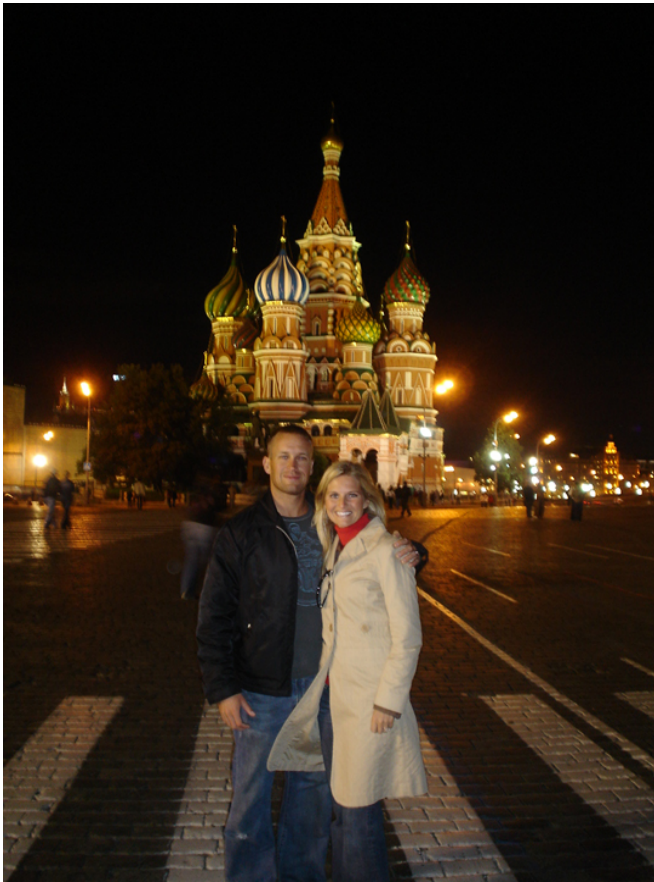


Moscow's Red Square at Night

Written by Julie Kerr Tecau

Wednesday, 06 April 2011 12:59 - Last Updated Friday, 08 April 2011 12:12

Red Square at Night, Traveler's Delight....unless one looks too much like a tourist.



Moscow. To me, just hearing the name of this famed Russian city evokes feelings of mystery, darkness, intrigue, power, beauty. Red Square is the convergence and epicenter of all of these, so when my husband Jeff and I visited Moscow, we made a point of going to Red Square every single evening.

What a sight to behold: the magnificent buildings all lit up brightly, commanding your admiration; the foreboding walls of the Kremlin reminding you of the power of this place and the ups and downs the relationship between our two countries has endured; the iconic St. Basil's Cathedral, too beautiful to be real – it looks almost edible; Lenin's mausoleum; the GUM department store,

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one of the most ornate and beautiful shopping malls I have ever seen; the Kazan Cathedral; the State Historical Museum – they all surround the famed square.

Jeff and I wanted to just stand there forever and let it all soak in. We actually made it to Moscow. The American generation before us would not have wanted to go nor would they have been allowed to stand in Red Square and behold the beauty before us. And who knows if the next generation will be able to or not? The moment—the privilege—of being there was not lost on us. We were quickly brought back to reality, however, when an armed and rather intimidating Russian soldier approached us on our first day at the square and bellowed with a thick Russian accent, “*Pass-port.*”

(For those unfamiliar with [Russian travel requirements](#) , Americans are required to have a visa to enter and exit Russia, and the visa process is very complex and strict. Foreigners in Russia must also have a Russian sponsor, such as a hotel, and maintain paperwork from the sponsor on their person at all times along with one’s passport and visa. According to the US State Department, “A US citizen who does not comply with Russian visa laws can be subject to arrest, fines, and/or deportation.”)



We had been warned to keep all of our immigration papers on us at all times, as it was not uncommon to be stopped in the streets by Russian police/armed forces for a random immigration check. Thankfully, we heeded the advice. After what felt like an eternity, the large Russian soldier returned our papers to us and we were allowed to go on our way. What a relief...but then it happened to us again later that same day. It was quite frustrating, not to mention unnerving, so Jeff and I started thinking – we know we’re in a “tourist” area, but how do they know we aren’t Russians? Why do they single us out? We were both dressed fairly European and certainly not like the typical American tourist (no fanny packs, no t-shirts boasting our alma mater for all the world to know, and definitely no ball caps).

We began to look around and observe the locals more closely. Jeff was carrying a small, gray

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backpack to house our video camera, waters and other supplies, and he was wearing American tennis shoes with his designer jeans instead of dress shoes. We started to observe that Russians (at least Muscovites) do not carry backpacks and Muscovites do not wear tennis shoes around the city. Perhaps these were the cause of our run-ins with the Russian armed forces. The next day, Jeff wore his dress shoes, and we used my large handbag instead of the backpack...and sure enough, we weren't stopped for immigration papers again for the rest of our time there. We felt like we had triumphed. For us, one of the many enjoyable and rewarding parts of travel is to go to a completely foreign place and culture and attempt to understand it – to try to blend in even just a little bit and pretend that you belong there – if even for a moment.

When you make that pilgrimage to Moscow, and I highly recommend you should, do not miss seeing Red Square at night. But don't rush it (and don't forget your passport and immigration papers). Just let it all soak in. Power shifts and wars fought over this mighty country. All that might have been and may still be. Who knows if you will be able to go back to Moscow again? But standing there in front of St. Basil's and the towering red walls of the Kremlin bathed in lights, you will certainly wish so.



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