NSLI students hold reunion in Tatarstan

In early November, the NSLI students from Kirov took a relaxing overnight train ride to Kazan, the capital of the historic region known as the Republic of Tatarstan, to join the NSLI Kazan group for four days of site-seeing, cultural excursions, relaxation, and of course – to celebrate a happy reunion! For the first time since departing from Washington, D.C. in August (and for the first time in Russia), all of the NSLI Russia students were gathered together in one place.

The Kazan group welcomed the Kirov students with open arms, and under the guidance of their RD, Will, showed everyone a great time. We managed to squeeze in so much culture and so many sites in such a short amount of time, that it’s hard to believe we were in Kazan for only a few short days.

Day 1 started off with a guided tour of the kremlin area (see photo at top of page) which included a walk along a cobblestone boulevard to view the ancient church of Peter and Paul, which directly faces the newly-opened Gul Sharif mosque, the newest mosque in Russia. Signs of the long-time peaceful coexistence of Christianity, Islam and other religions or beliefs are prevalently displayed throught Tatarstan. During the tour, Will served as an excellent Russian-English translator.

To conclude our first day, the students commemorated their reunion with a night of bowling and by relaxing with chess and conversation at a local student coffee shop.

The following morning, the students explored many of the inexpensively-priced museums near the kremlin (well, cheap if one is charged the “student” price instead of the “foreigner” price - which is five times higher). Some of the exhibits included artifacts from Ancient Greece and propaganda from the Soviet Union. Students also spent time visiting the Arskaya Cemetary, where Stalin’s son is reputed to be buried.
Day 2 concluded with a trip to the skating rink, followed by a visit to the National Tatar Theater where we enjoyed watching a musical comedy about the responsibilities and challenges a village man has when deciding who his daughter should marry. The performance was in Tatar, but much like on the airplane, we were given with earphones that provided translations in Russian and English.

Day 3 was everyone’s personal favorite where we enjoyed a trip outside of the city to the ruins of the village of “Bulgar”, the site where the Bulgarian people have their ancestral roots. The ruins included a Romanesque-style bathhouse, a minaret, a mausoleum, stone tablets with Arabic inscriptions, a church and a mosque across directly next to each other, and a museum with artifacts from Bulgar (our personal favorite was an item that had the following English translation below it: “A jug”).

Overall, it was a great trip: the Kazan students, host families, and RD were great hosts; we saw and learned a lot about the ethnically diverse, and culturally rich, area of Russia know as Tatarstan; and, of course, we were able to reunite all of NSLI Russia in one place for some well-earned rest and good times.

Best of everything,

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Fall ’09 – Spring ‘10