horizon, and, leaving red streaks in the sky, does not allow itself to be forgotten.

THE LOST WORLD *of Putorana*

A photograph of the aurora borealis (Northern Lights) over a body of water. The aurora is visible as green and blue streaks in the dark sky. The water is calm, reflecting the aurora and the mountains in the background. The mountains are silhouetted against a bright orange and yellow sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

IN THE DEPTHS OF SIBERIA, TWO MIGHTY RIVERS RUSH TOWARDS THE ARCTIC OCEAN:
THE LENA AND THE YENISEI. THE VAST EXPANSE OF THE CENTRAL SIBERIAN PLATEAU LIES
BETWEEN THEM. MANY AMAZING PLACES CAN BE FOUND IN THIS PRIMORDIAL LANDSCAPE,
BUT AMONG THEM, ONE STANDS OUT AS TRULY UNIQUE: THE MOUNTAINS OF PUTORANA,
OR, AS THEY ARE ALSO CALLED, THE PUTORANA PLATEAU.

Photos: Sergei Karpukhin

IN FOCUS **Putorana**





The Bolshoy Kureysky Waterfall is the largest in Russia in terms of flow rate.

IN FOCUS **Putorana**

Sunrises and sunsets —
dubbed "operating time"
by photographers —
are not to be missed.





Lake Yt-Kyuel. Translated from the Dolgan language it means something like Dog's Lake, and as such is often called that. It is still in the Putorana Reserve's buffer zone, but at the far end is a ranger's hut, and beyond that lies the reserve.



IN FOCUS **Putorana**

The Putorana Plateau is a land of waterfalls. It would be almost impossible to calculate how many, but you'll come across them on practically every stream.

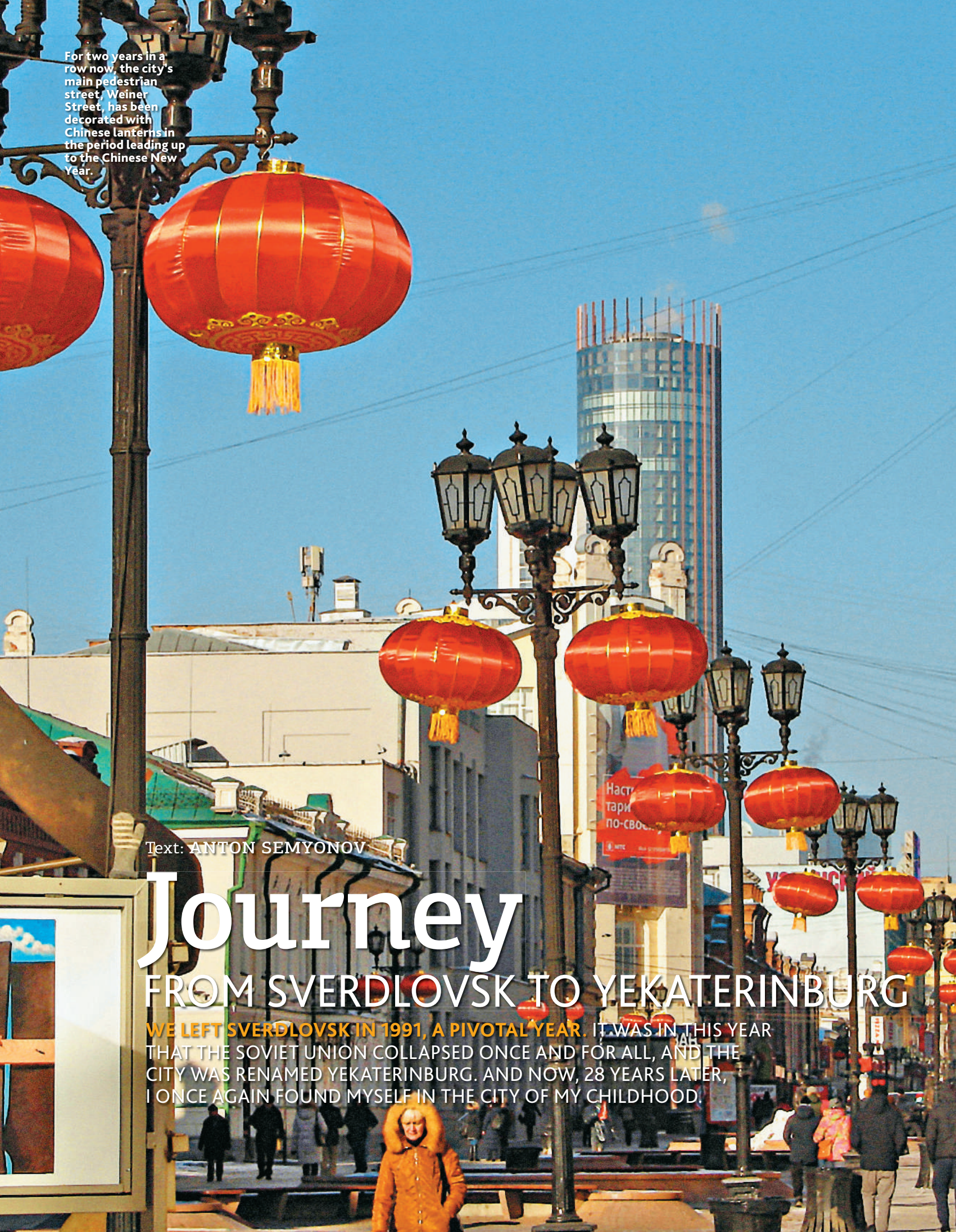






Dog's Lake (Ozero Sobach'ye). The shorelines of the lakes in the Putorana range are not so simple for a photographer. Or rather, their foregrounds are of little interest — but you'll often find rocky promontories from which an incredible birds-eye view opens up.





For two years in a row now, the city's main pedestrian street, Weiner Street, has been decorated with Chinese lanterns in the period leading up to the Chinese New Year.

Text: ANTON SEMYONOV

Journey

FROM SVERDLOVSK TO YEKATERINBURG

WE LEFT SVERDLOVSK IN 1991, A PIVOTAL YEAR. IT WAS IN THIS YEAR THAT THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSED ONCE AND FOR ALL, AND THE CITY WAS RENAMED YEKATERINBURG. AND NOW, 28 YEARS LATER, I ONCE AGAIN FOUND MYSELF IN THE CITY OF MY CHILDHOOD.

Happens in life, you experience a feeling when you return many years later to a place you once lived and with which a piece of your destiny is linked — something personal, meaningful, but already irrevocably in the past. You walk around with apprehension, wondering if your expectations and memories of those days will match up with the scene that you see today — will you be disappointed, will this reunion unravel a part of a long-past era?

I was seven years old when we moved from Voronezh to Sverdlovsk. First year at school, first school crush, first friends, first fight... After warm, southern Voronezh, the Urals welcomed

me in rather severe style: winter temperatures reached -40°C , and everyone was walking around in felt boots and fur mittens to protect themselves from the cold. The summer, however, was hot, and outside of the city there were huge mosquitos and ticks. Only thick clothing would keep you safe.

Arrival

And so, after nearly three decades, I once again found myself in the city of my childhood. Nowadays, it's called Yekaterinburg. I arrived at Koltsovo, a modern and well-designed airport, with Ural Airlines and from there a taxi (Yandex) to the centre, which came to 500 roubles (\$6.50) and took a half hour.

During the five days I spent in the capital of the Urals, I often used taxis and noticed that the cars were quite shabby and almost always dirty.

On the third day I couldn't help (rather cautiously) asking the driver "Why don't you clean the car?"

"I was going to today," came the laconic reply.

The drivers I came across were all different. One was worried about a loan — he'd taken out a mortgage, wanted to pay it off early, but the bank wouldn't recalculate the interest.

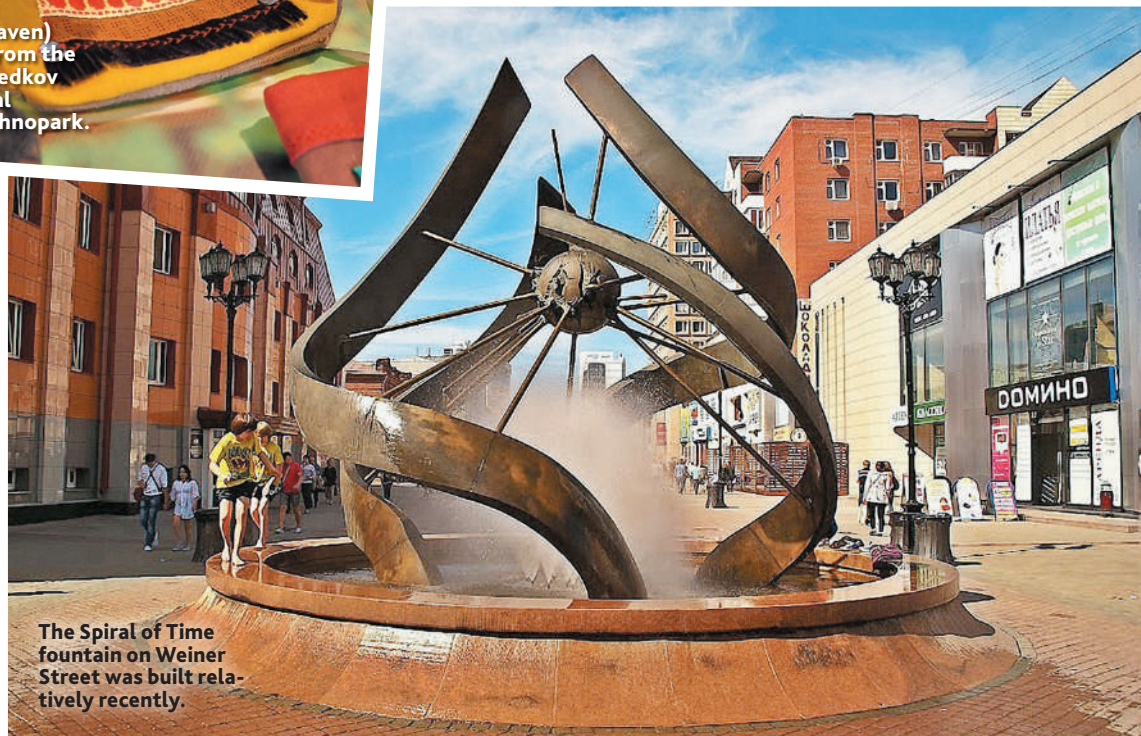
Another was a very talkative driver from Kyrgyzstan — a former Soviet republic, now an independent country. He came to the Urals in his uncle's footsteps 10 years ago and ended up staying. He has loads of friends in Moscow, but he doesn't want to move there, prefers things here. He got married here, and had kids. Once a year the family travels to see his relatives in Bishkek, and they visit the famous lake Issyk-Kul'. Driving 2,500 km across the hot Kazakh steppe is something he enjoys. He lives, as he mentioned, in the Sortirovka district, where the Yekaterinburg-Sortirovochny railway station is — a place that raises another vivid childhood memory.

In 1988, when we still lived here, a powerful explosion happened at that station. A railway train →

Urin-ekva
(woman-raven)
souvenir from the
Zemlya Predkov
("Ancestral
Lands") ethnopark.



The Spiral of Time
fountain on Weiner
Street was built rela-
tively recently.



carrying explosive materials (47 tonnes of TNT and 40 tonnes of RDX) rolled down a slope and hit a stationary cargo train on the tracks, right next to a warehouse full of flammable lubricant oils. The explosion was so powerful that we felt it in our home 8km away from the station — the walls and floor shook as if there were an earthquake, and somewhere close by windows shattered. My parents, having seen the mushroom cloud from the window of our apartment, thought a nuclear war had started. Pieces of roofing felt, ash, and cinders fell from the sky for the whole of the next day.

Skyscrapers, Skyscrapers...

I stayed in the hi-tech Four Elements hotel in the very centre of the city, from which it was a stone's throw to our old house. Almost immediately I found the 1905 Square ("Ploshchad' 1905 goda"), where the city's main events and parades happen. Lenin is still standing on the same spot, and in the building that once housed the city's Council of People's Deputies there is now the city administration. Next door, a huge shopping centre has appeared, called Passage, and near the house where we lived for five years another 42-storey block of apartments has been



There is an incredible panorama of Yekaterinburg from the viewing platform in the Vysotsky skyscraper.

Yekaterinburg is thought to be the most compact large city (with over one million inhabitants) in Russia — perhaps that's why in recent years so many skyscrapers have been built here.



Performances in the Kolyada Theatre are known for their originality.

The Stone Flower fountain on Labour Square ("Ploshchad' Truda"): the oldest in the city.

Figures made from scotch tape have appeared on the city's streets — they are an installation by the artist Mark Jenkins.

built, called "February Revolution". A new era, but the same old names.

Yekaterinburg is thought to be the most compact large city (with over one million inhabitants) in Russia — perhaps that's why in recent years so many skyscrapers have been built here.

In the very first one, a 52-storey business centre called "Vysotsky", there is a viewing platform — a popular restaurant, Vertical,





Sculptures near the Museum of History, Science, and Technology of the Sverdlovsk Railway.



located on the second-highest floor with panoramic windows and a great view over the city. Every year athletes and amateurs take the skyscraper by storm: a competition is held to see who can reach the top floor the quickest, with more than 300 runners from various cities competing. There are record-breakers too, like Ivan Kuznetsov, a teacher from Pervouralsk, who completed the race in 4 minutes 42 seconds, taking first place. All winners receive prize money from the organisers.

Three years ago on Boris Yeltsin Street (formerly called 9th January Street), the 209-metre-high “Iset” tower was built, containing apartments and pent-houses. It was the first building in the city’s CBD, Yekaterinburg-City, funded through investment by the Ural Metallurgical Company. The stylish first-floor restaurant Korova (“Cow”) serves juicy steaks and other European dishes.

The 24-storey building of the Sverdlovsk Region government, also known as the White House, is also situated on this street. The House of Soviets stood here until 1991, and at the time it was the highest building in the city.

The main tourist attraction on this street is probably the Yeltsin Centre. Tourists and visitors to the city are well advised to take a trip to this modern educational-cultural-museum complex, guarded by a white marble memorial to Boris Yeltsin at the entrance. It is here that red diplomas are handed out to the best graduates of the Ural Federal University (formerly Ural Polytechnic, from which Yeltsin himself graduated).

Yeltsin Centre

Of course, the Yeltsin Centre is today one of the most famous and recognisable of Yekaterinburg’s brands. The Yeltsin Foundation should thank its critics →



A panorama of the city centre from the pond on the Iset river.



The hi-tech interior of the 4-star Four Elements hotel.

Getting There



How to get there

Tickets from Moscow to Yekaterinburg will set you back between \$44 and \$52, with a flight time of 2 hours 20 minutes. A train ticket will cost around the same, and the journey time is more than 24 hours.



Where to Stay

The huge range of hotels catering to all tastes and budgets is one of the city’s advantages for tourists. A room for two in the 4-star Park Inn costs around \$53, in the Four Elements from \$40, and in the Hotel Onegin from \$36.



Where to Eat

The city has a huge number of cafés and restaurants; on 8th of March Street alone there are more than 70! Try the oxtail soup in Gastrol pub, blini with caviar in Dubrovin, delicious cakes and desserts in the “Nye Terty, a Terty” café.



What to Buy

Crockery and other works of Sysert porcelain, various pieces crafted from Ural stone, creative souvenirs from the shops in the Yeltsin Centre.





The Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre is one of the most famous attractions of modern Yekaterinburg.

for this too, the most ardent of which is the famous film director Nikita Mikhalkov: the Oscar winner has drawn attention to the centre's work so often that it not only guaranteed the centre's recognisability, but was a form of advertisement in its own right. "What's so terrible about it?" viewers wonder, and then go and visit the "ghastly" place worth \$185 million.

It must be said that the museum itself clings to its defences on all fronts. Tour guides forbade us journalists from taking videos in the bus, which had been converted into a cinema where Naina Yeltsin (Boris Yeltsin's wife), Tatyana Yumasheva (his daughter) and other famous people were being shown on screen. The heroic image of the first democratically elected president (who, in point of fact, inspires a sense of dissatisfaction in many) is projected from the moment you enter the

museum to the moment you leave it. The exhibits are all very interesting, modern, and creative. An American company developed the concept of the centre based on that of US Presidential libraries — if only we had more museums like this.

The Yeltsin Centre is a modern facility — aside from the museum itself, cafés, restaurants, stores, gift shops, vinyl stores, fashion brands and offices can be found across its six floors. You can even rent office- or event-space. The centre's own programme is pretty full, too: there are lectures, conferences, master-classes, cinema showings, and discussion panels every day... along with plenty of scandals. As we were leaving the centre in the evening, a group of men with hastily written signs were standing on the street near the entrance, protesting against a lecture being held about same-sex relationships. A few police officers stood nearby, clearly wondering what to do. Then some fire-fighters drove up, and people started evacuating the building. Apparently someone had called the police claiming to have planted a bomb; the protesters quickly withdrew.

300th Anniversary Approaching

During my trip, the Yeltsin Centre was hosting the "Bolshoy Ural" international tourist forum, organised by the Centre for Touristic Development of Sverdlovsk Region and attended by guests from other countries and regions of Russia. At the same time the "Tourist Souvenir" competition was running and local craftsmen were showing off their creations: metalware, swords, knives, stone crafts (there they are, the real Ural gems!), and various dolls.



Protesters and proponents of family values at the Yeltsin Centre.



This "seagull" remembers Boris Yeltsin from the time he headed the Sverdlovsk Regional Communist Party Committee.



A vinyl shop in the Yeltsin Centre: a rich collection in the home of Russian rock.

An exhibition of Sysert porcelain at the Museum of Architecture and Design of the Ural University of Architecture and Art.



In 1723, a dam was built on the Iset river to serve the needs of the Yekaterinburg Mechanical Plant. The city's birth is linked with the opening of this factory 300 years ago.

Handmade souvenir dolls from the Zemlya Predkov ethnopark.



Sheet-forging hammer from 1826 at the Museum of Architecture and Design.

The forum began with the opening of the Sysert porcelain exhibition in the Museum of Architecture and Design of the Ural State University for Architecture and Art. The museum is located in the Historical park, on the so-called "Plotinka" ("Dam") — one of the city's main attractions. A dam was built on this part of the Iset river in 1723, in order to serve the needs of the newly-opened Yekaterinburg Metallurgical Plant. The city's birth is linked to the opening of the factory, and in 2023 Yekaterinburg will celebrate its 300-year anniversary.

Sysert porcelain is a folk-art craft that appeared at the end of the 19th century. Nowadays, not only traditional dishes, teacups, teapots and services are made in the Sysert factory, but also porcelain icons! The tea services are particularly popular, and are decorated with the faces of the last Russian emperor Nicholas II, killed in Yekaterinburg in 1918. With the support of the governor, a new production complex is being planned for the factory, where more than 100 people are employed.

In the Footsteps of the Royal Family

Perhaps every Orthodox believer who comes to the capital of the Urals will visit the Church on the Blood. It was built on a hill →

JOURNEY Sverdlovsk Region

on the exact spot where the engineer Nikolai Ipatiev's house once stood, and in which Nicholas II, his family, and four servants were held under arrest and then shot on the night of July 17th, 1918. In 1977, the Politburo ordered that the house be demolished. Yeltsin, who was at that time the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk Regional Communist Party Committee, carried out the task. Consecrated in 2003, the church is one of the city's main tourist attractions.

Interestingly, Yekaterinburg used to have a street named after Rimma Yurovskaya, one of the organisers of the Komsomol youth movement in the Urals and the daughter of Yakov Yurovsky, chief executioner of the royal family. On request of the city's residents, the street was renamed in 1992 to Vladimir Vysotsky Street.

After visiting the church, I left the city for Ganina Yama ("Ganya's Pit"), the place where the remains of the murdered royal family were thrown into a mineshaft.

The Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Royal Passion-bearers was built here between 2000 and 2003. The complex consists of seven wooden churches, one for each of the murdered members of the royal family. Three memorials have also been erected on the site: one for Nicholas II, one for Empress Alexandra Feodorovna and one for their children.

This quiet place in the pine forest is very tranquil and gives guests the chance to learn about the history of the royal family and their

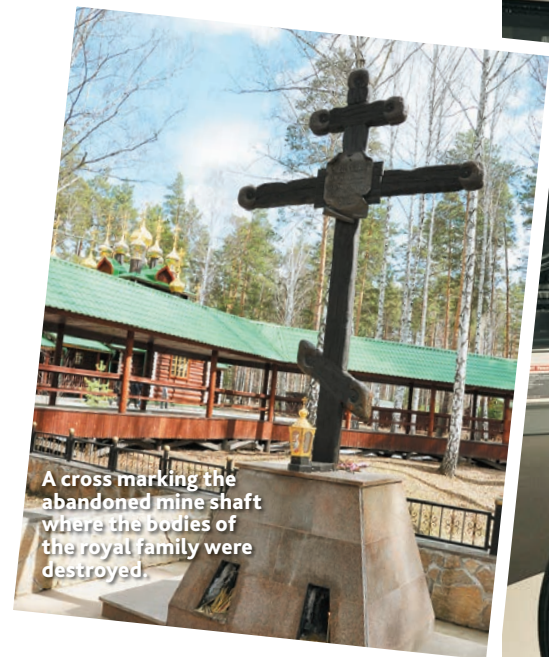
demise. A platform surrounds the mineshaft and a cross was erected nearby, and in one of the churches a museum dedicated to the royal family has been opened. Here you can read about the details of the murder, which were compiled by the investigator for high-priority cases, Nikolai Sokolov.

Excursions around the monastery must be booked in advance. Getting out of there is also not a particularly easy task: the internet and mobile connection is bad. But if necessary, you'll be able to call for a taxi, and from there to the city centre will cost 350 roubles (around \$5).

Proper Businessman

Yekaterinburg has a nearby satellite city, Verkhnyaya Pyshma, with a population of more than 70,000

Rimma Yurovskaya Street — named after the daughter of the Cheka member Yakov Yurovsky, who was the chief executioner of the Tsar and his family — was renamed to Vladimir Vysotsky Street in 1992 by request of the city's residents.



A cross marking the abandoned mine shaft where the bodies of the royal family were destroyed.



The Orders of the Russian Empire of the imperial family are kept in the museum at Ganina Yama.

The icon shop in the Monastery of the Holy Royal Passion-Bearers.



and the headquarters of the global metallurgical giant, the Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company. Its general director and co-owner Andrey Kozitsyn occupies 22nd place in the Forbes 2020 list of Russia's wealthiest businessmen. He was born and lives in Verkhnyaya Pyshma, and invests the company's earnings in the city: he has built sports palaces, museums, churches, parks. The population is growing and housing is being built; people want to come here for good work and pay.

One of Andrey Kozitsyn's favourite places is the Museum Complex of Military and Civilian Technologies, which we visited with some fellow journalists. In 10 years, the museum has collected more than 500 pieces of military equipment, while the Museum of Automotive Technology, 20th Century AUTO, houses the biggest collection of retro vehicles, motorcycles, and bicycles in Russia. Vehicles spanning more than 130 years are displayed in the new 4-storey building, and the first floor is filled with vintage foreign-made cars — all of which were sold by their owners at auctions. All the cars are in working order and perfect condition, so much so that it's



a distinctly St Petersburg word for “kerb”. I’m not in St Petersburg, am I? Russia’s cultural capital? Yekaterinburg was breaking up in front of me, with this new, unexplored side of it... And for the rest of my time in the city I was convinced: people in this city are ordinary, cultured, polite. They’ve started to monetise the common expression “you’re, what, from the Urals?” and now it appears on socks and cards sold in the souvenir shops. So, I bought some as a keepsake. **TLR**



In the Automotive Technology Museum 20th Century AUTO, there is a collection of cars and motor vehicles spanning 130 years of history, including a minibus from the film “Kidnapping, Caucasian Style”.

Souvenir plate “The Urals — the land of gems”.

hard to peel yourself away! In total, the museum’s collection includes more than 160 cars and almost as many motorcycles and bicycles.

Instead of an Epilogue

Before trekking to another cult spot in Yekaterinburg, the Kolyada Theatre, I stopped for a snack in a café opposite my dear old School No. 9. There were lots of young people there, obviously students, but the civilised, measured speech of two boys with rucksacks at the neighbouring table stood out. Hearing the word porebrik, I almost choked on my coffee — that’s



The Black Gold Capital

THE TYUMEN REGION, LOCATED WITHIN A TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR FLIGHT FROM MOSCOW, MAY WELL BE ONE OF THE MOST UNUSUAL DESTINATIONS FOR A LONG WEEKEND. READ ON ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT, AND WHY A TRIP HERE IS AN ABSOLUTE MUST. REVIEW BY IVAN NIKOLAEV.

Your amazing journey in West Siberia will start with your arrival at its regional centre, the city of Tyumen. The first city to be built in Siberia, Russia's oil and gas capital holds vast promise in its development.

A City of Happy People

Its residents have dubbed it "the best city on Earth". Studies and surveys held over recent years have shown Tyumen as ranking the highest in terms of standard of living and "happiness index" in all

of Russia. To begin to understand why Tyumen's people are so in love with their city, a visitor needs to simply take a tour of its most popular sites and attractions, like the four-level embankment of the Tura River, the merchant-quarter full of beautiful mansions adorned with hallmark Siberian carvings, its theatres, museums and, of course, atmospheric cafés. Stroll around the inviting Gilevskaya grove, Zatyumensky Ecopark or some of the city's other green nooks — and find your own happiness index escalating, too.

Siberian Cuisine

Many of the city's restaurants and cafés offer traditional Siberian menus. The locals are unanimous in mentioning the restaurant Chum (a chum is a traditional Siberian tent) among the city's most interesting gourmet spots. It offers both a tasty meal along with authentic impressions of the region's history. You will

Russia's only four-level embankment, complete with sculptures and fountains, is a favourite leisure site with the residents of Tyumen.

The region's main specialty are its signature hot springs, with over twenty of them located in the immediate vicinity of the region's capital.

The carved wooden front pieces which traditionally adorn the facades of old merchant houses can also be seen on newer buildings. They are the work of skilled modern artisans.



The Black Gold of Siberia tour features the history of Siberia's development, a tour of an oil-extraction site, and even participation in the oilmen's initiation ritual.

These are the exquisite dishes served at the popular "museum restaurant", Chum.

Every visitor takes a moment to sit on Grigory Rasputin's antique Vienna chair which is believed to bring good luck and professional success.

be surprised to find its waiters to be knowledgeable tour guides as they tell you fascinating stories about the geologists who came to conquer the taiga near Tyumen in the 1960s. The most popular dishes offered in Chum are muksun *stroganina* (a delicacy made of thinly sliced frozen fish) and venison salad. By the way, this restaurant-museum was consecrated by a real Siberian shaman, and it is believed that if you make a wish while there, it will definitely come true.

Some of Tyumen's restaurants cook using recipes dating back to the 1700s, like vinaigrette with milk mushrooms or the 'Olivier'

A visitor simply needs to take a tour of Tyumen's most popular sites, like the embankment of the Tura River, the merchant-quarter, its theatres, museums and, of course, atmospheric cafés.

salad with crayfish tails. Visitors fond of experimental cuisine are in for exclusive treats — fusion dishes based on high merchant style cookery and culinary hits of the USSR, to name but a few.

Hot Springs

Tyumen's calling card is its natural hot springs — the area around the region's capital boasts over twenty of them. The temperature of the mineral water gushing from the bowels of the Earth ranges from +36 to + 45°C. Bathing in these springs is not merely pleasant and relaxing — the procedure triggers healing processes in the body and tones the skin.

Joining the Gas and Oil Community

In the early days of oil and gas development in Western Siberia, enthusiasts and romantics from all over the USSR gathered here. Presently, 60% of Russia's national

raw material resources are concentrated in the Tyumen region. In the course of the captivating "Siberia's Black Gold" tour you'll learn about the history of Siberia's development, witness the oil-extracting process, eat black fish ukha (fish soup) and even go through the oilmen initiation rite.

Rasputin's Domain

On the way from Tyumen to Tobolsk be sure to stop at the village of Pokrovskoe. It's home to Siberia's first privately owned museum, the house of Grigory Rasputin, one of the most controversial and debated figures in Russian history. The exhibition is based on items owned by the Rasputin family, including original photographs of himself and his relations with personal signatures and notes. Make sure you take a moment to sit on Rasputin's famous Viennese chair: it brings good luck and professional success. **TLR**





Pyotr Yershov, the author of the Russian fairy tale poem "The Little Hump-backed Horse" lived and worked in Tobolsk.



The white-stone Tobolsk Kremlin is the sole kremlin built beyond the Urals.



The museum of the Russian Emperor Nicholas II and family was opened in the house where they lived in exile.

FATHER OF SIBERIAN CITIES

ITS RICH HISTORY, INESTIMABLE CENTURIES-OLD CULTURAL HERITAGE, NATURAL TREASURES, AND ADVANCED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ALL COMBINE TO MAKE TOBOLSK ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATIONS. REVIEW BY MIKHAIL IGNATIEV.

He who desires to see something truly beautiful in this world must go to Tobolsk, was the recommendation given to readers in 1818 by *Sibirsky Vestnik*, a magazine that was published in the Siberian capital. It is a remarkable fact that, 200 years later, well-known contemporaries are still saying that this city deserves our attention. Take, for example, the famous traveller Fyodor Konyukhov, who admits: "Tobolsk became a part of my destiny thanks to the lasting and heartfelt affection it inspired in me from the very first time I saw it."

Tobolsk was founded in 1587 by *voivode* (military governor) Danil Chulkov at the confluence of the major Siberian rivers, Tobol and Irtysh; since then it has been the centre of historical events for more than four centuries. Being the administrative, cultural, spiritual, and commercial centre of Siberia, the city hosted numerous foreign ambassadors. It became the engine behind the accelerated development of Siberia's vast expanses.

The first capital of Siberia was the first in everything — it was in Tobolsk that the first stone church

and the only kremlin beyond the Urals were built. It was here, too, that the first printing house was built and the first Siberian book was published. The first school, theatre and one of the oldest museums of Siberia also opened their doors in this city. Tobolsk is deservedly called the Father of Siberian cities.

The pride and joy of the former provincial capital is the Tobolsk Kremlin ensemble, built in the 17th–18th centuries. In 1961, it became the heart of the Tobolsk historical and architectural museum and heritage site. Today, the most significant episodes of Siberian history are

presented in the exhibitions of 18 state and private museums.

Tobolsk is one of the spiritual centres of Russia, along with Moscow and St. Petersburg. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious city is adorned with 13 Orthodox churches, as well as Muslim mosques and a Catholic Church. Among the important religious sites close to Tobolsk are the

Ioanno-Vvedensky Convent and the Abalak Holy Znamensky Monastery, both included in the list of Sacred Sites of Russia. Pilgrims come here not only from Russia, but also from abroad. Not far from the city there is a sacred place for Siberian Tatars — Iskerskaya Astana, where the first preachers of Islam in Siberia are buried.

The rich history of the city is associated with the names of many

Pyotr Yershov also lived and worked here.

Since ancient times, the city has been famous for its traditional crafts and folk arts. The Tobolsk bone-carving factory, the only one in Russia, continues the traditions of old craftsmen by manufacturing art products and souvenirs made of mammoth bone.

Tobolsk is actively developing as a centre of event tourism. It hosts the annual music festival “Summer in the Tobolsk Kremlin”, the international festival “Isker-Zhyen”, and the gastronomic festival “Ukha Tsaritsa”, all of which are ranked among Top 200 best events in Russia. The annual historical re-enactment festival “Abalakscoe Pole” is very popular among guests and locals. It is an amazing opportunity to plunge into the life of medieval Russia.

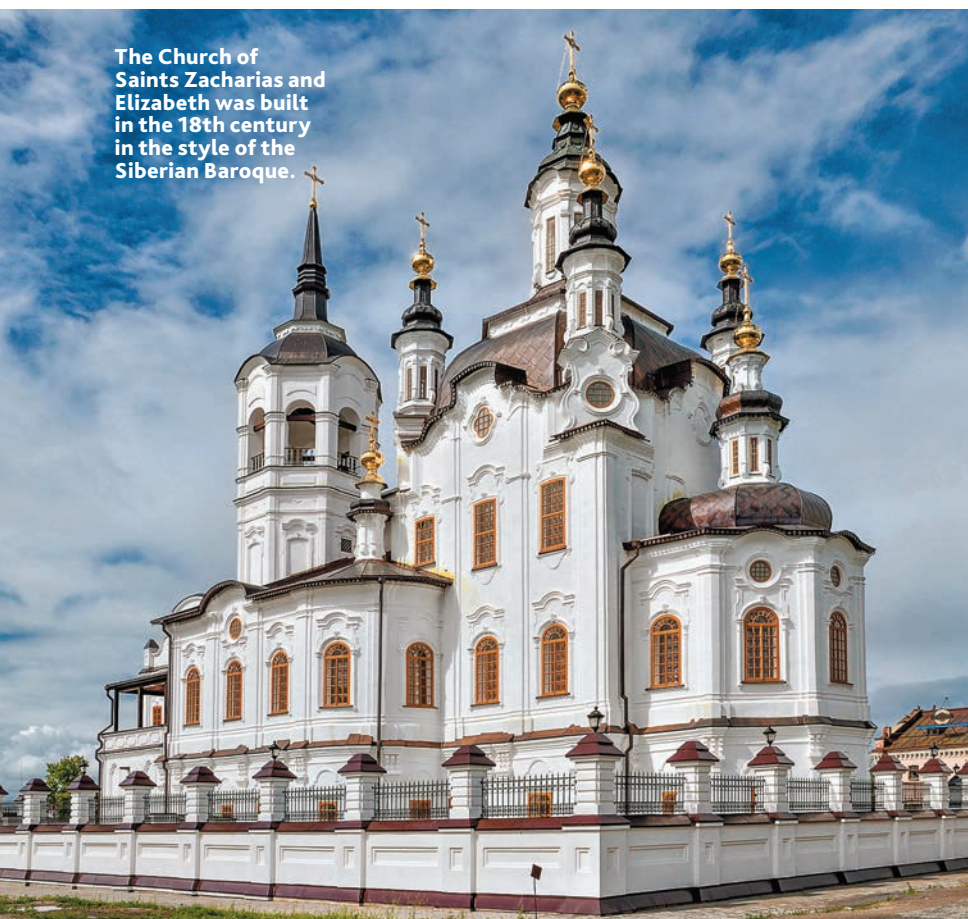
Comfortable hotels and hostels where you can choose accommodation to your liking — from economy rooms to luxury apartments — will allow you to fully enjoy generous Siberian hospitality. Numerous cafes and restaurants will delight you with dishes of European, Russian, and Tatar cuisine. **TLR**

Tobolsk was founded in 1587 by voivode (military governor) Danil Chulkov at the confluence of the major Siberian rivers, Tobol and Irtysh.



The popular tourist complex «Abalak» is a reconstruction of a stockaded town which is located 20km from Tobolsk.

prominent figures. The last Russian Emperor Nicholas II and his family lived here in exile for eight months. Tobolsk is the birthplace of the world-famous scientist Dmitri Mendeleev, the composer Alexander Alyabyev, the architect and chronicler Semyon Remezov, the artist Vasily Perov (a member of the Peredvizhniki, or Wanderer group), and the former President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Yuri Osipov. The author of the famous Russian fairy tale “The Little Hump-backed Horse” (“Konyok-Gorbunok”)



The Church of Saints Zacharias and Elizabeth was built in the 18th century in the style of the Siberian Baroque.



Tobolsk carved bone is another of the city's most recognizable brands.



Participants of the Festival of Historical and Cultural Heritage of Siberian Tatars “Isker-Zhyen”.



The driver must go through special training in order to operate the steam locomotive.



Bologoe. The Seliger retro-train and a Sapsan train. Continuity through the ages.



The stationmaster and conductors of Seliger in their mid-20th century uniforms.



TEXT: PAVEL CHUKAEV

STEAM POWERED

IN TVER REGION, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 40 YEARS, A REAL, **OLD-FASHIONED STEAM LOCOMOTIVE** SET OFF ON A REGULAR ROUTE. IT'S COMPLETELY NATURAL THAT TOURISTS ARE THRILLED TO RIDE IT.

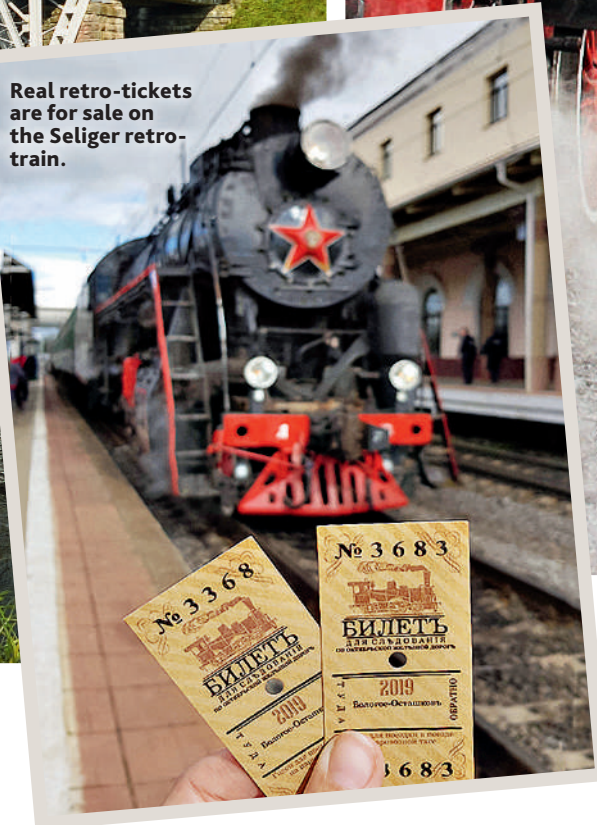


A bridge across the Shlina river is one of the most picturesque parts of the route from Bologoe to Ostashkov.



Every little boy dreams of riding on an old-fashioned steam locomotive!

Real retro-tickets are for sale on the Seliger retro-train.



The whistle of a steam engine cuts through the silence at Kuzhenkino station on Saturdays. For a few minutes the sky disappears in puffs of steam, then passengers leaving the two green wagons fill up the wooden platform. The train, which runs from Bologoe to Ostashkov in Tver region, makes a half-hour stop at this station to refill the steam locomotive's water tanks and to allow passengers to visit the old-fashioned station, now restored and really turned into a kind of museum. Passengers receive a free tour. Tour guides dress in the railway uniform of the 1960s, just like the train conductors. If it wasn't for the chain supermarket at the station, nothing would impinge on the

retro atmosphere that dominates at the station.

Actually, in Russia you can ride on a steam locomotive in other places as well — you don't have to penetrate deep into the forest wilderness near Lake Seliger to do so. For example, tourist rides on steam locomotives are organized on the picturesque Circum-Baikal Railway around the famous Lake Baikal, departing from Irkutsk. But Bologoe — Ostashkov is the first line since 1976 where steam locomotives

are once more used for regular trips — even if only once a week: on the other days of the week a diesel locomotive hauls the train. Tourists ride side-by-side with locals, people visiting their dachas (country homes), and mushroom foragers, while a ride costs the same as a normal suburban fare — only 295 rubles (around \$4) for a one-way ticket.

In Bologoe, seeing a steam locomotive doesn't surprise anyone. The station has two memorial steam locomotives: one greets travellers at the station platform, the other awaits them at the square near the station. But the Seliger retro-train, launched in September 2018, is still a special case. The Bologoe — Polotskaya line on which Seliger runs has long been known to transportation lovers as a true sanctuary of railway history. →

Tour guides are dressed in uniforms from the '60s, just like the conductors. But for the chain supermarket at the station, the retro atmosphere would be complete.



The departure of the Ruskeala Express is announced by the ringing of bells.



The Ruskeala Express arrives at its temporary wooden platform.



The elegant interior of the Ruskeala Express is decorated with bouquets of cowberries.



The route of the Ruskeala Express runs through the picturesque region around Lake Ladoga.

The line was built in the beginning of the 20th century, primarily for military purposes, and modernization bypassed it altogether — there are still manual switches and cosy wooden stations along the line. Over the last year, a steady stream of tourists has been drawn to this line, also attracted by the local beauty. The majority of the retro-train's route runs through deep forests with picturesque streams, swamps, and rare trees, and ends at the banks of Lake Seliger.

The Seliger steam locomotive experiment was acknowledged to be a success by its railway company. In the summer of 2019, the company launched another retro-train on a regular route —

the Ruskeala Express, delivering passengers from the city of Sortavala to the marble quarries of Ruskeala. This is a daily train (sometimes running twice a day during the summer), and in its first two and a half months of operation it transported twice as many passengers as the Seliger transports in a year.

A different period was chosen for the design of this retro-train: the pre-revolutionary era. Old-fashioned interiors (with the addition of modern sockets with USB connectors) have been recreated in the restaurant car and two compartment cars. The demand for steam locomotive trips in Karelia turned out to be so high that they doubled

the number of wagons on the train by the end of the summer.

The price for this ride is somewhat higher than in Tver region — from 455 rubles (\$6) for a ticket. The ride lasts for one hour. Before the launch of this train, it was practically impossible to get from Sortavala to Ruskeala by public transportation, and a ride by taxi cost a pretty penny. For the moment, a temporary platform has been erected in Ruskeala, where there are plans to open a marble train station soon. And that's not the only perspective for the future development of the Ruskeala Express project: there are discussions about the possibility of a steam locomotive ride across the border — to the Finnish city of Joensuu. **TLR**

Before the retro-train was launched, it was almost impossible to reach Ruskeala by public transportation. Soon, a marble station will be opened in Ruskeala, and in the long run, an express train will run to the Finnish city of Joensuu.



If you're lucky, you'll get to see how eggs are fried, according to tradition, on a shovel right in the locomotive furnace.

A different steam locomotive leads the Ruskeala Express back to Sortavala (series "Eu").



GETTING THERE

Seliger Retro-Train

Route: Bologoe — Ostashkov — Bologoe (Tver Region). **Frequency:** every Saturday. **Schedule:** departure from Bologoe — 9:25, from Ostashkov — 15:07. **Transit time:** to Ostashkov 3 hours 40 minutes, to Bologoe — 3 hours 15 minutes. **Ride fare:** 295 rubles (around \$4) one way. **How to get there:** almost all trains running between Moscow and St. Petersburg stop in Bologoe.

The Ruskeala Express

Route: Sortavala — Ruskeala — Sortavala (Karelia). **Frequency:** every day. **Schedule:** departure from Sortavala — 10:40, from Ruskeala — 17:30. **Transit time:** around one hour. **Ride fare:** 455 rubles (\$6) one way. **How to get there:** the departure time of the Ruskeala Express is coordinated with the schedule of the St. Petersburg — Sortavala Lastochka trains.



IN VOLOGDA, A CITY KNOWN CHIEFLY FOR ITS LACE, YOU CAN TRY THE CREAMY LOCAL BUTTER AND ATTEND A SALT-MAKING WORKSHOP — OR, THE MOST EXCITING OF ALL, TAKE A FAIRY-TALE JOURNEY TO VISIT FATHER FROST, THE RUSSIAN COUNTERPART OF SANTA CLAUS.

TEXT: EKATERINA SMIRNOVA

TREASURES OF THE NORTH

1 Day in Vologda

Almost all guides start their city tours from Kremlin Square. Here, on the banks of the Vologda River, stands the monumental St. Sophia Cathedral. A beautiful view of the city opens from its 78-meter high bell tower.

Remember to get your pictures taken with the monument to the letter “O”, sitting on the bench with a sign that says, “Let’s sit and say our o’s” (a reference to the Vologda accent!), or next to the art object called “The door to...” All these attractions are located in the park on Cathedral Hill. A visit to Russia’s one-of-a-kind lace museum will undoubtedly be the culmination of your programme. Don’t forget to undertake the quest, either — it leads to the carved palisade mentioned in a famous song about Vologda.

The afternoon is best spent at the Semyonkovo Open Air Museum. There you’ll learn about peasant traditions in the Russian North and will be able to try making the



Father Frost's residence in Veliky Ustyug is open for visits all year round.

famous Vologda butter according to the original recipe.

2 Day in Totma

Stay the night in Vologda, and in the morning, get up early and travel to Totma, a town of sailors and explorers located 210km from the region’s capital.

The city’s signature architectural style is the Totma Baroque. The facades of the churches are adorned by exquisite ornaments called “cartouches”.

The Church of the Entry into Jerusalem, a ship-temple, is home to the Mariners’ Museum. On the excursion there you will learn about the history of the Russian navy, the discovery of Russian America, and the geography of the voyages across the Pacific Ocean made by merchants from Totma. Besides all that, you can also participate in a real “sea battle”.

The history of Totma is first and foremost the history of the salt industry. Today, fragments of brine pipes can be seen in the Totma Ethnographic Museum and in the village of Varinitsa on the outskirts of the city.

3 Day in Veliky Ustug

After a day of visiting the cultural attractions in Totma you’ll take a 4-hour trip to Veliky Ustyug where you can spend the night in one of the city’s hotels. In the morning, refreshed and well-rested, why not head out to see some of the local attractions?



At the excursion visitors learn about the history of the Russian navy, the discovery of Russian America and the geography of voyages over the Pacific Ocean made by Totma’s sea-faring merchants.



Vologda’s signature lace.



A bird's eye view of Vologda. On the right is a heart-shaped figure made by lace-makers who came from different parts of the world during the Vita Lace International Lace Festival.

Ustyug is famous for its 300-year tradition of producing art of the northern niello style. You can see the process of niello works' creation at the Severnaya Chern factory and buy something at the factory souvenir shop.

Veliky Ustyug is Father Frost's (Ded Moroz in Russian) hometown. That is why the Residence of Father Frost, a special gift shop, the Ded Moroz Fashion House, and his post office can all be found in the city.

Father Frost's Residence is located in a picturesque pine forest not far from Veliky Ustyug. From the main gate of the Residence stretches the Path of Fairy Tales. On it, apart from inhabitants of the magic forest, you will see the house of the little for-ester, the Magic Well, the enchanted bridge, and have a chance to witness valiant contests. The Residence features a hotel, several comfortable guest houses, cafés, and shops.

At Father Frost's home, his assistants will show you all the rooms of the fairytale house: the magic laboratory, observatory, library, study, and the wardrobe that contains his famous outfits. At the end of the excursion, the master of the house

himself will meet his guests in the throne hall.

The Zoological Garden located near the Residence is affiliated with the Moscow Zoo. Over 400 animals and birds live there.

You can visit Father Frost at any time of the year. You can get there by car, or by plane or train via the city of Kotlas. From there it's only a 70km car or bus ride to Veliky Ustyug. **TLR**

The city residence of Father Frost in Veliky Ustyug



A RECORD-BREAKING FRESCO

The St. Sophia Cathedral on Vologda's Kremlin Square is the first stone church built in the city. It was built during the rule of Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Inside you can find a fresco of "The Last Judgement" which is the largest on this subject in Russia — it is 400 square meters! The cathedral's 18-century altarpiece has been preserved in almost perfect condition.

CHURCHES AND TEMPLES

FLYING AIR-SHIPS

The city's temples are adorned with cartouches which look like ships in full sail. An observation deck has been opened on the bell tower of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering a bird's eye view of Totma.



A MUSEUM CITY

Veliky Ustyug is a true museum city with its numerous white-stone churches and merchant mansions. At the very least, you simply must walk around the cathedral complex known as Cathedral Courtyard (Sobornyy Dvor), walk along the new embankment of the Sukhona River, visit Dymkovskaya Sloboda, and the Museum of the History and Culture of Veliky Ustyug.



THE IMPRESSIVE CHECHEN REPUBLIC

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT THE GROZNY OF TODAY LOOKS LIKE A PART OF DUBAI THAT HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO RUSSIA. EVERY WEEK, HUNDREDS OF TOURISTS COME TO SEE SKYSCRAPERS, MOSQUES, MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS AND THE UNIQUE LAKE KEZENOV-AM.

TEXT: RAYANA VISAITOVA



The Veduchi resort has an artificial snow trail that will suit both beginners and experienced skiers.

As a result of significant investments in recent years, modern residential blocks, mosques, shopping centres, museums, and sports facilities have emerged in Grozny. Many of them purport to hold European and Russian records in terms of their size. A growing number of tourists are coming to the republic: the annual increase in tourist flow is 40-45%. Foreign tourists are also beginning to visit Chechnya more often, and in 2018 it welcomed visitors from 78 countries.

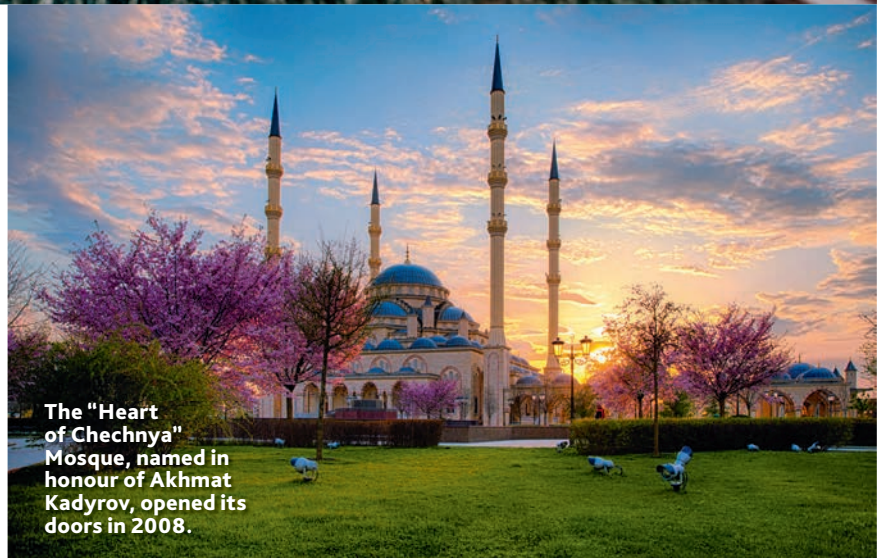
Record-Breaking Mosques

The Heart of Chechnya mosque is the #1 attraction in the area that tourists come to see. It is one of the largest and most magnificent mosques in Europe and the world. Dazzlingly white marble, quarried on Marmara Island in Turkey, was used in its construction. The height of its minarets is also remarkable — each of them reaches 63 meters.

Another mosque which impresses visitors with its size and beauty is the Prophet Muhammad Mosque in Shali City. It is twice as big as the Blue Mosque in Istanbul and is often compared to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi. The building is made of snow-white marble and the main hall has a lotus-shaped chandelier weighing about three tonnes. A huge park with two thousand trees and 48 varieties of roses surrounds the Mosque.

Beyond the Capital

You can admire centuries-old towers or walk along the edge of waterfalls — Chechnya has plenty of places to go outside the capital.



The "Heart of Chechnya" Mosque, named in honour of Akhmat Kadyrov, opened its doors in 2008.



Argun Gorge. Ushkaloy Twin Guard Towers.

Lake Kezenoy-Am is located at an altitude of 1870m above sea level. The lake is captivating thanks to its unusual colour: the turquoise water changes its hue depending on the weather conditions.

The water temperature does not rise above 18 degrees Celsius. You can take a catamaran cruise or go on a zipline ride (a high-speed cable car) right above the lake. An international sailing regatta, the Kezenoy-Am Cup, takes place every year here.

Another picturesque spot is the Argun Gorge, which stretches about 120km from Khevsuretia towards the Black Mountains. Along it can be found more than 600 historical, cultural,

The Kezenoy-Am Cup regatta wins the Guinness Record for the highest altitude regatta in Eurasia.

Prophet Muhammad Mosque in Shali City impresses visitors with its gigantic size.

The Tower Complex in the Malkhistinsky Gorge.

archaeological, and architectural sites, as well as outstanding sites of natural beauty. On the bank of the Chanti-Argun river, there are twin guard towers built into the rock of Ushkaloy. Historians estimate that they were built in the 11th-12th centuries.

The next stop in the Argun Gorge is the village of Nihaloy, where travellers can see a cascade of 12 waterfalls, the highest of which reaches 25 meters. This place is a real paradise for extreme sports fans. Fantastical cliffs, breath-taking canyons, and huge stone boulders create a sense of mystery and the primeval. To appreciate the beauty of this place it is unlikely that one day is enough, and for that reason many people stay at a nearby camp site with cottages and gazebos.

Chechen Style Resort

Do you like skiing and snowboarding? Well, these sports are possible all year round in Veduchi, thanks to a special surfacing. The artificial snow trail is well suited for beginners and experienced skiers alike.

The resort has an aerial cable car line over 800 meters long and a 1km ski run for beginners. By 2025, it is planned to build seven more cable cars and more than 16.5km of ski runs.

The resort operates as an all-season tourist cluster: in spring, summer and winter, guests can go hiking, take horse ride treks, or bike rides along the picturesque mountain slopes, or go on tours to one of the historical, cultural or wildlife attractions thanks to which the Chechen Republic enjoys growing popularity. **TLR**



Akhki Tai is a cascade of beautiful waterfalls in a picturesque location.

ARBORETUM Sochi

The lion sculptures emphasised the high breeding of the noble family that owned the estate.



TEXT AND PHOTOS: MARINA KRUGLYAKOVA

ROAD TO THE GARDEN

LISTING ALL OF THE PLANTS IN THE SOCHI ARBORETUM'S COLLECTION IS NO EASY MATTER. THEY ARE AS WONDERFUL AS THE HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST RENOWNED BOTANICAL GARDENS ITSELF.

Hundreds of years ago, this area was a dense forest full of wild animals. The tiny stream flowing through it exuded an eerie stench for miles around that rightfully earned it the name *Gnilushka*, which literally translates as “rot”. The year of 1889, when the coastal plot of land was purchased by Sergei Nikolaevich Khudekov, marks the naissance of the Sochi arboretum. Assisted by the German gardener Karl Lemgau, the land's new owner turned the dense forest slopes into a beautiful piece of landscape art.

The pride of the park is the blue Egyptian lotus, a sacred plant of Ancient Egypt, also known as the flower of the pharaohs. Its bloom lasts for about two months a year, until the end of September.

The Gardener-Publisher

Sergei Nikolaevich Khudekov was an extraordinary person. Saying that he was a playwright, a ballet historian, the editor and publisher of the “Petersburg Newspaper”, and a horse breeder, would still not make up a complete list of the activities he engaged in.

Born in Moscow in 1837 into a gentry family, he was the fourth of twelve children. →



ARBORETUM Sochi

Sergei Nikolaevich became a student of law at the Moscow University, abandoning his studies when the Crimean War broke out to join the military. He retired from the army five years later as a major, and joined literary society in Saint Petersburg. His works, which he signed with his pen-names “the Sting” and “George”, were published in various periodical editions.

Khudekov abducted his cousin, who he was madly in love with, directly from a ball, and married her against her father’s wishes. The young couple didn’t have an easy start to their married life, and they had nothing to live on. Sergei Nikolaevich’s father had long been out of money, having lost everything to his destructive passion of card-playing.

Financial desperation somehow led Sergei Nikolaevich to first rent, and later purchase, the “Petersburg Newspaper.” The story has it that when the publishing house ran out of paper, and lacked the funds to buy any more, his wife pawned... their pillows.

At that point, fate suddenly smiled on Khudekov. He started with four issues a week, gradually



The Sochi sculptors A. Butaev and V. Zvonov created this bust of the founder of the park, Sergei Khudekov.

A detail of the “Fairy Tale” fountain. The sculpture was executed using the technique of white stone casting.



THE GREEN LAWN NEXT TO THE MAURITANIAN PAVILION SERVED AS THE SHOOTING LOCATION FOR SOME OF THE SCENES FROM THE SOVIET MOTION PICTURE “THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE FLORIZEL”.



bringing his paper to five, and then, six, weekly issues. It was there that the first works of the then unknown writer Anton Chekhov were published.

In his estate in the village of Erlino in the Ryazan region, Khudekov engaged in gardening and breeding livestock, poultry and horses. The area of the estate covered 92 hectares, and a third of its territory was occupied by the park, or, more precisely, the arboretum. Khudekov later modelled his famous Sochi arboretum on the park in Erlino.

Aphrodite and Eros

The central alley of the arboretum leads from the entrance to a Moorish gazebo adorned with columns. It was dubbed “Moorish” during the Soviet era. The reason for this is unknown as the gazebo has nothing to do with Mauritania. A sculpture of Aphrodite emerging from the sea foam adorns the gazebo, and is the symbol of the park’s beauty. Her son Eros is sitting on the back of a dolphin just below. The lions symbolise nobility: in Khudekov’s time there was one sleeping lion which symbolised the family’s noble lineage; the second lion was added after the revolution.

Sergei Nikolaevich held soirees with his friends there. They admired the beautiful view of the Oryol (Eagle) pavilion, decorated with two eagles which looked particularly impressive in the rays of the setting sun. At that time, the Oryol pavilion was entwined with climbing roses, and had a small pond nearby. In Soviet times, the eagles, as a symbol of the tsarist empire, were thrown down and smashed to pieces; only the pedestals were left in place.

Now a pueraria — a rather interesting plant — is weaving around the gazebo. It is native to China and Japan, and blooms in July with large and beautiful purple flowers. Within a year, such a vine may grow up to thirty meters in length. Its roots are used for producing starch, the leaves for feeding cattle, and its bark fibres for making thin but durable fabrics.

The green lawn between the Mauritanian and Oryol pavilions served as the shooting location for some of the scenes from the Soviet motion picture “The Adventures of Prince Florizel” with Oleg Dal in the title role. An elegant table and a cage with a parrot in it stood on the lawn in the film.

In Khudekov’s day, every path in the park was covered in a layer of crushed marble. They quickly became overgrown and had to be weeded endlessly, but it was fashionable back then — it was believed that the soil could breathe freely under such a cover.

The Nadezhda Villa

A snow-white marble staircase led to the master’s mansion. In Soviet times, it was significantly expanded, the marble was removed and basalt slabs were installed instead.

Fountains, sculptures, and vases that adorned the central part of the estate were made in St. Petersburg at the famous iron casting company that belonged to Franz San Galli. The sculptures were transported by steamboat from Kronstadt. Having travelled through the Mediterranean Sea, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, they arrived at the



The “Fairy Tale” fountain, built in 1969, is framed by the lush crowns of Kashmir cypresses.

Novorossiysk port in huge wooden boxes covered with talcum powder, wood shavings, and sawdust. But as a severe storm broke out, the ship could not approach the coast and headed to Sukhum. From there, the statues had to be transported on long arabic carts, which extended their journey by four weeks.

Sergei Nikolaevich named the park and the villa “Nadezhda” in honour of his wife, Nadezhda Alekseevna. The ground floor housed a dining parlour — a small room with six windows. The kitchen was located in the house’s wooden annex. As Nadezhda Alekseevna could not stand the smell of cookery, all of the kitchen activities had to be conducted in a separate area, with dishes for the owners of the estate served through a special window.

The Khudekovs often had guests. With the Novorossiysk-Sukhum highway having yet to be built, they had to get there by boat. The used to climb up to the lower part of the park, crossed the “rotten” stream on a wooden bridge and got into the carriages that took them directly to the house: not to the main entrance, however, but to the back door. This →



was done intentionally: when the guests woke in the morning and went out onto the balcony, the majestic sight of the park and of the sea unfolded before their eyes. Then, the amazed ladies and gentlemen went down the front stairs to the park to admire the extraordinary tropical plants.

The oil lanterns and the ancient cypress growing near the villa are witnesses of those remote times which survive to this day. This giant tree preserved by some lucky chance is one of the world's oldest remaining cypresses — it is about 140 years old. There are two rare Kashmir cypresses growing in the park as well, the crowns of which have an unusual “weeping” shape. In Northern India, this sacred tree is planted near temples in snowy mountainous areas. Not too many trees can withstand the weight of the snow, but Kashmir cypresses do not have problems in this regard! In fact, the snow doesn't even have a chance to begin piling on top of the cypresses: it slips and falls down through the cypress's openwork branches almost instantly.

The Road to a Fairy Tale

The upper part of the park features a collection of plants from all over the world. Its arrangement is geographical. If you go to the right, you will find yourself in Italy, with its oaks, palm-trees and cypresses. On the left, you have South-East Asia: China, Taiwan and Japan.

Naturally, there you will see bamboo, ivy, and boxwood. The agave flowerbed is lovely at any time of the year; it is always in bloom. Make sure not to miss the Italian laurel and the North African chamaerops, the lapari date palm, and the



THE “FAIRY TALE” FOUNTAIN IS THE ONLY WHITE STONE CASTING IN RUSSIA. THE SCULPTOR VLADIMIR BOGATYREV RECREATED SCENES FROM ALEXANDER PUSHKIN'S “THE TALE OF TSAR SALTAN”.

The central staircase is adorned with a sculpture of the goddess Diana in her pursuit of Apollo. The sculpture was made of cast iron in 1898.

The Moorish gazebo. “The Adventures of Prince Florizel” motion picture was filmed on this green lawn in 1977.

Central fountain, the Amours, by P. Capellaro and A. Durane.

A detail of the “Fairy tale” fountain.





cypress from the Island of Cyprus. The Italian laurel arrow-wood has inedible blue fruit, unlike our red arrow-wood with its tasty red fruit. You certainly won't fail to notice the pitch pine with its 55 cm-long needles. There's a single cedar of Lebanon growing in the Park. It is still very small but, believe me, it's so interesting that it's worth coming to the arboretum just to see it.

The staircase ends at the "Fairy Tale" fountain. It is the only work of white stone casting in all of Russia. The material of the sculptural composition works perfectly for the local climate, unaffected by either heat or moisture. The sculptor Vladimir Bogatyrev recreated scenes from Alexander Pushkin's "The Tale of Tsar Saltan". The composition is crowned by a four-meter tall figure of the Swan Princess. The story's other characters are also represented here - Prince Gvidon, the ship flying across the ocean under full sail, the squirrel gnawing on the golden

nuts, and uncle Chernomor with his brave knights, the *bogatyrs*.

The Civil War caused serious damage to the Park. The White Army chose it for housing their cavalry. Horses grazed on the flowerbeds and ate fresh leaves from the trees while the soldiers chopped down rare trees for firewood. The restoration of the arboretum started in 1924, and it was then also that its collection was replenished with new plants. In 1944, the Sochi Scientific Research Experimental Forest Station was created on the territory on the basis of the Khudekov estate.

Some or other of the plants in the arboretum are in bloom all year round. Even in winter, the air is filled with the scent of the acacia flowers, sweetshrub, and magnolia. The yellow mahonia flowers also come forth, smelling like lily of the valley. Cold and frost may reign elsewhere, but in Sochi the Indian canna blooms. **TLR**

VISITING THE SPARROWS

TEXT: ANDREI IVANOV

RUSSIA'S ONLY BIRD PARK IS LOCATED 80KM FROM MOSCOW, IN THE KALUGA REGION. EVERYONE WHO GOES THERE IS INVARIABLY AMAZED BY ITS SIZE AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, BY WHAT IT CONTAINS.



H


ere you will find over two thousand birds, animals, reptiles, and fish from all over the world. Apart from that, you can take a ride in a carriage, have a picture taken of yourself with a bird of prey, visit an ostrich farm, and admire tropical plants in bloom.

An Engineer's Dream

I first learned about the private Sparrows Bird Park in Kaluga in 2015 from the president of the Moscow Zoo, Vladimir Spitsyn. He was in complete awe of it, praising its owners for their competent and modern business approach. I wondered what could possibly amaze an experienced zoologist who had been the head of the famous metropolitan park for almost 40 years.

The bird park is located in the Zhukovsky district near the village of Vorobyi (Sparrows), from which it took its name, on the banks of the Istya River.

It all started with the engineer Alexander Belyavsky's and his wife Tatiana's hobby of collecting specimens of various bird species, which they have been doing for for over 30 years. Their collection grew, gaining popularity among enthusiasts and connoisseurs, and was finally moved from Moscow to the Kaluga region. The Belyavskys were inspired to create their own bird park



The rufous hornbill (*Buceros hydrocorax*), or Philippine hornbill, may reach up to 100cm in length. Endemic to the Philippines.

Cockatoo parrots are widespread in Australia. They live up to 80 years.

Flamingos stand on one leg to reduce loss of heat.



The Garden of Stones features stones from different regions, from the Urals to the Caucasus.

The green parrot, or the red-fronted conure, lives in Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, as well as the Sparrow Bird Park.

The small-sized western bluebill is found in Africa, along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea.



by their knowledge of bird parks in other countries that functioned as full-fledged places for family recreation, similarly to zoos, nature reserves and open-air museums.

They bought the lands of a former collective farm called "Pobeda" ("Victory") and over a period of two years built, and in 2005, opened, their bird park.

By that time, its exposition included not only exotic birds – the core of the Belyavskys' collection – but also forest birds, birds of prey, domestic birds and water birds found in Russia.

The park, with its collection's variety and completeness, was destined to become more than just a recreational centre; it has developed into an excellent education and research base. The park's experience in breeding rare birds has rightfully earned it the recognition of specialists from Russian and foreign bird nurseries and zoos.

Arriving at the Tropics

This summer, my dream of seeing the famous bird park with my own eyes finally came true. After a few days at Etnomir (Ethnic world), my family and I headed to the Sparrows as it's located nearby.

The entire area of the parking lot and all the curbs along the fenced-in bird park were occupied. Finally, we managed to find a place on the lawn by the entrance. It would be advisable for the local authorities to consider building a larger parking lot for visitors to this popular tourist attraction and educational facility.

The second difficulty awaited at the entrance, where a queue of about 50 people was slowly moving towards the ticket counter. As we discovered a few minutes later, the cashier's order for everyone to put on →





Horses are one of the main visitor attractions.

The long-horned, shaggy-coated Highland cattle are of Scottish origin.

The crowned crane that reaches a meter in height is found in Africa.

face-masks, and refusal to sell the tickets otherwise, was to account for the slowness of movement. To avoid having to queue, we crossed the road and headed to the second part of the park where the queue for tickets was much shorter.

This part of the park is smaller than the main one, but it turned out to be very interesting. As soon as we entered, we found ourselves inside the “Tropical World” pavilion. The moist air, palm and banana trees, various exotic plants and animals made us feel as if we had suddenly been brought closer to the equator. In the next pavilion we saw various types of fish in aquariums while just outside stood cages with songbirds from all over the world. Large, open-air enclosures housed long-legged ostriches that walked along the fences in a relaxed manner.

Another open-air collection features stones brought from different territories all over Russia, beginning with the Urals and going all the way to the Caucasus. There we saw Karelian granite and white marble, laughing children climbing all over large boulders, and adults getting photographed next to them.

Hundreds of exotic birds

The second, main, part of the park, made an incredible impression on us. Neither ourselves, nor the



Groundhogs are known to sometimes snore, and to greet the sunrise with a whistle.

The air in the "Tropical World" pavilion is humid and warm to imitate the conditions of the equator.

Male rose-ringed parakeets have a narrow rosy-red ring around their necks.



other guests had expected anything so grand, judging by their feedback. Hundreds of bird cages and animal enclosures, the sounds they emitted making our heads spin - and we couldn't take our eyes off of the sight.

The park's collection includes about 300 species of birds: peacocks, parrots, hornbills, pelicans, storks, cranes, pheasants, and different birds of prey. Domestic birds are featured as well, represented by pigeons, chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys. Now that's a fine place to study zoology and ornithology!

Besides the birds, exotic animals also live in the park, such as lemurs, gibbons, small monkeys (tamarins, marmosets and saimiris), sloths, kangaroos, alpacas, llamas, fallow deer, caracals, servals, capybaras, coati, porcupines.

Trying to see them all will easily take up your entire day at the park!

The park's popularity has its downside as well. For example, in August, the sacred myna (an Indian starling), a big favourite with the guests, disappeared from its cage at the park's café.

Besides the café, a barbecue area is open to guests in a picturesque spot overlooking the river. At the time of our visit, all of its tables and gazebos were occupied.

The entry fee is relatively cheap — 400 roubles (about \$5) on weekends and 300 roubles (about \$4) on weekdays for adults, and 100 roubles (\$1.3) — for concession tickets. The latter category is available for schoolchildren, students, seniors, and people with disabilities. The entry fee to the Park of Stones located on the second territory of the bird park is paid separately, with the adult ticket costing 100 roubles less.

It is possible to stay overnight on the park territory at the "Ivolga" hotel consisting of 10 wooden cottages, each one containing two rooms with two separate entrances and a veranda. In summer, the booking must be made well in advance if one is to secure accommodation. **TLR**



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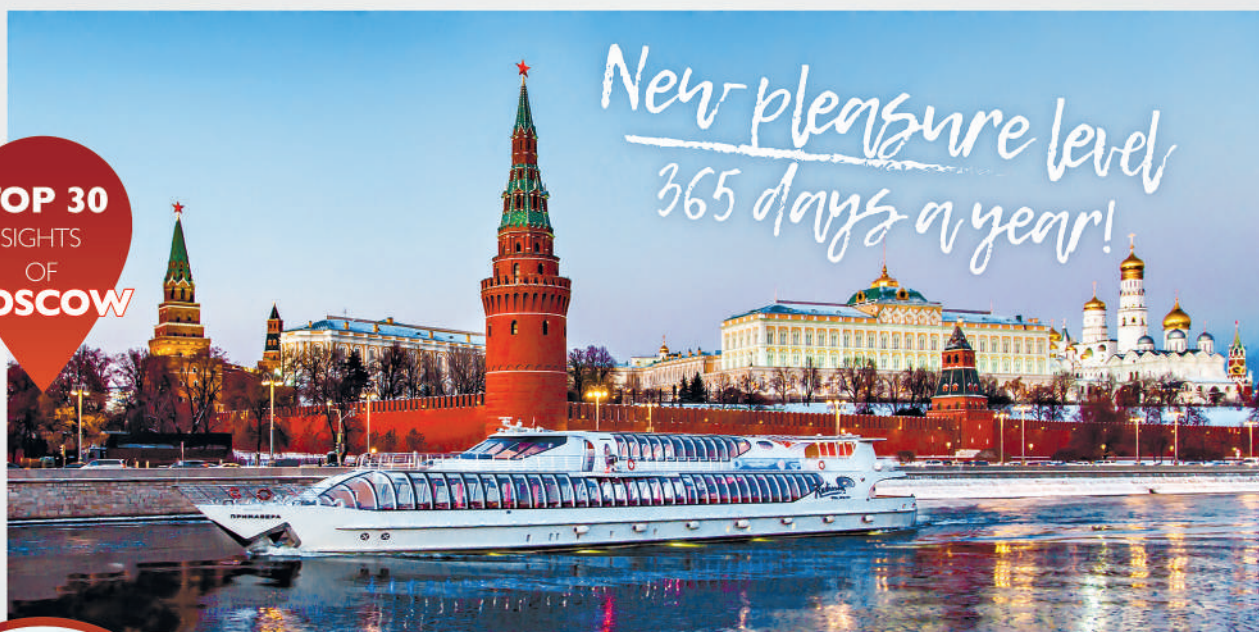
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