NSLI-Y Russia recently had its first grand link up when RD Daniel Wienecke brought his gang southward to join the Kazan bunch. We spent the first day huddled together for warmth as we explored such popular Kazan destinations as the Kremlin, Gorky Park, and Park Pobeda. We also had a chance to visit the Hermitage exhibit going on right now in the Kremlin, and in the evening, we all went bowling!

Our second day in town, we strapped on our skates and took to the rink where participant Kelsey Watts showed us her hockey skills. After, we went to the National Tatar Theater to watch Gorgori Kiyaulere, a comedy about Uncle Gorgori, an charming village muzhik who tries to marry his daughter off using the traditional ways!

The highlight of the trip was certainly our day-long excursion to the village of Bulgar. Situated along the banks of the Volga, there are two Bulgars: one new and one ancient. Ancient Bulgar is, of course, the ruins of the capital of the Volga Bulgars who, once upon a time, inhabited that strip of Volga-watered earth before migrating westward to settle along the shores of the Black Sea. The ruins themselves are spread out over a great distance, and NSLI-Y leisurely promenaded through them all, stopping for snowball fights, to climb the early stone minarets, to touch ancient Arabic lettering carved in stone, and to browse the onsite museum.

Finally, we walked down to pay homage to the icy, austere Volga. "This is what I thought Russia would look like," participant Lysander Jaffe said, and all concurred. It was so silent along that frozen bank where nothing but an abandoned looking green row boat, reeking of fish, gave any evidence of civilization.

Thanks to Kelsey for taking great photos of the visit!