

2 – THE KREMLIN AND THE CITY CENTRE

Sunday, 17 June

For many people, the word ‘Kremlin’ conjures up a picture of Communism and its harsh rule since 1917. However, behind the rather forbidding walls, government offices are situated in fabulous palaces once lived in by the Tsars of Holy Russia, and these palaces rub shoulders with some of the most beautiful, most opulent, and oldest Orthodox churches that have been built in Russia. Ever since Ivan the Great (1462–1505) made Moscow the capital of a burgeoning empire, built the magnificent Uspensky Cathedral (1479) for his coronation, and regarded the city as a ‘third Rome’, the city’s Kremlin has been the heart and soul of the country.

Moscow was not the only city to have a kremlin, for all medieval Russian towns had one: a hill on which the most important buildings were built and surrounded by a strong wooden wall. The walls of Moscow’s kremlin were first made of wood, and were probably there in 1147 when, it is recorded, Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, Prince of Suzdal, ‘laid the corner stone of Moscow near the mouth of the Neglinnaya River above the River Yauza’. At a later date, the walls were rebuilt in white stone, and so the Kremlin was called the White City. Finally the familiar red walls were built by the Italian architect Ridolfo ‘Aristotele’ Fioravanti and his colleagues in 1485–1489.

We had discovered that we would visit the Kremlin this morning. At eight o’clock we woke to bright sunshine and, an hour later, went down to a smaller restaurant for breakfast. We were given fruit juice and water; on our plates were thick slices of cottage cheese, which we ate with either white or black rye bread. Next came a large plate containing thick square slices of omelette, which were quite tasty. We finished the meal with coffee and buns. A waitress did come around with tea, but forgot to serve the people at our table.

At 9.45 we stepped out into the sweltering heat (it was up in the seventies) and clambered aboard a better quality coach, which had been parked by the side of the hotel. At ten o’clock we set off and took a rather devious route to the Kremlin, driving for the most part up the length of Prospekt Kalinina. The traffic lane regulations were quite bizarre here, for our driver had to go under the bridge by the river and double back in order to get to the other side of the bridge and cross it. Walter and I laughed at this crazy route, and tried to imagine Irish drivers conforming to such idiotic rules and regulations.

Near the Kremlin we were driven this way and that, and eventually came to a halt at the Borovitsky Gate, situated on the south-west corner of the wall. Here we stepped out of the hot and airless coach and followed our guide Julia into the garden containing the fir trees. We walked along a path to a small side entrance near the gate and joined crowds of tourists.

Inside, a wide and empty road on our right stretched ahead and, to our left, we could see the large yellow-and-white Armoury Palace (*Oruzheinaya Palata*), which had been built as a museum in 1851. At the entrance of the palace, a small group of Russians were beginning to form a queue, but our official Intourist guide shooed them

away and presented the old lady at the door with an official permit that granted us permission to enter immediately. We waited in some cloakrooms while Julia spoke to



The Armoury, in the Kremlin, Moscow

the fussy old lady, then brought us up to the Armoury proper, which turned out to be quite bewildering because of its size and its range of exhibits. Although many of the items were important, priceless and finely made, my overall impression was of grandeur for grandeur's sake. Many of the objects on display were badly displayed and lit. I kept beside our guide, taking notes, while many of the older members of our group, weary of our guide's furious pace, began to lag behind.

First of all we were shown a series of elaborate thrones belonging to various Tsars, starting with the one owned by Ivan the Great (1462–1505), which was finely decorated with ivory and gold. Next was Boris Godunov's, covered in precious stones; then Mikhail Romanov's, Alexis Mikhailovich's, and finally the silver double throne made for the two boy puppet emperors, Peter (later to become Peter the Great) and his weak half-brother, Ivan. At the back of this unusual throne was a little window, through which their half-sister Sophia would prompt them when they were responding to important dignitaries.

We then moved to another set of glass cases, where we saw various imperial crowns (or *shapkas*), most of which had fur around the bottom. Here we looked at Ivan the Terrible's *shapka*, the Empress Anna's first crown, and the orb and sceptre made for Mikhail Romanov (the first Romanov Tsar).

Next we stopped to admire some large crown jewels, then moved on to the elaborate gala trappings. After this we were shown a large collection of stirrups, saddles and other items pertaining to horse riding. We also saw gala trappings that had been gifts from Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

We were then shown a large collection of coaches dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which we stopped to admire. One of them was English; it was from the sixteenth century and was thought to have been a present from either King James I or Queen Elizabeth I to Boris Godunov. Another one had been made in Poland, and in it Mikhail Romanov's father, the Patriarch Philaret, had escaped from Poland during the period when his son reigned. We also saw a tiny coach that had been made for Peter the Great when he was three years of age.

Another exhibit was an oak sleigh made for the Empress Elizabeth (who reigned 1741–1761), which had been pulled by twenty-two or twenty-four horses. In order to

travel from Moscow to Saint Petersburg, five hundred horses had to be used, for the five-hundred-mile-journey had taken three days.

More coaches followed, then a collection of imperial dresses made and worn in the eighteenth century; they had belonged to Catherine II, Anna, Elizabeth (whose train was carried by nine pages), and Catherine (a silver brocade dress).

When we had finished looking at the exhibits on this floor, we ascended a fine wide staircase. On the walls to the left and right were two large paintings, one of which depicted the train of Ivan the Terrible; the other showed Alexei Mikhailovich reviewing his army. At the top of the staircase was a globe designed by the scientist Lomonosov.

We now were brought through a series of halls, in which we saw military equipment, ecclesiastical objects including icons, wine scoops (*kovsh*), and elaborate Easter eggs and novelties created by the famous French craftsman Fabergé, including a tiny gold clockwork model of the first Russian train, which had been made in 1900. In another hall were large glass cases containing dinner sets; one case contained just one twentieth of a French set ordered by Catherine II for her lover, Grigory Orlov. In the last hall was a collection of robes once worn by the gentry. One such pearl-encrusted robe had been worn by the autocratic patriarch Nikon, who had terrified everyone including the Tsar. These robes had been made by Russian women as they had whiled away their time in the *terem*, a room of seclusion for women, which was later banned by Peter the Great.

Exhausted, we stumbled down the staircase and, at the bottom, paused to admire a large gold clock which was called The Temple of Glory, which it indeed resembled.

Satisfied at having seen this extraordinary collection of items, I followed the guide out into the sunshine while the others lagged behind. Julia now asked me to lead the group slowly up the road while she went back to round up the others. This I did with Walter's help and, at the top of the hill, we stopped to photograph the Armoury and the Great Kremlin Palace, now a government building and closed to the public.



The Great Kremlin Palace, Moscow

Once we were all together once again, we crossed the road at a wide zebra crossing and approached the part of the Kremlin in which the finest architecture was to be seen: the square containing the magnificent cathedrals. I was very disappointed to discover that the first two were partially hidden behind scaffolding. I knew the reason

for this, as many buildings were being given a facelift in preparation for the following year's Olympic Games, when the country would be flooded with tourists.



The Cathedral of the Annunciation (left) and the Palace of Facets (right), Kremlin

The first ecclesiastical building that we now approached, with its gold cupolas and whitewashed walls reflecting the bright sunshine, was the lovely Cathedral of the Annunciation in the south-west of the square. This neat little cathedral had been built in 1482–90 by architects from Pskov, in imitation of a wooden church. Rebuilt in the 1560s, it had been used as a private chapel for the Tsars and for royal baptisms. When the great icon painters of the 1400s (the Greek Theophanes and the Russian Andrei Rublyov) had worked in Moscow, they had created icons for this cathedral.



The Cathedral of the Archangel Michael

Opposite, to the south-east of the square, stood the equally impressive Cathedral of the Archangel Michael, which was larger. Like the other cathedral, it had gold cupolas and white walls. This had been rebuilt in 1505–9 by the Milanese architect Alevisio Novi, who had introduced various Italian Renaissance features such as cornices for the first time in Russia. This cathedral had been used for burials of people in the royal family, and contained forty-six tombs, including that of Ivan the Terrible. The interior murals had been painted by Rublyov.



Uspensky Cathedral (left) and the belfry of Ivan the Great (far right), Kremlin

Crossing the road, we entered the square between these two magnificent cathedrals, which looked fresh in the morning sunlight. We stopped in the centre and listened to Julia, who told us about the place. Fortunately she gave us more than her rationed half hour in the square, which gave Walter and me time to take some photographs. I was rather annoyed to discover that every building here was closed to the public because of renovations, with the exception of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, which we would not be visiting because of the length of the queue.

Directly in front of us was the largest and oldest cathedral: the Uspensky or Assumption Cathedral. This had been built in 1475–79 for royal coronations by Rodolfo Fioravanti, nicknamed ‘Aristotle’ because of his great learning. This architect, from Bologna, had based his structure on a famous cathedral of the same name in the former capital of Vladimir. Inside were frescoes of the sixteenth century and the throne of Ivan the Terrible, which had been made in 1551.



Church of the Deposition of the Robe

Just to the west of this tall square cathedral, with its paintings of saints over the entrance, was a tiny gem of a building: the Tserkov’ Rizpolozheniye or Church of the

Deposition of the Robe. This had been built in 1485–6 by architects from Pskov, who had added some Gothic features. Close to the church was the simple but beautiful Granovitaya Palata or Palace of Facets, the oldest of three surviving domestic buildings in Moscow that had been built by Marco Ruffo and Pietro Solario in 1487–91. Behind could be seen the golden cupolas of the Church of the Terem Palace, also known as the Church of the Saviour behind the Golden Lattice, built in 1678. (The Terem Palace had been built in 1635–6 for the Romanovs to live in.)



The belfry of Ivan the Great, Kremlin

Across the square, on the east side, was the tall belfry of Ivan the Great, which looked very impressive. It had been constructed in 1532–42 by the architect Marco Bono in the new western style. During the seventeenth century, Boris Godunov ordered it to be elevated to 263 feet high. At the very top, standing out boldly against the deep blue sky, was a shining gold cupola, topped with a Russian Orthodox cross.

There was a magical atmosphere about this truly beautiful square, though it was slightly marred by the presence of so many tourists and souvenir kiosks. However, when the tourists disappeared and an occasional old woman dressed in black shuffled across the square, the place assumed its unique Russian flavour. Unfortunately though, there was a lifeless atmosphere about our surroundings, for these magnificent cathedrals, as far as we could see, probably only functioned as museums.

We were now led from the square by the side of the belfry, passing the patient Russians who were queuing to buy admission tickets, and were brought back to the road. We now walked around to the other side of the Belfry to see the next historic attraction, the Tsar Bell.

As we passed the belfry, I stepped on to the road to frame a dramatic view of it in the viewfinder of my camera. As I did so, I heard the blast of a policeman's whistle. Although I realized that I must have done something wrong, I decided not to budge, and took the photograph. I was surprised to hear the whistle being blown again when I returned to the pavement. I looked around and discovered that a soldier, dressed in a brown and yellow uniform, was blowing his whistle at Walter, and was furiously summoning my friend over to him with his baton. Walter approached him and a comical show of gesticulations took place. Although I was inclined to laugh at the incident, I told Julia what was happening. Waving it off, she said that it did not matter and that it would come to nothing. However, as Walter was being carted off by the

arm, several other people appealed to her and so she approached the soldier who was now shouting to us, 'Где ваш гид?' ('*gdye vash gid?*' 'where's your guide?').

A rapid conversation in Russian followed, during which Julia scolded the soldier and he vainly tried to remonstrate. Julia and Walter then returned to us, victorious and smiling. Our guide laughed and told us that the soldier was convinced that Walter was a Russian pretending to be a tourist and that he had kept repeating his conviction. Walter (whose parents were Italian) later confessed to me that he had felt his knees wobbling and that he was quite scared!



The Tsar Bell, the Kremlin, Moscow

Julia now showed us the huge black 200-ton bell that had never been used, for a large chunk, weighing over eleven tons, had broken off in a fire two years after it had been made. It had been cast in 1733–35 by Ivan and Mikhail Motorin.

Across the road from us were the extensive Kremlin gardens, in which we saw blue spruce trees. We now walked on, veering to the left and heading northwards, and approached the Kremlin Theatre: a yellow and white 1958 building. Nearby we stopped again and this time were shown the black Tsar cannon, made in 1586 by Chokhov. Like the great bell, this had never been used.



The Tsar Cannon

On we walked, skirting the back of the Uspensky Cathedral and passing the Senate and Court building, which we had seen from Red Square on the previous evening. This had been built in 1776–88 by the architect Kazakov; we were told that Lenin had worked here from 1918 to 1922.



The Palace of Congresses, Kremlin, Moscow

To the west of this building, farther on, was the Arsenal, which had been built in 1702–36. Straight ahead was the Trinity Gate; as we approached it, we passed the Palace of Congresses, built in 1961. Surrounded by trees and gleaming in the hot sunshine, it now did not look so bad and out of place. We were told that the grand hall could seat 6,000 people and that the banqueting hall could cater for 2,500 guests.

We now walked at a leisurely pace through the gate, down a ramp, down some steps after another gateway, and clambered aboard our coach, which was like an oven inside. Thus ended our enjoyable tour of the Kremlin. Walter and I vowed to return and see it at our own speed sometime later.



Leaving the Kremlin through the Trinity Gate, Moscow

After a good lunch in the hotel, we paid for three optional tours and then left, at two o'clock, for a general sightseeing tour of the city. We drove along Prospekt

Kalinina, then crossed to the other side of the Moskva river for a panoramic view of the Kremlin. After we had taken photographs, we set off again, taking an extremely



The Kremlin from the opposite side of the Moskva river

complicated route to the nearby Red Square, which now looked somewhat different and much bigger in the sunlight. There was a festive atmosphere about the place as there were so many people and tourists about. Once again the soldiers were making sure that one walked only on the routes marked by the white lines, for every now and then we could hear the familiar whistles being blown.



The Lenin Mausoleum, Red Square, Moscow

We now hastened to see the changing of the guard at Lenin's tomb, but we had just missed it. As we ran up to the mausoleum, the soldiers were completing their strange goose-step manoeuvres at the Spassky Tower gate; once they had relaxed, an official shook hands and laughed with them. Some children nearby were imitating the soldiers' goose step; Walter and I laughed at their attempts and tried to do it ourselves.

We then wandered around, looking at souvenir stalls, and also at tables displaying the work of professional photographers who were busy taking photos of people posing in front of Saint Basil's Cathedral. We saw colourfully-dressed children scampering around, teenagers, women with shopping bags, old women in dark clothing, business men with attaché cases, old men with empty string bags (who were probably on the lookout for food or goods for sale in the almost-empty shops), families on holiday, and Americans with cameras slung around their necks. The atmosphere was relaxed; the only individuals who looked solemn were the two motionless guards on either side of the closed door of Lenin's mausoleum.



GUM and Lobnoye Mesto, Red Square, Moscow

Back at the coach, where we discovered that not everybody had joined us, we looked at the huge Rossiya Hotel which, we were told, could accommodate six thousand people. This had been built in an old area of the city, where there had been a maze of narrow streets. The only surviving buildings were some beautiful little sixteenth and seventeenth-century churches, which looked totally out of place beside the modern hotel.

When everyone had returned, we set off in the coach and drove around the city. The heat and airlessness in the coach now began to make me drowsy and I was inclined fall asleep during our tour along the wide streets. We passed various sights, such as the large Lenin Museum, the Bolshoi Theatre, the Maly Theatre, a statue of the first Russian printer, Ivan Fyodorov (1564), a statue of Pushkin erected in 1880, and various buildings, skyscrapers, railway and metro stations, apartment blocks and monuments. Most of the city looked grim and uninteresting, though we did see some tree-lined avenues and parks. There was a fair amount of traffic on the roads: buses, trolleybuses, trams, taxis, black official cars (such as Chaikas and Zils) that also doubled as luxury taxis, small cars like the new Polski Fiats, and a number of old trucks and lorries.

On the pavements, crowds of people could be seen walking, waiting for buses, or queuing in front of dowdy and poorly-stocked shops. The names of the shops were descriptive and completely unimaginative: *Gastronom* (food shops that normally displayed stacks of tinned food in the windows), *Moloko* (Milk), *Khleb* (Bread), *Myaso* (Meat), *Frukty* (Fruit), *Produkty* (Groceries), *Atelye* (Studio – a fashion store),

Tkani (Fabrics), *Tsveti* (Flowers), *Apteka* (Chemist), and so forth. Only cinemas, theatres and concert halls had been given appealing names.

Here and there we saw people queuing on the pavements for *morozheniye* (ice cream), which was sold from mobile fridges, and which often had a block of ice on top. *Kvas*, a distinctive Russian drink, almost non-alcoholic and made from fermented rye bread, yeast and water, was sold by women seated by a special tanker; as there were no take-away glasses, people had to drink the *kvas* on the spot and return the glasses, which were then cleaned and rinsed in water by the women. There was also *gazirovannaya voda* (fizzy water), which one could get for a few kopecks from automatic machines, which we saw everywhere.

Revolutionary posters and slogans could be seen in various parts of the city, to which the locals seemed to pay scant attention. We also passed several ugly statues of Lenin.

Eventually we came to a stop by a lake that offered a pleasant vista of a sixteenth-century convent that our guide told us was the New Maiden Convent. We scrambled out of the hot coach, looked in a small shop nearby, and then walked along the lakeside in the shade. It was a pleasure to walk around for a few minutes. We then returned to the coach and sped off. As we drove along, I took out my map and checked it. It suddenly dawned on me that the New Maiden Convent was what I knew as the Novodevichy Convent, which was just a short walk from our hotel!

Near the Moskva river and our hotel, we passed some new sports complexes that were being completed in readiness for the Olympics during the following year. We were told that eighty new stadiums were being built – a fact that we found rather hard to swallow.



A view of Moscow from the Lenin Hills

We then crossed the river and made for the Lenin Hills in the southern suburbs of the city. Plonked on top of one of the hills was another one of the seven ugly skyscrapers; this was the Moscow State University. The building was just as hideous as our hotel, but the view of the city from its grounds was quite breathtaking. Despite the ban on taking photographs from high viewpoints, we were allowed to take whatever we liked. We were given twenty minutes on our own here.



Church, Lenin Hills

Coming near to the end of our allotted time, Walter and I decided to walk into a small forested park nearby. Just inside it we found an attractive church. As we took photographs of it, two teenage girls quite deliberately and self-consciously posed before us and then went inside. We followed suit, noticing that a few old women, who were sitting on a bench nearby, were chatting among themselves.

We found that it was quite dark in the church. A man who was dressed in black, and who was standing by the door, indicated that we could not take our cameras inside. I gave my camera to Walter and entered on my own. I was surprised to discover that the church was full of old women who were lighting candles, kissing icons, crossing themselves, prostrating themselves, touching the floor with their heads, and singing a sorrowful hymn in harmony. The only source of light was the rows of flickering candles that faintly illuminated the icons that adorned the tall iconostasis and the frescoes on the walls and pillars. There was a magical atmosphere in the church; it was as if I had been transported back in time. Although I felt that I was an intruder, I was reluctant to leave this oasis of peace and tranquillity that I had strayed into, and so I stayed put, inhaling the delicate scent of burning wax and incense. The pious congregation continued their prayers, hymns and obeisances, paying no attention to me. Slowly my eyes adapted themselves to the dim light and I began to make out more details of the tiny, yet delightful, church.

As the old women moved around, the sound of shoes shuffling over wood mingled with the singing of the congregation, which seemed to be quite a spontaneous affair; anybody and everybody joined in at will, singing one of the vocal lines. The two girls who had entered beforehand were wandering around, taking everything in. Were they believers or were they merely curious, like me?

Glancing at my watch, I tore myself away from the enchanting place and went outside, where I found the porter examining Walter's camera and expressing approval. I took both cameras and headed back to the coach in a daze, while Walter went into the chapel to take a look.

When Walter joined me in the coach and we drove off, our guide pointed out the little chapel and mentioned that it was a practising one. It was interesting to note that she had told us about the church *after* we had returned to the coach rather than before we had got out to take our photos and explore the area. Some members of our group were surprised and interested to learn that Walter and I had been in the chapel and that we had seen worshippers inside.

On our way back to the hotel we passed the Mosfilm studios, which appeared to be surrounded by parks and trees. We arrived back for dinner at 5.30 p.m.

After dinner Walter and I rested, then went off for another walk to the Kremlin, where we hoped to photograph it when it was floodlit. As I was feeling rather exhausted by now, we set off at an easy pace, and decided to take a different route. Instead of heading up Prospekt Kalinina, we turned to the left and headed towards the Zoo. On our way, we passed another replica of our hotel building; this one was a high-rise apartment block where workers and their families lived. Open windows revealed grubby apartments and lines of washing, and on the first floor was a large and uninviting *gastronom*.

Walking up a minor street lined with houses, we eventually arrived at the large entrance gate of the zoo which, of course, was closed at this hour of the evening. As it now began to drizzle with rain, we wondered if we should go on. However, as nobody else seemed bothered by the rain, we decided not to be either. Soon afterwards it stopped. At a corner opposite the zoo, a large crowd of people were heading for a building. We followed them inside and discovered that it was the entrance to one of the Metro lines. We noticed that the gate machines opened when a five-kopeck coin was pushed into a slot. We had learned that this small amount of money (about four pence) would entitle the customer to one journey of unlimited length and duration.

Outside again, we examined some fizzy water machines and discovered that a payment of one kopeck yielded a glassful of plain aerated water, while three kopecks yielded flavoured water. In the machine were two glasses which could be washed by inverting them over an opening and pressing them down; this caused water to be squirted upwards, both inside and outside the glass. The device was quite clever, though not exactly hygienic. Neither of us could imagine something like this lasting any length of time at home, for the glasses would surely be pinched after a very short amount of time!

We then headed up Herzen Street, which I noticed had been spelt *Gertsen* in the Cyrillic alphabet, as the Russian language does not have the sound 'H'. Here we passed some older and more pleasant buildings, the ground-level floors of which were lower than street level. Many of these buildings had been preserved by government order, and sported notices to that effect. Some of them were being used as government offices, and one was an embassy. We also passed some small churches, many of which were partially hidden by leafy groves. Eventually more shops appeared as we approached the city centre, and at last we caught sight of the walls of the Kremlin.

A short walk now brought us to Red Square. We were disappointed to find that, as it was not dark enough, the floodlights had not been switched on. We decided to wait and see what might happen. I looked at my watch: it was almost ten o'clock. All of a sudden we heard a dull thump followed by an electrical hum, and the floodlights lit up. The people in the square immediately began to group themselves around Lenin's mausoleum, and we joined them. We guessed what was about to happen: the changing of the guard. We were right, for soon we saw soldiers advancing, headed by a corporal, with their legs swinging high through the air. Stiff and mechanical, they marched up the steps and stopped just as the bells of the Spassky Tower clanged and struck the hour. The timing was perfect. With a few deft movements that were almost too quick to detect, the guards were installed and the two who had been relieved then marched back with the corporal towards the tower.

The ceremony completed, the crowd began to disperse. We walked up to the Lobnoye Mesto, tried taking some photographs of the square, looked around and

walked back to our hotel along Kalinin Avenue. En route we met droves of well-dressed people emerging from the Palace of Congresses and the October Cinema.



Red Square, Moscow, at night

At bedtime, I took some tablets as I was beginning to feel rather sick, no doubt because of the heat and the unfamiliar local food.