

My Husband's Story:

"How I met The Love Of My Life"



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From the Author



Hi! My name is John.

I am married to Elena Petrova from www.womenrussia.com.

I wrote this story about us before Elena wrote her famous "How To Find And Marry A Girl Like Me", so it is in no way connected to what Elena is talking about in her book. It is *my* personal experience of looking for love in Eastern Europe.

My account will give you the important "another side" of our Love Story.

You will also learn about Russia and Russian people and see the photos I made when I was in Russia.

Enjoy your reading!

John

1. What selling a car has in common with finding a wife

This story started a while ago, at the times when I would never consider Russia as a good place for a holiday - this destination does not sound like your regular tropic paradise vacation. My Russian tour was the result of my quest for a Russian wife, and the means of finding her. Please don't consider me a jerk straight away! Search for a Russian wife was something that just happened to me.

I believe every man comes to the idea of finding a Russian wife in his own way. What about me, I should thank my feminist neighbor. She would be very surprised if she discovered that it was she who was the reason of my marriage to a Russian girl!

One night after visiting my neighbors - a married couple next door - I decided it was time to replace my car. My neighbor was working for a motor manufacturer, and she told me about demo models that the factory was selling at a very good price. But first I had to get rid of my current vehicle.

You know, there are different ways of doing that, but because previously I was very successful with classified ads, I did not think twice (the offer would expire soon). The next day on my way home I bought the newspaper - I needed to have a look at prices before placing my own ad.

That night I paged through the newspaper, and the following day placed my advertisement. I kept the newspaper so I could look through it later.

(Very boring? Keep reading, the things are starting right now.)

During the weekend I had some time to page through the newspaper more carefully. The last few pages were all about people that were interested in meeting other people. Since I was currently available (I divorced a few years ago, and had not dated much since), I looked through this section with a particular interest. You know, it feels weird to look for the love of your life in classifieds - but hey, who said one cannot just have some fun? (I mean that it is fun to read personal ads; please do not think I meant something else! I am a quiet type that tends to be shy at first, not very adventurous and I am



St Basilius, Moscow (1555-1561) - this impressive church on the Red Square became the visit card of Russia



The Bronze Horseman, Decembrists' Square (formerly Senate Square), St Petersburg - memorial to Peter the Great, which had become an unofficial emblem of the city. Peter was the founder of St Petersburg, and it was his wish to move the capital from Moscow to the new city. The words on the stone say "To Peter the First from Ekaterina the Second". Ekaterina II was Peter's daughter. Built in 1733.

not a big fond of blind dates.)

This section was split into the local and international sections. I read the local section first, but could not find anything that would interest me, except the ads of married couples that were looking for other married couples to swap partners - not that I was interested in something the like but I did find it pretty amusing. I was wondering about these couples' married lives. Does such a marriage work?

Then I looked further to the back of the newspaper and saw in the international section many ads of foreign women that were looking for men from other countries. Most ads belonged to women from Eastern Europe, mainly the former USSR or eastern block countries, as it was known at one stage.

I read all advertisements and was swept off my feet. According to the ads the women were attractive, educated and so much more. That sounded to good to be true, and surely would make any man wondering. As far as I know men, even the ones who are married would wonder about this. I was tempted to respond to some of the advertisements, but decided to think about it first. Many questions came to my mind, and some of them were very disturbing.

Some of the questions that I can remember were:

- Why Eastern European women looked for western men?
- Why Eastern European women advertised to find men?
- Why men 15 years older were acceptable for Eastern European women?
- Why most of the Eastern European women that advertised were so highly qualified?
- What other methods did these Eastern European women use to make contacts with men?

All those questions prompted me to start my own research, and where in those days did we run our researches? Of course, on the Internet. Soon I discovered that Internet was loaded with web sites featuring Eastern European women looking for western men. The web sites at that time were mainly featuring women from the former USSR.

I started my research partly out of boredom, partly to find out if I really wanted to do this, or better say, if it could really be an option, would it be acceptable or not.



The Cathedral of the Resurrection, Nevsky Prospect, St Petersburg ("Our Saviour-on-the-Spilt-Blood"), one of the most beautiful and famous churches of Russia, built in the memory of the tragic event on 1 March 1881 when terrorists bombed the Tsar, Alexander II - who referred to in Russian history as "Alexander the Liberator" because he freed peasants from the serfdom they had suffered for many centuries, so he actually deserved such treatment less than anybody. It was the 8th attempt of the terrorist organization named "People's Will". One of the members of this organization was Lenin's brother, Alexander Ul'yanov.



Magnificent **Great Palace at Petrodvorets, Peterhof** (a place outside St Petersburg), the abundance of fountains, gold and greenery. Below: The sculptures at the Palace are gold plated!



The word acceptable in this sense had a very broad meaning because it included everything and everybody around me. I believe in many cases men that read or hear about these women and see their ads would be tempted to storm in like a bull and write to some women before doing any research.

Of course every person is unique, and there will be unique things that are applicable to one's personal situation. But the basic questions that you must answer are: Are you ready for this experience? Will you be able to deal with the situation? And - very important - If you choose to continue, will you be able to make a success of it?



2. Why I decided to look for a Russian woman

Why Russian women? I must admit that I had very basic knowledge of Russian culture at the time I conducted my research. I thought I knew quite a lot about Russian history, but later discovered it was not really much. The most important point for me was that the woman I was looking for should be Caucasian. This was my focal point. If you do some research you will soon discover that the majority of available foreign Caucasian women are Russian. This is why I made my choice in favor of Russian woman.

I was very excited about my decision to look for a Russian bride. It was after the cold war; Perestroika has changed the face of Eastern Europe forever and opened an opportunity to foreigners to discover the unknown. I searched for more information on Russia, Russian culture, and generally anything Russian related, to enrich myself. That had made me even more involved into Russian women, and I did not even consider any other women. (I will tell you later about real and important differences in culture that I personally encountered.)

In my first search on the Internet, I could not believe in what I was seeing, all these beautiful women, and they all were looking for men. I kept saying to myself, this couldn't be true. Something must be wrong. There must be a catch. I was wondering about the websites that were selling these addresses, showing all these pictures of all these beautiful women. Then after paying for the address, you will receive it, but you will never be able to make contact with any of these women because she does not exist, or will receive a negative response from her, such as that she is not available any more.

Many days and nights after I saw the advertisements in the newspaper and on the Internet, I was pondering with the idea to make contact with Russian women. I could not make up my mind, which way would be the best. I was tempted to buy addresses on the Internet. The reasons being, because you see women's pictures, you start dreaming about them and there are some details about them on the website as well. This way you know who you are writing to - or so you think - but still have the worrying factor that you will never be able to make a real contact with her. The saying, "it is as easy as buying a horse" surely was not applicable in this case.



Winter Palace, St Petersburg (built by Italian architect Rastrelli) is the residence of Russian Tsars and the Court since the later half of 18th century. It includes the vast Hermitage Museum and is considered one of the best palaces in Europe for its beautiful architecture and interior decor. It is currently one of the world's biggest museums for fine arts.



Monument to Peter the Great (Peter I) on the bank of the Moscow River, built in 1990's. In fact, Peter had never been a very fond of Moscow; St Petersburg was his child and the love of his life. Since Peter moved the capital to the new founded St Petersburg, the two cities always competed with each other, with one of them being the official capital, and the other being "the second capital". Peter moved the capital to St Petersburg trying to introduce a new, European style of life to Orthodox Russia in the beginning of 18th century, after the revolution of 1917 Lenin moved the capital back to Moscow trying to distance the new Soviet State from

I also came across a website that was offering tours to Russia. They promised I would meet - in person! - hundreds available women that were seeking foreign men. This was also tempting. (I never went on any of these tours, but today, after a few years, I can give you some good advice on "romantic tours" with socials. I'll discuss it later and will tell you from my knowledge which companies are the best.) Well, this was way too much for me - I did not need hundreds women, only one, but the right one... It calmed down my worries though, and I started to get used to the idea that all those beautiful, educated women did exist.

the traditions of Russian aristocracy.

For me, once I've accepted a challenge I would try my best to make a success of it. In this case it was a very serious personal matter that would change my whole life - with the opportunity to be happy for the rest of my life. I was brought up to believe in myself, and I am strong enough to accept the challenges life has to offer. Finding a partner for life is a very serious challenge, in this case a foreign wife. Everyone's experience will be different. The point I am trying to make, give it a very serious thought before heading for it. For me it was a wonderful experience but for you it can be different.

So after counting all pros and contras, I decided to go ahead. My choice was Russian women. I made this decision purely based on my review of different web sites that were available at that time on the Internet. Russian women attracted me the most. That being, I need to clear that I considered all women from the former Soviet Union as Russian. USSR was still fresh in my mind; and despite of the fact that it ceased to exist in 1993, all counties of the former USSR were still Russia to me.

3. What is the best way to find a Russian wife?

I learned a lesson early in my life; if you cannot make a decision, leave it for a few days. I used this method to play for extra time with great success in my work. Very often I found a solution after I gave it some thought, but most of the time the answers used to come up naturally. I used the same method in finding a Russian wife.

A few days passed, and the answer came up naturally. I was thinking, if Russian women place ads in newspapers, they must have some success otherwise they would not keep on doing this. If they can place ads, they will surely respond to ads as well. I was thinking, what if I place my own ad and receive responses from women? This could be very exciting. What else can you ask for? You are sitting pretty in your chair, and let the women find you! You don't need to worry if the woman from the picture exists in blood and flesh, or if she will be interested in you. SHE is writing to YOU. To me it was exactly the opposite of what the Internet agencies were offering. Going this way all my unanswered questions would be answered.

I bought the same newspaper where I saw the first ads of Russian women advertising to make contact with men. There was a coupon that could be used for placing your own ad. I filled out the coupon with my details and requirements to women that I would like to respond my ad, and faxed it through to the newspaper. I did not include my e-mail address in the ad. I don't know why, but today I can tell you it was the right decision at that time. The majority of Russian people at that time, 5 years ago, did not have access to the Internet or e-mail. Most people were not even aware that such a thing existed. Today the situation is completely different. Internet is available and well known, but in many instances women do not own computers and have to pay for Internet access. They use Internet cafes, post offices, libraries and universities.

Dating agencies in Russia are making money out of it by asking money from women for sending and receiving letters via e-mail; it is probably the principal source of revenue for Russian agencies.



The famous **Red Square** in Moscow is not red at all! "Red" in Russian language was initially used as an equivalent of "beautiful", so the Red Square would also mean "a beautiful square".



The opposite side of the **Kremlin** if facing the Moscow River. There are a few cathedrals on the territory of Kremlin; you can see its gold plated roofs on the picture.



Spasskaya Tower; Kremlin, Red Square, Moscow. The clock on the Spasskaya Tower is called "The Main Clock of the country", and is the standard of time in Russia.

4. First letters from Russian women that swept me off my feet

Three weeks later the first letters arrived in my post box. Snail mail! We'll soon forget what it is (was). I think it is the right time to start collecting postal stamps - they will soon become rarity. Nevertheless, Russian women still use them.

I was so surprised to see these letters because after I placed the ad, I never worked out how long it could take for letters if any to arrive. I collect mail from my post box once a week; this is why there were a few letters. It took me by surprise, but a very pleasantly so.

With those letters in my hand I could not wait to get home. I would lie if I say I was shivering but surely I was full of joy. It was not the type of feeling that you experience with your first date; it was more the feeling of satisfaction and excitement, like when you check your lotto ticket and the first 4 numbers are the same as yours - and you are about to check the last 2. The joy was overwhelming - I now knew there really were women in Russia that were interested in western men - and that they were interested in me, too! Many things had flashed through my mind before I reached home, the whole brain storming process that I went through before placing the ad. The most outstanding point was that the women responded to my ad without knowing what I looked like. My mind was running, and I was wondering what would the women look like?

My ad was placed in the whole of Russia. You have the option to choose cities if you so prefer, but because of my uncertainty whether I would receive any response to the ad, I placed it in the whole of Russia.

I did not sort out the mail. I opened the first letter that was lying on top. I pulled the letter out of the envelope and inside the letter were two photos. I was stunned. I looked and looked and looked and could not believe in what I was seeing. The most beautiful girl you can think of. Look at the pictures of Irina and decide for yourself.

After a while I read the letter. She was from St Petersburg. It was a short letter written in complicated English, but still intelligible. She was about two years younger than my requested requirements. After reading the letter, I took a big breath and made myself some



Irina: the girl that made my heart skip a beat



coffee, before opening the next one. This was way too much for a healthy man's heart.

I cannot recall how many letters I have received that day, probably about nine. I opened the rest, looked at the photos and read the letters. The rest were very average comparing to the first one but still they were also attractive women. Some of the letters were written in Russian of which I could not understand a single word. I can remember there was even a letter without a photo from a woman that was older than me.

Then I calmed down, sat and wondered if this were the reaction in the first week what would it be the next week. I was trying to figure out how to deal with the situation. When must I respond to them and what should I say to whom? The ones that had only Russian version of the return address automatically excluded themselves from receiving a response. In retrospect I think I could just have made a copy of the Russian address, glued it to the envelope, add "Russia" at the bottom and sent it like that - I am sure it would have reached the addressee - but at that time this idea did not occur to me. I think I was a little bit overwhelmed.

So I did not rush into writing responses, still not sure how I should reply. It just shows you how important is to think about the consequences once you have started. Luckily it was snail mail - if it was e-mail, the women would decide I was not interested!

5. You've got mail: now what do you do with it?

From today's perspective I believe it is important to draw a very clear picture of the woman you want to meet. Don't be in any doubt: there ARE women in Russia that seek foreign husbands, and at least some of them will be interested in you. If you have a clear image of your Ideal Woman, you will see straight away who is not Her. My problem was I did not have such an image in my mind. I did have some ideas but because of my uncertainty whether Russian women would find me attractive I hesitated to express them clearly even for myself and would probably settle for the second best.

After a few days of uncertainty about my first bunch of letters the answer suggested itself: I will send my photos to Irina from St. Petersburg and will correspond with her. The rest I will put on ice until I receive more letters in the weeks to come. I wrote my letter to Irina and mailed it the same week.

That week I was dreaming and wondering what I would do if there were many more of this type of girls: attractive, intelligent, educated, non-smokers and in my specified age group. I would prefer somebody that was older than Irina. I said to myself, if there were nobody else that I would be interested in, I would keep on corresponding with Irina to get to know her better, and then make a decision. Actually I was lucky in not receiving many letters from women that were very attractive to me. If there were, let's say, 20 girls like Irina, it would have been very difficult to make a choice, because I definitely was not ready to correspond with 20 girls at a time! I was too busy for that.

At the time I placed my ad I was 43 and I was looking for a woman from 28 to 35. The reason why I chose this age group was that I was hoping to have kids with her and the most important fact for me was that she would want to settle down.



St Basilus Cathedral and the Spasskaya Tower; view from the hotel "Rossia" in Moscow



Kremlin: sunset on the Moscow River

6. The best remedy if your ego needs a boost

The following week I was like a kid. I almost counted the night's sleep until the weekend before I could fetch the mail on Friday. At that time I was working for a corporate company and was a part of the top management. During the day I was very busy and late afternoons when I returned home I wanted to collect the mail but have kept myself in suspense until the weekend. I was telling myself that it would be more interesting and more exciting to receive all the letters together, than one or two every day.



Elena: a pink dream

The next bunch of letters was about 11. It was the same as the first time: I rushed home and opened them one by one. Again the responses and the women who wrote them amazed me. Again I was shocked. My symptoms were similar to that of an alcoholic having the shakes. I had the shakes with the letters in my hands. Amongst them was another stunning woman. She had much more than I could ever hope for. Her name was Elena. She was in the age group that I was looking for and needless to say, very attractive. Her first letter contained only basic information about her and one photo. And this one photo and the little information about her was enough to impress me!

In total I received more than thirty letters. It was wonderful. Receiving letters from beautiful women that apply to you is actually much more fun than browsing personal ads on the Internet or reading a newspaper. If your ego needs a boost, I would recommend it as a therapeutic remedy. Today if you place your ad, it is possible you will receive more than thirty e-mails in the first day!

My letters were quite diverse. There was one woman from Bulgaria that saw my ad somewhere. I also had a letter from a woman from Ukraine that was asking me for money. She included a photo with her letter, telling me how difficult it was for her to make a decent living. Her aim was not to meet a man. I was feeling really sorry for her, as I was not used to women so openly asking for money. I could have fallen for her story, because she was quite attractive. Afterwards I realized that it was the correct decision that I did not send her money. That is where the most men go wrong in giving women money if she asks or complains about costs of

some sort.

I also received a DHL parcel from a woman that was a medical doctor. She said she sent it by courier because she was worried that I would not receive her letter fast enough. I also received a few letters a year after I placed the advertisement.

7. The tough decision of choosing between two stunning women

All these different experiences were eye-openers for me. I was under the impression that I was experienced enough to deal with the situation satisfactory. I was successful in my career and confident in what I was doing. Probably I was a little too much mucho. Today I can tell you there are so many things that you learn in the process and it is very important to make the right decisions at the right time. I was fortunate enough that everything worked out fine for me and I can share it with people that have a desire to find a foreign wife.

From the second bundle of letters I only responded to Elena. She was the one that was giving me cold fever when I read her letter and saw her photo. Eventually I decided to write to only two of the women. My biggest worry at that time was if I was dealing with the situation correctly. What will I do if one of the women suddenly informs me that she has met somebody else and is not interested in me anymore? That would leave me in a situation where I don't have a choice and this is the type of situation I prefer not to happen. The best would be if I could make a choice. I hoped that after a few letters it would be clear who I liked more.

After I received second letters from Irina and Elena, I already had a feeling who I would eventually prefer. But I still did not want to let anyone go, probably because I was afraid to lose control over the situation. I wanted to be able to choose. At that stage it would be difficult, both were very attractive, educated, intelligent and so much more. Having the opportunity to correspond with two women of this caliber was wonderful, but at the same time I also felt a little bit guilty, like I was cheating. I actually told both women that I have received very good response to my ad, and made it clear that I was corresponding with somebody else. But still I was thinking how would I tell one of them that I have chosen another woman.

The correspondence and a possible future relationship with a Russian woman were so exciting for me. There was some indescribable mystery, the unknown of someone foreign. But despite of my sound knowledge of foreign countries and their realities (foreign countries were always my passion), it did not make me an expert in foreign relationships. I can tell you, foreign knowledge



Mausoleum of Lenin on the Red Square, Moscow. The body of "The First Bolshevik", the leader of October takeover of 1917 and the founder of the USSR, Vladimir Ul'yanov (conspiracy nickname "Lenin") was embalmed after his death, and placed in specially built (1929-30) Mausoleum for public access. During the Soviet times the queues to have a look at the mummy used to reach 5-6 km (3-3.5 miles). Today the public access is denied, and rumors have it that the body was removed from Mausoleum. Another famous Mausoleum is in Hanoi, Vietnam, and is built to memorize yet another famous communist, Ho Chi Minh.



Mausoleum is no longer the main attraction of the Red Square.



One of the scariest places in the world - **KGB on Lubyanka Square in**

and foreign relationship don't have much in common. Having knowledge of a foreign country will help you in your relationship but there are so many finer things in the culture, which you will only discover later. You can also be experienced in relationships, but a foreign relationship will definitely have some difference and most of it will come from the culture differences. What I was wondering about, how big will those differences be and how difficult will it be to overcome them. Of course it depends on the person, but there always will be some culture differences, Russia and the West are just way too different. Your personal way of dealing with those differences is important because it can determine whether you succeed in the relationship or not, and this whole process made me very excited.

After I received third letters from the two ladies, I had a definite feeling of my choice of woman. Initially I was not sure how to cope with this feeling, but after giving it a good thought (2 weeks!) I had come up with a decision. These types of decisions are so sensitive. The decision I had made that day ensured my further relationship with the lady of my choice. I decided to continue my relationship with Elena. In my following letter to Elena I told her about my decision, that she was the only woman that I was now corresponding with. Much later in our relationship she told me that the letter where I informed her that I only corresponded with her now, was the turning point in our relationship. She told me that after that letter she was feeling secure. She said she was attracted to me the most from the very beginning (she was also corresponding with some other men) but she thought I was too good for her (grin). She was feeling insecure and wanted to keep her options open.

I think this is very typical for Russian women. A beautiful woman 10 years younger who is educated, intelligent, feminine, caring, charming, not overly materialistic and who is happy to be a woman, is something special born. The same applies to a Russian woman. A guy who is hardworking, faithful, attentive, who takes care of his career, health and good physical shape, who does not smoke and doesn't drink, will be very special for Russian women. Add the desire to get married and start a family (which is as rare in Russian men as in western women), and you will see why we both could not believe in our luck. We both were thinking the other one was too good to be true!

Moscow. By the way, since late 1980's KGB (Committee of the State Safety) had changed its name to FSB (Federal Service of Safety), so you don't have to be afraid of getting locked by KGB anymore! I consider Moscow as a safe place to travel, and FSB is hardly interested in foreign tourists.

8. How much time it takes to develop a relationship

I must be honest, I was sure about my feelings for Elena and that she was the woman I was looking for, but I was worried how she would accept my letter. I was sure that she would accept it positively because the indications in the letters were quite clear, but as a normal human being, I was still a little bit nervous. Nervous, similar to when you wait for the results of the final exam - you have prepared well and you believe you should pass, but you are still worrying when waiting for the results. Nevertheless, I trusted my instinct and feelings about the relationship that we had built over three letters (I do not count a few postcards that we sent to each other). You can probably wonder how people can build something over the course of 3 returned letters - well, that surprised me too, but I did feel very strongly about her. Our letters were VERY long, 5-10 pages every time, with lots of discussion and confessions, and we asked each other many, many questions. I felt that our communication was very good, and it was like we knew each other for years. Sometimes it happens in real life that you meet somebody that you feel comfortable with from the day one, I think this was the same thing.

I was relieved after receiving Elena's next letter. She told me that she was glad about my decision. She never told me that she was also corresponding with somebody else, but she told me later she had quite a few admirers, and my decision to continue corresponding with her only had given our relationship a great boost. Nowadays relationships are built much faster because of Internet access - I don't mean the number of letters but the time it took for us, nearly six months because we were using snail mail. I placed my advertisement in July, received Elena's first letter in August and in February it was on the right track. In my following letter I informed her of my intention to come and visit her. Telling her this had further strengthened our relationship. It is very important in these long distance relationships to keep it real. Attractive Russian women receive many letters from men, and if you do not act you are at risk of losing her. Russian women prefer men to make the first move, and if you wait for her to invite you over, you will probably wait forever.

By the way, you must know that it is virtually impossible for a single Russian girl to get a visitor's visa to USA (as well as to other countries like Canada or Australia) because of the immigration rules. The immigration



Church at the hotel "Rossia", Moscow, Russia - I took this picture from my room window. At that time it was still in the process of renovation.



During the Soviet times churches (the ones that had not been destroyed) were painted in pale colors to make them "invisible" - now they paint them bright colors. This **church (also at the hotel "Rossia")** is half-renovated: can you see the difference?



Yet another Moscow church - **the Cathedral of the Mother of God's Kazan Icon (1626-1636)** on the Red Square. Reconstructed in 1993.

services consider every applicant as a potential immigrant who intends to stay in the country, and they (reasonably) believe a single Russian girl visiting her boyfriend would not be eager to come back after her visa has expired. So it has to be you who must go over to see her, if you want to turn your correspondence into something real.

In my case the women responded to my advertisement, but they also sent their data to some dating agencies and had their ads placed on the Internet. If a Russian woman has decided to seek a foreign relationship, she will make every effort to receive enough letters so she could also have a choice. I find it understandable.

In our correspondence with Elena we shared not only our dreams and aspirations but also our views on marriage and relationship, what each of us considered important in life. We were also talking about many other things, such as politics, current world events, history and things that were affecting our countries. I have learned a lot about Russia and related topics. It was things in which we had a common interest.

9. Finally, I've got to visit Russia!

For me the ideal time to visit Elena would be in June/July. I did not have any interest in visiting Russia during the wintertime because of the cold weather. First I wanted Elena to come to Moscow and join me for a week visiting Finland and Estonia. Elena was from Ekaterinburg, Ural province, which is situated more to the middle of Russia close the boundary between Asia and Europe (actually, it is 37 km to the Asian side). Elena was the manager of a marketing company in Ekaterinburg, and it was a very busy time of the year, the beginning of their summer. It was impossible for her to go on vacation this time of the year and tour with me. Because of her busy schedule I had to visit her in her home city, or reschedule for another time of the year, so I'd chosen the first.

Again I was lucky, and did not even know it. In fact, I was not very happy about the forthcoming trip to Ekaterinburg; it made the logistics of my European tour so much more complicated, but today I am thankful that it worked out the way it did. I would have made a great mistake if I did not visit Elena in her hometown. If you have made up your mind about the women that you are interested in, visit them in their hometowns and meet their families if possible. It is not only a learning process but also a lifetime experience. Russian people are very warm, friendly people. Once they have accepted you, it is forever. The way people live in Russia is different and could seem strange to you but this is not all that important. It is the people and the (possible) future wife that is important. It's good for the relationship. It gives her family a chance to meet you, to get to know you and the opportunity to accept you as a possible future husband of their daughter.

A possible future marriage is not a business deal. It is all about feelings, and to me it was a very serious matter. The final decision that you suppose to make after your visit is something that can have its influence on your whole life for the rest of your life. It is normal people's aspiration if they have decided to get married that it will be forever. Visiting the possible future wife in her hometown and meeting her family can strengthen your relationship enormously. At least for me it did, and it was an unforgettable experience too. I spoke to several people that have done it the way I did and they shared exactly the same viewpoint: it is experience of a lifetime. I have visited Russia several times, but none was so



GUM, the state shopping center on the Red Square, Moscow - opposite to the Kremlin; one of the biggest shopping galleries in Europe



Fountain at the center of GUM - the meeting place if you have lost one another at the shop. (The announcements on radio is always that you should meet each other here.)



Street musicians at the underground street crossing close to the Red Square: I was told, they are usually students of Conservatory or musical college. They were playing very enjoyable music!

memorable as that first visit.

During the time of our correspondence Elena had sent me several photos of herself but for me the most precious one was the one that I received with her very first letter. I sent her my photo only with my second letter, which as I realized afterwards, was a mistake. I should have done it with the first letter to eliminate any uncertainties. I also sent her some other photos later. It is very important to have good photos of yourself, especially the first photo that you intend to send to women. It was Elena's first photo that impressed me so much. I guess if it was a bad photo, everything could go differently and we probably would not be married today! This is applicable to us men as well: send the woman of your dreams a poor quality picture, and most likely you will not have a chance to send a better one. Rather don't send any picture than send a bad one.

10. How to plan your Russian tour: the pitfalls of logistics

I used a travel agent that had knowledge of Russia to do all the bookings for my Russian trip. I decided to use the opportunity to see more of Russia, and also included Finland and Estonia in my trip. My trip was planned that I fly to Moscow, then to Ekaterinburg and back to Moscow. From Moscow I would fly to Helsinki in Finland, then travel by ferry to Tallinn in Estonia, then by train to St Petersburg, Russia, and from there back to Moscow also by train, from where I would leave the country. It was to be a long trip!

It was to be my first trip overseas. I was very excited and looked forward to it. Again, I made the right decision - to use a travel agent. If you don't know the country, it is always better to use an experienced knowledgeable travel agent, and it's particularly true in the case of Russia. My travel agent had given me very good advice. I think if your trip is planned properly, and it works out nicely, it makes the trip so much more memorable.

Tips from my travel agent were that when you arrive at Sheremetevo international airport in Moscow and continue your journey to another Russian city, you will depart from another airport. You can use one of the following services that are available: a transfer organized by you or your travel agent, a taxi or the bus service that operates between the two airports. The bus transport is cheap but you must watch not to miss your stop, and if you don't know the language and do not understand the Russian alphabet, it is not easy. The taxi will be expensive if you cannot speak Russian fluently without an accent - prices for foreigners differ from the prices the taxi driver would ask for a Russian, and not in your favor! So the less complicated and safest way is to organize your transfer in advance.

If there is enough time available between the flights, I would advise you to take an excursion around Moscow. This is what my travel agent did for me. I had to wait twelve hours for my connecting flight to Ekaterinburg, and the excursion was supposed to fill the gap. I know some people enjoy sightseeing on their own but with a personal guide it is so much better. It was not cheap but it was definitely worthwhile (I believe most good things are not cheap). If you were flying to one of the regional cities in Russia (or Ukraine, or Belarus) it would be a



The Temple of the Christ the Saviour, Moscow.

Initially was built with people's donations (1831-1883, architect K. Ton), demolished in 1931 by Stalin. Restored in 1990's - it was planned to finance the building with donations again but it was impossible to raise such amount during the poor years of Russian reforms; so at the end of the day it was basically sponsored by the Moscow government.

shame to miss out seeing the capital. If you anyway happen to be in this part of the world, get as much as you can out of it.

Well, coming back to my story. I had finally booked my trip and informed Elena about the day of my arrival. She had sent me her home phone number and I sent her my mobile phone number that would be unbarred while I was traveling. We were still corresponding via snail mail. As far as I was concerned, everything was planned well for the trip. The only thing that was worrying me was the language: I was wondering how I would communicate with people in Russia if I did not speak any Russian! The only word that I knew was "na zdoroviae" (a common Russian toast, like our "Cheers") and according to Elena I pronounced it wrong anyway. I knew that Elena's English was good but we had never communicated in person. She told me that they study English at school, and a lot of books that she used for research in her degree were English. I could see from her writing that she had excellent knowledge of English but as far as I knew she did not have many opportunities to speak the language.

I had a double visa for entering Russia, because my trip was planned that I would leave Russia for Finland and then enter it again from Estonia. My Russian visas were loose documents with my photos on it. My Finnish visa was placed in my passport and the Estonian visa could not be applied for beforehand, and had to be applied for on my arrival in Estonia at the Tallinn harbor.

11. My arrival in Russia: immigration, customs and Russian Mafia

Finally, after a few months of planning and preparations, it was the day of my departure. On 24 June at about 13h00 I arrived at the international airport Sheremetevo 2 in Moscow. It was raining. I was surprised to see so many planes of the Russian airlines Aeroflot at the airport. Some of them were totally or half stripped and parked in rows on the field. What struck me about the airport was that it was old with limited space for the enormous queues waiting to go through immigration and customs.

Eventually it was my turn to go through the immigration. My idea of Russian people was that Perestroika had brought changes and those emotionless people that we saw in James Bond movies had disappeared. I handed in my documents to the lady behind the counter. She did not say a word and did not even look at me. No "Hello" or anything else, even in Russian! She silently took my passport and paged through it, looked at my visa, and compared the photo on the visa with the photo in my passport. She looked at the photo on my visa and looked at me to check if I was indeed the same person. She looked me straight in the eyes and as a normal reaction from me I smiled, but no reaction came from her side. Without any emotion or reaction she looked at me and looked at the photos on the visa and passport, opened my passport and stamped it. I could not understand this emotionless reaction of the woman or should I rather call her officer. Elena later told me because of the work that they were doing, she would not smile, and secondly it was not in the Russian tradition for a woman to smile back at strangers.

After the immigration I went to collect my luggage. When I arrived at the conveyer my luggage was already available. At the exit from the international arrivals hall I was met by Dmitriy, the driver of the car for my afternoon transit tour in Moscow. Dmitriy was fluent in English and I was very impressed. I was wondered if I was over concerned about Russian people that could not speak English, but Dmitriy confirmed that I surely would experience problems. Dmitriy told me that he had a full time job but that he transported people on transit tours through Moscow in his free time. Initially I thought that he was the tour guide as well, but he told me that we would meet the guide near the Red square and that she



Airport Sheremetevo, terminal 2 (international)
Moscow



Sheremetevo 2 was built in the early 1970's, during the times of the cold war. It is by far too small for today's busy international life. Long queues and lack of waiting rooms don't make a favorable impression.



Moscow is becoming prettier with every day: renovations, reconstructions, upgrading of roads and new buildings are changing its look to the one of a modern European capitals (I hope they will reconsider the upgrading of the international airport soon!)

would be my tour guide and he was only a driver. The tour guide's name was also Elena. I thought "What a coincidence" but now I know it is a very popular name in Russia. If you look through Internet dating agencies, you will find hundreds (I am not kidding) women whose name is Elena. Russians don't have such a variety of first names that we do in the West, I don't know why but it seems there are only a few dozens female names. When you look through the Internet websites, you will all the time see women named Elena, Natasha (or Natalia - it is the same name), Olga, Tatiana, Svetlana, Irina, Marina, Ludmila - don't worry, there is nothing wrong with it. I did not know about the names at the time, and I decided the fact that my guide's name was the same as the woman I was going to visit must be a good omen.

Dmitriy and I had a pleasant conversation on the way from the airport. He was very interested in my country and questioned me all the time. There were some road works and the traffic moved terribly slow even though there were three lanes of traffic going into the city and three lanes coming out of the city. In the middle of the road was an additional lane for emergency vehicles. As we were talking I saw some unmarked motorcars, some with blue flashing lights and some without, driving at high speed in the emergency lane. I asked Dmitriy if that was the police? To my surprise he said no, it was the Mafia, police cars were only the ones that were marked. I was stoned. Then he told me about the Russian mafia, and how powerful they were. Before that I was only aware of the Italian mafia.



The Temple of the Christ the Saviour: stunning view from the Moscow River

12. Moscow the magnificent

It took us nearly an hour in Dmitriy's Toyota that he bought in China, from the airport to the city center where we met Elena.

Elena was a middle age lady that had given up her teaching job as an English teacher to become a tour guide for foreign tourists. The whole afternoon there were scattered thundershowers but that could not prevent me from enjoying my Moscow tour.

They showed me the Rossia hotel, one of the biggest hotels in the world with more than three thousand rooms and three different reception areas on the banks of the big Moscow River.

We visited the impressive Moscow University, some churches; some of the churches were still in repairing state with their gold plated roofs. I found it very impressive that the roofs could be gold plated.

We also visited the Bolshoy Theater, one of the most famous theaters in the world and a market place close to the university.

We went to the Olympic Stadium built for 1980 Games that was boycotted by USA and some other countries, which is situated on the banks of the Moscow River not far away from the city center.

We did not go to the Red Square with its famous churches because I was supposed to have an opportunity to see it during my 3-day stay in Moscow after my visit to Ekaterinburg.

My Moscow tour was well planned and I enjoyed Elena as my tour guide. She was well spoken and cultured.

Late that afternoon I offered to buy Dmitriy supper. Elena rather preferred to go home and he took me to the place where we could eat. His choice was the beautiful underground shopping center next to the Red Square where they were selling some fast foods. It was easy to order because Dmitriy did all the talking and again I wondered about the language problems and if I would really experience problems.

The shopping center was packed with people and for the first time I had the opportunity to look at the people. I was impressed with the people, especially the neat and



Bolshoy Theatre, Moscow (1825, architect Bove) - nevertheless its waning glory, Bolshoy is still considered one of the best opera and ballet theatres in Europe and the world. As with many other things, tickets for foreigners are more expensive than for Russian citizens!



Some things in Moscow look very Italian; like this **fountain on the top of the underground shopping center** close to the Red Square



Eatery at the underground shopping center in Moscow close to the Red Square: dozens of fast food cafes and restaurants on the same floor

fashionable way that they were dressed. After the supper Dmitriy took me on a tour through the shopping center. The shopping center was linked with an underground train station.

For me Moscow was a beautiful city with beautiful architectural buildings. There were no skyscrapers in the real sense of the word. The Moscow University is the tallest building in Moscow that could be considered as a fifty-story building. It was built during Stalin's era, but it is a beautiful architectural building. Moscow is neat and clean.

What struck me in Moscow the most (after the planes that I had seen at the airport) were the old model type of vehicles. The few new vehicles were imported German models. Even the new Russian's vehicles were old-fashioned shapes and mostly dark colored. I found out later that before Perestroika black cars were used in Russia by government elite only, and this is probably why Russians are so in love with black and dark colored cars.



The glass roof with world's map:
underground shopping center, Moscow

13. Why it's easier in Russia to drive 10 miles than make a phone call

My connecting flight to Ekaterinburg was at 01h00. According to the document that Dmitriy received my flight was leaving from another airport and not from the Sheremetevo domestic airport. My plane ticket and documents stated Sheremetevo domestic airport. It was still two hours before my flight was leaving and he said we must go to the airport that was indicated on his document. If I had to leave from Sheremetevo domestic airport then we still would have sufficient time to get there. I suggested that we phone but Dmitriy said it was better to go in person and find out. He said that he did not mind to drive all the way. According to him the airports were not far apart from each other and he could use one of the circle high ways around Moscow. I later learned that in Russia it is really easier to get there and find out in person than phone and talk to officials. They just don't want to help you over the phone! They are too busy for that; they are working and you interrupt their busy working day when you phone with your stupid questions. This is of course if you were lucky enough to get through. Most of the time the phone is engaged, and you will probably spend the same amount of time to just connect to some human being at the other end as on driving there. You can try if you speak good Russian but I did not, so I decided to trust my Russian guide.

On his way to the airport Dmitriy told me that there were six airports around Moscow. The busies one was Sheremetevo and then the one that he was taking me to; I cannot recall the name now. At the airport Dmitriy again did all the talking for me. He managed to find out very quickly that we were at the wrong airport. On our way on the circle high way it was raining and we came across a truck that washed the roads. I was amazed by the fact that it still washed the freeway even when it was raining. Dmitriy's answer to this was that these people had a job to fulfill at a certain time of the day and they must perform this job at that time irrespective of the whether conditions.

We arrived at Domodedovo domestic airport an hour before the departure time. You also need to know that at Russian airports you should be there at least 45 minutes before the flight. They register you first, and then you go through another gate for the security check and then wait for your plane at the lounge. If you arrive at the



Moscow University on Lenin's Hills - the tallest building in Moscow (since fire destroyed Ostankino's TV tower in 1999)



Moscow: city center



"The point", Moscow, close the Red Square - this is the starting point of Russia. All distances are measured from this point.

airport less than 45 minutes before the flight, the registration desk will be already closed and it may happen you won't be allowed on the plane at all.

I found out with Dmitriy's help where to go made the whole process very easy. Twenty minutes before the departure we were called to go through the departure gate. It was my turn to present my boarding ticket and the lady asked me something in Russian that I could not understand. I responded in English but she responded back in Russian. I could not figure out what she was looking for. I accepted that she could not speak English at all and was very uncomfortable because I did not know what to do. Luckily the guy behind me heard everything and in broken English told me that she was looking for my visa and not only my passport, which solved the problem. There and then I realized that it would not be easy without any knowledge of the Russian language.

14. Flying with Aeroflot

As we were walking to the plane I heard someone was talking very loudly and screaming. As I looked back, I saw this Russian guy in his early twenties, walking towards the plane, but as drunk as a lord. I was amazed that he was allowed to board the plane. Before the Aeroflot plane took off he was fast asleep or passed out.

This was my first flight with Aeroflot airlines. For me it was a huge contrast, from the old airport building into the very neat sophisticated plane. Not that I expected a plane that was falling apart but still, it was quite a difference.

The airhostesses did not have a problem to speak English to me; it was broken English but I appreciated it very much. The service on the plane was of high standard that you would receive from any other airline.



Ekaterinburg, third biggest city in Russia:
city view

15. My first hours at Ekaterinburg: no one speaks English!

It was a two-hour flight but because we were flying east we had gained two hours. Instead of arriving at three in the morning we arrived at five in the morning local time. The sun was shining when we landed. That struck me in Moscow as well that the sun went down after ten at night and it was nearly dark at about eleven at night. I did not pay much attention to the sun going down so late because we were in the underground shopping center in the late afternoon in Moscow.

Again I was surprised with the old airport. Ekaterinburg's airport looked much older than that of Moscow. It was not in a bad condition, it only looked very old. There were no conveyer belts to transport your luggage. It was offloaded from the planes onto trolleys and placed on the floor for collection. After collection you had to prove that the luggage indeed belonged to you by presenting your receipts that were issued at the Moscow airport before you could exit the secure area.

It was Thursday, 25 June that I arrived in Ekaterinburg. As I left the secure area I did not expect anybody to meet me, even though that I had informed Elena of my arrival date. I did not even bother to look for her. I intended to get to the hotel to wash and sleep and then make contact with Elena. Outside the secure area there were guys that were calling "taxi, taxi" all the time. I approached one of the guys and asked him how much he would charge to take me to the Centralnaya hotel. He could not answer me in English and wrote the amount on paper. The amount was two hundred Roubles. I tried another guy and the answer was the same. So I looked for the first guy and asked him to take me to the hotel. Elena afterwards told me that they have prices for foreigners and prices for Russians. If you are not fluent in Russian without an accent, you will not be able to bargain the price. I also did not know that you could bargain the price. When I asked for the fee I was expecting an approximate price because I believed the price could only be determined once you had driven the distance and the meter would indicate the price. That was not the case; the system does not work that way in Russia. The price that you pay is negotiated before the trip, and you will pay the exact amount according to the agreement. It does depend on the distance but also on the place from where you travel. If you travel the same



Vikulova Street, Ekaterinburg - a typical residential area of a big city. The vast majority of Russians live in flats in such blocks.



This is what Russians are used to call "**a private house**" - a small wooden construction, most often without water connection or sanitation.



Statues of Lenin still can be found in almost every Russian city or town; this one is proudly standing on the central square of **Ekaterinburg, the Square of 1905 year** (formerly the Cathedral Square), named in memory of the first Russian Revolution of 1905.

distance inside the city, it would be 4-5 times cheaper; but if you travel from the airport or railway station, you have to cough up.

The taxi was a very old car and the taxi driver was not a youngster either. The shape of the car was at least thirty years old if not older. Until today I do not know what type of car it was, but it was in a fairly good condition. But you should see the road we were driving! It was in the terrible condition, with holes in the paving all over, but this guy was driving as if he was late for his appointment. I asked him what was the hurry but he could not understand me. I tried again to start a conversation but without any success. I was also sure that he was taking back roads to reach the hotel. The factories and buildings that we had passed on our way were very old. I must admit I was a little disappointed, probably I had expected more from the third biggest city in Russia. I said to myself, this guy is using back roads and is passing through the worst areas. I was telling myself to wait and see. Eventually we reached the city center and it was looking much better.

The taxi driver stopped in front of the hotel and helped me to offload my luggage. I paid him; he waved goodbye and disappeared in the same fashion, as if he was late for his next appointment. My biggest concern was that I arrived so early at the hotel and I wondered if they would have a room available for me. It was nearly six o'clock when I entered the hotel reception. Behind the counter was a young attractive lady. I greeted her and she greeted me back in English. I gave her my reservation document, she gave me a form to fill out and after completion she asked for my passport and visa, which confused me. She locked my passport and visa away without saying anything, and I thought that she would keep it as long as I stay in the hotel. I thought that it was the procedure that they follow with foreigners in Russia. I had found out later that every foreigner must register with Russian authorities on his arrival to the city, and if you stay in a hotel, the administration will do it for you; you don't have to go to KGB in person. This is why the lady at the counter took my visa and passport; she gave them back to me when she saw me next time. But she did not explain that to me when she took my documents. I was therefore left to wonder why hotel administration took away my passport, did they think I was going to steal a coach and drive away with it? (My staying at the hotel was prepaid so they could not worry about me booking out without paying the bill.)

She gave me the key for my room and when I asked her



City Council, Ekaterinburg (1947-1954) - built on the place of the Cathedral Temple (demolished in 1930), it looks right in the eyes of bronze Lenin statue.



Hotel "Tsentralnaya" (1926), Malysheva Street (formerly Pokrov Anenue) - this is the hotel where I stayed during my visit to Ekaterinburg. The name of the hotel means "central", and it is in fact situated in the historical heart of the city.



Entrance to the hotel "Tsentralnaya"

where could I have breakfast later, she blushed and could not answer me. At least she was feeling guilty in not understanding me. I said to myself that I would ask someone else later after I have showered and slept. That morning I showered in cold water, not that I preferred it that way, but because no hot water came out of the hot water tap. At that time I was wondering if it was not because I was showering so early in the morning. The hotel was a very old building and it was in the process of renovation. Probably that could also be a reason for the cold water. I brushed my teeth and took some water from the tap to rinse my mouth. I then realized that it was definitely not advisable to drink any water from the tap. The water had some yellowish color and did not look 100% clear. Being unfamiliar with Russian water supply I did not know whether it was some kind of industrial water. But I was too tired to wonder about it, and decided to leave water related questions for later. Now the only thing that was in my mind was to get some sleep. I was up for more than 30 hours because I didn't sleep on the planes.

My bedroom was not renovated yet and was painted many years ago but at least it was neat and clean. It did not really bother me because the purpose of my visit was much more important than the old room that I would sleep in. On the bed were enormously big pillows. I was surprised because to me that was continental pillows and not pillows that you sleep on. I was tired and said to myself that it was not important and the rest of my visit in Russia slept on these big pillows.

After a few hours of sleep I was ready. I tried to use the phone in my bedroom but could not get a dialing tone. I tried to read the document that apparently featured some phone numbers and how to use them but soon realized that I was fighting a losing battle. My next option was the lady on reception. We could not communicate and now I had to ask her to phone for me. I wrote Elena's home phone number with her name on it and went to the reception. The same lady was still behind the counter and that could make things easier. I gave her the piece of paper and with hand sign showed her that she should call Elena. She phoned the number I gave her and asked for Elena. As I could expect in the middle of the working day, Elena was not at home. I heard she mentioned my name to the person on the other side that gave her Elena's work telephone number. Without asking, she called Elena. Elena was at the office and the lady told her that I wanted to speak to her. She gave me the receiver, and for the first time Elena and me were talking to each other. We arranged a date for 13h00 and that she would meet me in front of the hotel.



Fountain "Stone Flower", the Square of Labor, Ekaterinburg. The small church was built in late 1990's, and is now open to the public. Until 1930's the church - the Temple of Martyr Ekaterina, was on this site but it was demolished by Stalin's administration like many others.



Russian winter is definitely not the best time to visit Russia. The temperatures of 20-25 C below zero (minus 4 F) are nothing special. (On the picture: **VIZ boulevard, Ekaterinburg, Russia**)

The conversation took a while because I was talking too fast and sometimes had to repeat my words a few times so that Elena could understand what I was saying. I was overwhelmed with joy and the lady behind the counter could see it. She had a broad smile when I thanked her and went back to my room to enjoy the happiness of the moment.

16. Elena... The moment of truth had arrived after a year

Eventually the great moment of truth had arrived after a year. A quarter of an hour before one o'clock I was in front of the hotel. I would lie if I say that I was not a bit nervous. It was a great moment for me and I hoped that it would be a memorable one as well. The streets were an ant's nest of cars and buses, a total contrast from the time when I arrived that morning. The sidewalks were jam packed with people. The people on the street were very nicely dressed. I cannot recall that I had seen someone in blue jeans. Next to the main entrance of the hotel two ladies were plastering the outside walls of the hotel. I was waiting patiently close to where the women were doing the renovation work. I was looking around and the next moment I saw Elena. At exactly 13h00 I saw Elena for the first time alive about twenty meters from where I was standing. I did not know how she arrived. I knew that she had a car, but never saw her stepping out of a car. She had a pair of blue jeans and a white t-shirt on. Her long blond hair was in a ponytail. She was looking in my direction. We walked closer to each other. She was as beautiful as she was on the photos that I had received from her. We greeted each other and started talking a little bit. Elena asked me what I wanted to do. I think she did not complete the sentence before I answered that I would like to eat. I was as hungry as a lion.

In the same building complex as the hotel was a restaurant that Elena suggested for lunch. Elena picked our spot to sit and explained the menu to me before we ordered the food. The romantic atmospheres of the restaurant have contributed to ensure that our relationship started in a relaxing way. It broke the tension because our focus moved from trying to understand each other to ordering food. Thereafter everything was natural between us. Understandable moments were an enjoyment, something common that we had shared and not an embarrassment. I was speaking slower and used basic words to help Elena to understand me. It did not take us long before we felt like we knew each other for a long time - actually, we did know each other for a long time, because of our long correspondence and discussions. It was wonderful to experience the feeling that you are a unit, that you belong together. From the beginning I have enjoyed it with Elena and was feeling comfortable with her. I had



The Palace of Merchant Sevast'yanov, Ekaterinburg, Russia

(architect Paduchev, 1860-1863). This eclectic 3-storey building is situated in the historical center of Ekaterinburg, right of the dam. Sevast'yanov wanted to plate the roof with gold but the city mayor prohibited it. Sevast'yanov then applied to the Tsar but was told that only church roofs were plated with gold, "So the Lord could notice them more often". For his arrogance Sevast'yanov had to go to church every day in iron shoes and ask forgiveness. Luckily the church - the Temple of Martyr Ekaterina, destroyed in 1930's - was across the road.



Russian travel can be lots of fun... If you know what you are doing!

no doubt that she was the woman with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life.

Elena could not stay too long because of deadlines that she had to meet. She promised to pick me up later that afternoon. She had told me that this would be a very busy time for her before I came to visit her. Later that afternoon she came to fetch me in her car. It was a small Russian, now Ukraine manufactured car. I am a tall guy, and as I usually do, I move the seat back if there is nobody behind me. I also did it in Elena's car. As she accelerated, the chair felt backwards with me. There I was lying next to her with my feet in the air. It was an embarrassing moment for both of us, but probably more for Elena than for me. Afterwards we had a good laugh about it and still today she is telling people how I broke her car shortly after we have met for the first time.

17. Russian restaurants and Russian food

That Thursday night we went out for the most romantic supper imaginable. Elena had chosen one of the most exquisite restaurants in Ekaterinburg to spend our evening of wining and dining together. It was a beautiful place with excellent food. The menu choices were endless although I think none of us cared to read them all. I don't even remember what we were eating - some salads, some meat, some deserts - I remember the food was really good, but our conversation was so much better. We were so involved in our own world of trying to know each other better that we never used the opportunity to dance. The night sped past in a flash, but a very memorable flash.

That night Elena told me that she had expected me only the following day, the Friday. She also had planned well in advance for these days of my visit. She had intended to meet me at the airport and carefully thought about which clothes and hairstyle she would wear for this special occasion. She was so surprised when I called her the day before I was supposed to arrive! That was why she was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. In Russia jeans and a T-shirt are not considered as proper clothes and no woman would wear such an outfit on her first date. Elena also told me that if a woman were dressed in jeans and T-shirt, guys would not be interested in her. That is why she dressed that way - because she did not want guys approaching her; but for me she looked very attractive, her jeans fitted her very well! None of us was sure where the mix up with arrival dates originated. I knew that I had changed my travel arrangements and I could have informed Elena differently, or one of us simply made a mistake with the dates. Elena and me had a mutual feeling that my early appearance did not do any damage.

For the rest of my stay, the most of the evenings we went out for supper together except for the Sunday after I was introduced to Elena's family. That night Elena had proved her cooking skills and I must admit she passed the test with flying colors. Now after a few years of our marriage I can say that Elena did not practice for days or weeks to prepare that meal. She has a natural talent in cooking and has proven that she is not only intelligent but multi talented.

Another memorable supper was the last night before my departure. We went to another top class restaurant.



The Dam ("Plotinka") - the historical center of Ekaterinburg and the popular place of leisure. Ekaterinburg was founded in 1724 according to the directive of Peter the Great.



The monument of Genin and Tatischev - the founders of Ekaterinburg. During the Soviet times only one of them was known - the Russian Tatischev. German Genin was not considered by the Soviet propaganda as an appropriate person for the fame of the city founder. The monument was built for the 275th anniversary of the city (1999), and is facing the Dam.



The buildings of 1950's facing the Dam from the other side

After we had placed our order and while we were enjoying our drinks the electricity went off. After a while of enjoying our time together in candlelight, the chef told us that he would not be able to prepare our meal. We had our starters already and decided to finish our wine and then leave, but a few minutes later he came back and told us that he would be able to prepare our meal on a gas stove. We were in no hurry because we were finalizing our future plans before my departure the next morning, so we approved. There were only of us two in the whole restaurant, sitting in the darkness, and this candlelight supper I will remember forever.

I think if I was not a foreigner, they would probably have asked us to leave but Russians like foreigners and have high respect for them, so the whole team was serving the two of us. During my trip I encountered the same attention a few times. If somebody says to you that Russian people don't like foreigners or that you could be unsafe there, do not believe them. In fact, Russians treat foreigners in a very special way. "The rule of hospitality" is very important for Russian people, and a guest is entitled to everything the best. They will go out of their way to make you feel comfortable.

During my visit to Elena, it was the only time that I was really wining and dining during my trip. The rest of the time I lived of fast food because it was easier to order and I would not have language problems. I must say that I enjoyed the Russian food. Apart from the fact that it was well prepared, it was very tasteful. The restaurants were neat and clean with very nice atmosphere. In the better class restaurants the menus had an enormous variety from which to choose. It was smaller portions than I was used to, but people in Russia often order more than one starter because of the smaller portions but also to enjoy more than one taste. Most of the starters are salads. The big variety continues with the main dishes. There were too many to choose from, so in my weeks of wining and dining I did not get tired of the taste or reached the point that I could not decide what to eat. The wide variety of choices continued with wines. Most wines are imported. Beer is a very popular drink in Russia these days. Black bread forms an integral part of the Russian meal. I am not a sweets fan but for the one with the sweet tooth it will also be a never-ending list and as tasteful as the rest of the food.

Without knowledge of Russian, it can be a problem to order food. I was fortunate to be with the love of my life that made eating out an unforgettable experience. If you are not well versed in Russian, my advice would be to hire an interpreter but you must book him or her in



Palace of Merchant Rastorguev (1794-1795), Vosnesenskaya Hill, Lunacharskogo Street. In 1935-1937 the palace was reconstructed and became the Palace of Pioneers - the recreational center and school of arts for children.



Artists' exhibition in the park in the city center; Lenina Avenue, between the Square of 1905 Year and Khokhryakova Street. Open daily.

advance. I suspect that if the interpreter is an attractive woman, you will enjoy it a bit more. I know some people that went to one the former USSR countries to meet women and have hired an interpreter that has made the visit a memorable experience. The interpreter can also be a tour guide. I had hired interpreters in many places during my visit. The first one was in Moscow as I described earlier. I am also aware of many instances where the guys have fallen in love with an interpreter or tour guide and not with the women they were meant to meet. So having an interpreter can add to your options!

18. My Russian casualties

On my tour to Russia I have encountered a few embarrassing moments because of my ignorance about Russian realities.

One day when Elena picked me up from the hotel I told about my predicament about the cold water in my hotel room and that I could not complain about it to the hotel staff because they did not understand me. Also that I never drank the water from the taps because it had such an awful taste. Elena then informed me that nobody in the city currently had hot water, because that was the time of the year that the hot water pipes were repaired. The city had a central hot water system that supplied the city residents with hot water for domestic use as well as for heating purpose during the winter. According to Elena water from the taps could be used for drinking but to do so one had to first let it stand for 1 day in some open bowl, and then cook it to the boiling point, thereafter it would be safe to drink. Elena suggested that I buy mineral water to drink from the kiosk on the street corners.

I indeed did so and thought while I buying mineral water, buy some Coke as well. I told the person behind the counter mineral water and pointed my finger to it. That was quite easy and I asked him for a liter of Coke. He shook his head in disbelief and had no idea what I was talking about. I looked around but could not see any Coke on the shelf. I tried another time and said Coke again, and again got the same reaction. I was stunned. I saw some people before me that bought some Coke. Does this guy refuse to sell me coke or is it possible that he does not understand me. I thought, let me try once more. I said Coca Cola and he shook his head differently, in the way that he now understood what I was meaning and said Coca Cola. I afterwards found out that they never use only the term Coke.

Back at the hotel room I could not wait to drink some of my mineral water. I poured a glass full and took a big sip. I was severely shocked. I have asked the guy for mineral water but he gave me soda water instead. The Russian mineral water (and the words "mineral water" were written on the bottle so it was not a mistake) was salted. I was so disappointed. Later when Elena fetched me, I told her about my experiences. She enjoyed the situation and told me that was how mineral water tasted. I said no, not from where I come. It was difficult for me to drink any water for the rest of my stay in



Lenin Avenue, Ekaterinburg, Russia - The number of cars in Russia multiplied by 10 in the past 15 years, which created problems for most Russian cities that have not been built to handle such traffic. The Russian style of driving is different; they are used to taking chances but at the same time very skillful. Speed limit in Russian cities is 60 km (37 miles) per hour.



Square of Labor, Lenin Avenue, Ekaterinburg - Nevertheless, most Russians still do not own cars and use public transport, which I must admit is quite good. Buses, trolleybuses and trams are available and inexpensive. On my tour to Russia I did not use them much because I usually had a car available but knowing which number you should take and having the name of the stop you need written on a piece of paper, you can use public transport without hesitation.

Russia. I also bought some Fanta Orange at a later stage and was equally disappointed, because it almost tasted like a lemon twist that I am used to but not actually fond of. Russian Fanta Orange is not sweet!

Another strange experience that I had was during one of my strolls in the city. I saw these people that were selling fruit and vegetables on the street corners. I approached one of them and bought myself some bananas. After I paid for it the lady handed me the bananas as it was lying on the scale without putting it in a bag. I hesitated to take it and she could see that and offered me a bag but asked me money for it. I could not believe what I was hearing. Never in my life I had paid for a bag if I bought something. But apparently in Russia a free bag with a purchase was not the part of the deal. I then paid the required money because I could not see myself walking down the street with bananas in my hands. Elena later told me that it is normal to pay for a bag if you buy something in Russia.

If you go to Russia on a tour, you will probably encounter more things that will surprise you. There are many things that Russians do in a different way than we are used to.

19: Meeting the parents

The day of the meeting with Elena's parents can be described as one of the many highlights of my tour to Russia. Often guys go to Russia to meet a few women and then make their choice after they have met them all. In my case I have made up my mind before I visited Elena. We had a mutual feeling that we were made for each other. My visit was to confirm our feeling for each other and to meet Elena's family as well as to meet her in her natural environment. It is three very important points for a visit and in my opinion the foundation for a successful future relationship.

Friday was set-aside for meeting the family. Our first contact was at the graveyard where Elena's brother was buried. He was murdered when he was in his early twenties (he was a night safeguard at a shop and it was a robbery). I was curious to know why we had to meet at the graveyard. Elena explained me the reasons why we would meet there. Family and the relation between family members are very important for Russian families. A lost family member is not a forgotten member of the family, and to pay respect to a lost family member is an important ritual that he or she is not forgotten.

We met with the parents at the grave. Because of my inability to speak Russian, my first contact with Elena's parents was not more than a handshake. Thereafter Elena acted as my interpreter. Respect was paid in the form of flowers that were placed on the grave, cleaning up the grave and thereafter we visited the church on the same premises. In the church we bought candles and lit them.

Lighting candles in somebody's memory in a church is the part of the Russian Orthodox tradition. The lit of candles can be described as a moment of silence, where you think of the deceased. The Russian Orthodox Church services and actions are very symbolic. The lit of candles and icons play a very important role in Russian churches.

The church on the graveyard premises was built of wood and was there merely to serve the purpose. That building was a total contrast to the other Russian Orthodox Churches that one will find in Russia. Churches in Russia are known for their wonderful architecture and gold plated roofs. I think Russian churches are one of the biggest attractions to foreign tourists. The most famous church is probably St Basilus on the Red Square in Moscow because of its location. For me, the most



Wooden church at the graveyard (Uralmash, Ekaterinburg)



At the entrance to the graveyard, close to the church, there was an alley of graves with huge (1,5-2 people's heights) tomb stones picturing young men. When I asked Elena who they were, I was shocked to learn that it were the graves of Mafia. The full-length portraits on the black marble were state of the art, and the graves were thoroughly maintained. I looked at the live flowers and the dates on the stones; most of the men left this world very early, between the ages of 20-35 years.

impressive were the St Isaac's Cathedral in St Petersburg and most beautiful from a distance with an impressive history, the Cathedral of the Resurrection also in St Petersburg.

After the graveyard we all went to visit Elena's grandmother, her father's mother who stayed in Ekaterinburg, for a lunch.

These types of lunches are planned and prepared days in advance. To enjoy those lunches to the full you will also need some time; usually Russians spend 2-3 hours at the table while eating, drinking and talking. According to Russian tradition and beliefs, somebody would announce the necessary toasts to welcome me. No toast was made without a reason, and after the toast everybody should empty his or her glass. If you did not empty your glass, you showed your neglect and disrespect to the reason for the toast. I am a social drinker and I very seldom drink, but this was a gathering for celebration and joy and most certainly not a venue to inform the people that I was a very moderate drinker. So I was drinking like everybody else. Elena did not drink at all because she was driving, and I had to follow what the rest of family members were doing.

I can tell you honestly, I did not enjoy the Russian Vodka at all. I tried to drink it in small sips as we usually drink wine but was told I should drink it all at once, in one big sip. You drink Russian Vodka to become drunk, and not to enjoy the taste. I am not a big fond of being drunk but I decided I'd rather keep my mouth shut, or better say open and drink with the others. But it did not take long for Elena's family to realize that I was not used to this type of celebrations. Despite the fact that some of the stronger alcohols were not easy to swallow with one gulp, I tried to make the best of the situation and enjoyed the nice food that Elena's grandmother prepared for us. Thereafter I was embodied as a possible future family member.

Little did I know that there were more tests set for me! I would probably do the same if someone were interested in my daughter. The difference was that these barriers were in the culture that I did not know in detail. It was a memorable experience and I was satisfied with the manner in which I dealt with it.

The lunch and the wonderful spirit in which the people enjoyed the event had made a lifetime impression on me. These impressions stick in your mind after the happening. My advice would be to enjoy everything to



Orthodox cross and Muslim crescent together on one of the graves. The spiritual connection between people is more important for Russians than the religious differences. Russians do not have separate graveyards for different religious confessions, which reflects their great religious tolerance. Russia was officially atheistic until the Perestroika (1987).

the full extent.

Before we sat down at the table, some food was on the table already and the most interesting to me was the caviar. Before any food was dished up, we enjoyed the food on the table as snacks with the celebrations.

Thereafter followed the starters that were salads then we had our main meal followed by sweets. I know there was also cheese on the table but am not sure at what time did we eat it, before or after the Vodka.

20. Ekaterinburg: going out, entertainment and sights

Next day, Saturday, we attended a beer festival. It did not differ much from the festivals that I had been to previously. Russians drank beer at the festival and not Vodka, as many people would expect. I would probably have enjoyed it much more if I could understand the Russian language. For me it was very interesting to be between people of a different culture. It was also at the beer festival that for the first time I saw Gypsies that were living in Russia. The Gypsies are Russian citizens but they are a nation on its own that originated from Romania. A few hundreds year ago they traveled to Russia and stayed there. They have their own language and culture and prefer to mix with their own people only. Cross marriages between them and Russians happen seldom. They live all over the former USSR between other cultures and still succeed in maintaining their culture and traditions. In Ekaterinburg they had a place where only Gypsies were staying and built houses close to each other; it's even called "Gypsies neighborhood". It is not unique to find these types of nations in Russia with their own cultures. The difference is that gypsies do not have an autonomous Republic like the other nations that live in Russia. There are 21 autonomous Republics in Russia.

At the beer festival we also went for a ride on the big wheel at the merry-go-round that gave me the opportunity to have a good view of Ekaterinburg. Ekaterinburg, founded in 1724, is the third biggest city in Russia with a population of more than 1.5 million people. It is situated more in the middle of Russia, between European part of Russia and Siberia, on the way to the east from Moscow. People in the city live in apartments, and therefore the city is not wide spread. It is highly industrialized and was always closed for foreigners until the middle 90's, because of its enormous arms manufacturing plants. I was one of the first foreigners allowed to visit Ekaterinburg since foreigners were allowed in the city.

On our way back to my hotel, we also made a stop at the zoo. I was the most impressed with the different types of bears and their intelligence. Like most other places in Ekaterinburg, it was also an old place, but well maintained.

Ekaterinburg was named after Ekaterina, the late wife of tsar Peter The Great. The city is probably best known for



Russian Orthodox cross ("the eight ends cross") on the place of the execution of the last Russian Tsar Nicolay II and his family; **Vosnesenskaya Hill, Lunacharskogo Street, Ekaterinburg, Russia.** Vosnesenskaya Hill is the highest place of the city.



The old wooden chapel (1998) on the place where the House of Engineer Ipat'ev was situated on Vosnesenskaya Hill, in the basement of which the Tsar's family and 2 devoted servants were shot at night 16 July 1918. For many years the building served as the museum of the revolution with the room of execution as the main attraction. The building was destroyed in 1977 according to the secret directive of Politburo.

the killing of the last Russian tsar Nicolay II in 1918. During the Communist rule the city's name was changed to Sverdlovsk according to the nickname of one of conspirators of the Bolsheviks' take over in October 1917. The killing of the last tsar took place after the revolution and the establishment of the Bolsheviks party in Russia. Tsar Nicolay II, his wife - a former German princess, their six kids and two devoted servants were executed in the basement of a building in Ekaterinburg. This building (which was a registered historical monument) was later destroyed because the government was afraid that a US delegation that was due to arrive in the city could try to visit the building. The former president Boris Eltsin was the city mayor at the time the building was destroyed according to a secret directive of Politburo.



The new wooden chapel replaced the old one (1999). It is planned to build there "the Temple on the Blood in the Name of All Russian Saints". The city administration is currently trying to collect money for the building.

After the execution, the remains of the family were buried at an unknown place about twenty kilometers outside Ekaterinburg. After perestroika in 1987 it was established where they were buried and the remains were found. After many tests the remains were identified as the tsar's and his family. The remains of the youngest daughter, Anastasia and the youngest son, Mikhail have never been found. Many people believe that the two kids were never executed and the possibility exists that someone else could have brought them up. The official Russian version is that the two youngest kids were buried somewhere else.



The queue to the Vosnesenskaya Cathedral during the ceremony of reburial of the remains of the Tsar's family (16 July 1998, 80 years after their death). The Cathedral is situated right in front of the place of Tsar's execution. During the Soviet time the Cathedral was the museum of natural sciences, and was given back to the Russian Orthodox Church only in the middle 1990's.

At the time of my visit in 1998, the place where tsar Nicolay was killed was in the process of development. There was a small wooden church and some wooden Russian crosses on the premises. A Russian cross differs from other crosses as can be seen on the photos. In the literal translation from Russian it is called "the eight ends cross" and associated with Russian Orthodox Church only. During my visit in 2000 a new wooden church was built and the area was developed. Shortly after my departure from Ekaterinburg in 1998, different services were held for the reburial of the tsar and his family. The one service was held at the civil war monument outside the city (close to which the remains have been found) and another; big service was held at the Vosnesenskaya church in Ekaterinburg which was situated right in front of the (now destroyed) building where the tsar's family was executed. This church used to serve as a museum during the communist era, and was returned to the Orthodox Church only after Perestroika.



During the ceremony of reburial of the Tsar's family.

During my visit to St Petersburg in 1998 I attended a Sunday service that was held for the reburial of the tsar.

The remains of the tsar were eventually laid to rest in St Petersburg (if it was really the remains of tsar Nicolay II - there are still some doubts about it and some members of the tsar's family living abroad never recognized the remains as that of the of tsar's family).

In my free time (while Elena was working) I enjoyed walking around in the city center of Ekaterinburg. Like with the most cities in Europe the city center in Ekaterinburg is the place where everything is happening. I particularly enjoyed street artists at the market places that will draw a picture of you for a few Roubles. More serious artists had daily exhibitions of their work in a small park in the city center under the trees. The beautiful parks in the city impressed me. Elena and I often went for romantic strolls in some of the parks. The strolls were wonderful memorable experiences and I enjoyed Ekaterinburg's parks immensely, they are very well maintained.

As mentioned before at the time of my visit, Ekaterinburg had not been open for foreigners for long and they therefore were of great interest to many of the local people. I once went with Elena to a transport company where she had to dispatch some stuff for her company. The courier's office was in the outskirts of Ekaterinburg. I was waiting in the car for Elena, but it took her a while because she had to wait for the truck driver before it could be dispatched (the driver left for a lunch after waiting for the manager - Elena - for a few hours while she was busy somewhere else). We arrived there nearly after hours; this was the reason why I was with her - we were heading for a dinner afterwards. The security policeman at the transport company asked Elena who was waiting in the car, and she told him that it is her foreign boyfriend that cannot speak Russian. That was like oil on a fire, because he then insisted on seeing me and would like to talk to me. Elena acted as our interpreter and that made the delivery trip another memorable experience.

21. What is Russian "dacha" and Russian sauna

Little did I know that the Sunday would be the toughest test for me! After our brunch, we departed the city to spend our day at the dacha of Elena's parents. Dacha can be described as a place or house outside the city that is not the place where you live. Most often it's used to cultivate fruit and vegetables. Elena's parents' dacha was developed with a modest wooden house that included a Russian sauna, which was built on the small plot in a "collective garden" - a neighborhood of dachas united by a common fence surrounding them. All areas around the city are occupied by such "collective gardens" where people grow vegetables and berries. I believe every second family in Russia has a dacha, which supplies their yearly quantity of potatoes; carrots and home made fruit jams.

On our way to the dacha we stopped at the civil victims monument, which I mentioned before, the one that was built close to the place where the last tsar and his family were buried. It was an impressive monument and worth while a visit - a huge cross made of black marble surrounded by many desks with thousands names of people from Ekaterinburg and the region who lost their lives during the Civil War and political oppression of 1930-1950's. The names of tsar Nicolay II and his family were just a few names on this huge list. I was really impressed; Russians do remember their dead. I saw fresh flowers at the bottom of the monument and asked about them. Elena told me that when people get married, they visit memorable places like this one after the marriage ceremony, and lay flowers. I think it is a beautiful custom.

On our arrival at the dacha I was informed that Elena's father had prepared the sauna and that he and me would sauna first. Elena confirmed it with me, but my answer to her was that she should come with us. I could see that she was very uncomfortable and could not answer me. Before she could answer me, I accepted that I would sauna with her father on my own. We took all our clothes off and went into a very hot sauna. Her father gave me some thin branches with leaves on to use when it become too hot to hit myself with so that it relieved heat on the body. The first time we went into the sauna was to get use to the conditions. After a while we came out for a cold drink, which made me sweat like a horse. The second time we stayed in longer and it almost became unbearable after her father had put some



The Black Cross close to Ekaterinburg at the civil victims monument (Moscow highway). Its height is approximately 11 meters (12 yds)



The monument of civil victims (Moscow highway, outside Ekaterinburg)



The names of tsar Nicolay II and his family were just a few names on this huge list at the monument of civil victims outside Ekaterinburg

water on the wooden coals. I hit myself intensively to prevent me from getting too hot. We went in for a third time and that was when I was tested to the ultimate. Her father put water on the coals several times; Russians call it "To add some steam". I could not bear it any longer and showed him that I had to exit because the heat became unbearable. Only then I realized that her father had also found the heat unbearable. It felt if my skin would melt any given minute. Outside Elena was waiting for me with a nice refreshing drink and a broad welcoming smile as if she knew something that I only found out now. I told her about my experience, but the only reaction I could get from her was another smile. She was telling me that saunas were very popular in the winter in Russia. People sauna until the heat becomes unbearable, then go outside in the snow for a few minutes to cool down and then go back in the sauna. I think if I knew what I would go through I would have drunk a few vodkas to build up the courage to do that.

22. Ekaterinburg's most famous sights

After our lunch of cold soup that consisted mainly of raw vegetables (they call it "okroshka" and it is very popular in Russia during the summer time), eaten again with Russian black bread, Elena and I left for the Europe-Asia boundary monument, which was nearby. I took a picture of Elena standing with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia.

That afternoon we also visited a lake close by. I have many times read about the lakes in Russia, which has the biggest fresh water lake on earth, the lake Baykal near the city of Irkutsk in Siberia. I must admit I am always impressed with the wonders of nature. I would love to visit the Baykal Lake sometime in the future. The lake that we visited was impressive, but not very large.

What made the trip memorable was the undriveable dirt road that we traveled on, but I think Russian cars are built for those types of conditions. Many of the main roads were also in bad condition like the one I traveled from the Ekaterinburg airport. I was told that the surfaces of the tar roads break up because of the extreme climate, and in the winter salt is placed on the roads to melt the snow that contributed to the deterioration of the paving. Luckily in Ekaterinburg during the summer time the sun only goes down after half past eleven at night thus ensuring that we arrived back to the city still in daylight.

Ekaterinburg has a lot to offer to a tourist. It has nice eating-places, memorable places to visit, beautiful parks, nightclubs, good hotels, a big dam surrounded by areas developed for leisure, and lakes outside the city as well as pictorial swamps. I would suggest visiting Ekaterinburg during the summer because in winter temperatures can be as low as -35 degrees C (approximately -5 F°). If you include Ekaterinburg only as a part of your trip than I would suggest not staying longer than three days and four nights because while it is a nice city to see it is without doubt not the most beautiful place in Russia. But I enjoyed my stay there.



Europe-Asia monument
(Old Moscow highway,
outside Ekaterinburg)



**The memorial stone at
the Europe-Asia
monument** says the first
geographical sign Europe-
Asia was established here
in 1837

23. My last morning in Ekaterinburg, and some interesting insight into the souls of Russian traffic officers



The lake Peschanoye outside Ekaterinburg, Russia

I departed from Ekaterinburg Tuesday morning after five days of a very pleasant and memorable stay. The flight departs early morning at seven and scheduled to arrive also at seven in Moscow so I could "catch up" the missing two hours of my life that disappeared on my way to Ekaterinburg. Russia has eleven time zones.

On our way to the airport Elena was stopped for speeding, but luckily we left the city early enough to still in time for the flight. Elena spent a few minutes in the police car and came back with a broad smile. She told me the traffic officers did not give her a ticket because she gave them half of the "would be" fine in cash. She said if they followed the normal procedure of giving her a fine it could take quite a while to get the papers done, but she did not want to risk being late for the flight. Rather she "smiled to them broadly" and asked to finalize it without papers. She said if she were alone she would not have paid them a cent and still would have gotten away with her speeding because "she knew how to talk to traffic officers". She said she never paid any fines (I guess they don't have female traffic officers in Russia; that's the reason).

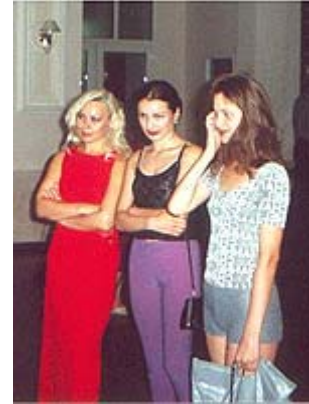
It was a very emotional departure for both of us. We were sure that we were made for each other and that made my departure even more emotional. I don't know which person usually suffers the most from such a departure, the one that stays behind or the one that is leaving. I think in our case it was me because I would still tour for another two weeks before I would return home. I would have had lots of time to think. Elena went back to work where she had a very busy schedule for the rest of the summer. I never asked her afterwards how good her concentration was, but I am pretty sure that her mind wandered from time to time. I was glad that I have visited her in her home city and until today it was a very memorable trip. I am confident that I have made the right decision at the right time.

24. Russian women, Russians and Russian travel: do's and don'ts

Guys, if you are adventurous and enjoy exploring new things, search for a foreign wife is the perfect opportunity. It is a wonderful adventure. My choice was a Russian wife, and the process of finding her was as exciting as its results. Russians are wonderful warm-hearted people. The girls in general are attractive and there are so many to choose from. In Russia girls spend their money on things that make them look good and feel good. Their appearance is the most important thing for them; and boy, they look stunning. They follow the latest fashion trends. It is in to be fashionable in Russia. So you've gotta believe all those pictures that you see on the Internet dating sites. I have seen these women with my own eyes. They do exist.

The proof of the pudding is to choose the right person for the rest of your life. That is not only applicable to us men because women also have the right to choose (although many guys may have a different viewpoint). Russian women will not marry and leave their country because you are available and willing to marry them, or because they only want to escape Russia. This is a common misconception. There is poverty in Russia as in any other country of the world but there are also people who make much more money than an average American.

It is true that some women are looking for a better life, but most are only willing to leave their country for the right guy. Many other women in other countries are also looking for a better life. Russian women are not an exception; it is just in human nature to strive for a better life and I don't see anything wrong with it. But better life is not everything to them. If you are in your sixties and you are looking for a girl in her twenties, it is a dream world that you are living in. It is possible that you will find such a girl but the unanswered question is then how long would such a marriage last. I cannot believe that such a marriage can last long. It does not last long anywhere else in the world. Women in Russia in general look very good, much younger than their age. Rather narrow the age gap and get a long lasting successful marriage. Do not live in a dream world and think that Russian women are hard up. It is also not true that they are willing to marry men that are much older than them. She still wants to enjoy life with her husband and it is very doubtful if a man of sixties would like to do what a



Russian women... They are stylish, feminine, and feel good being women



The majority of **women in Russia** are slim, attractive, and look young



All those **beautiful women from Russian dating agencies** are real - I've seen them with my own eyes!

girl in her early twenties would like to do. Russian women will accept a fairly large age gap (I would say, up to 15-20 years) but not 40 years gap. If you find somebody who is happy with such a gap she is probably not real, please be careful with this individual.

Russian women needs are not different from any other women in the world but their values are different because their family values are different.

What does make Russian women different from the rest of the world's women?

- Most of them are highly educated.
- Most of them are intelligent
- They are family oriented, with good family values even that they are educated and intelligent.
- They are not that career driven, as you will find in the western world.
- They are committed to their husbands and their families.
- Most of them are attractive.
- Most of the time their appearance is good and they are proud to look good and proud to be women.

After a few years of marriage, I can say that I have made the right choice. Firstly to find the right woman, that likes me, loves me and stands by me through thick and thin. I have the greatest respect for her the way she sticks with me. I trust her and she have never created any doubt in my mind or mistrust. I must also say that I am not a difficult person to live with, but everyone has its ups and downs in life and nobody is perfect in this imperfect world.

Secondly I am glad that I have married a Russian woman because as previously mentioned of her values in life. Her values are more acceptable to me than of any other woman that I was previously involved with.

Many Russian women are looking for western men. There are many reasons for that but probably the most important are:

- Very often Russian women cannot find the right man in Russia.
- People in Russia marry early in their lives and if you are a female in your late twenties or early thirties it becomes difficult to find the right guy because most of them are already married.
- Many Russian women do not like Russian men. If Russian men live in Russia they must behave like other Russian men otherwise they will not have

own eyes!



Elena & me



And our beautiful family

- friends and probably will not be successful in Russia. That makes them unacceptable for some Russian women. Men's chauvinism, infidelity and addiction to alcohol are among the most prominent reasons why some Russian women don't like Russian men.
- For every 100 women in Russia there are about 88 men. In other words, twelve women out of hundred will not find a man and if the population of Russia is 150 million, about 18 million women will not be able to find a husband in Russia. From those 18 million, about 10 million are of marriageable age; the other 8 million are kids and elderly.

Many Russian women are placing ads trying to find the right man in the Western world. These ads vary from ads in newspapers, Internet web sites and catalogs. That does not make them hunters for men; neither do they want to take over the role of men. In fact Russian women are looking for men that will be "the man of the house".

Russian women are family oriented even though they are well educated. They are confident and intelligent enough to take the bold step to advertise and try to change their lives for the better. Their "better" for them means to become a part of a happy family of their own and not to escape Russia as many guys think.

In general people in Russia are educated. Russia has an education record of nearly hundred percent. In other words there are no uneducated people in the country. It can change in the future of course but currently this is the situation. Therefore you will find many educated women that are looking for men abroad because everyone is educated. In many western countries the attitude of women has changed in the sense that they prefer to compete against men in the business world. In many instances that type of attitude is transferred home resulting in an unbearable situation at home. Many western men have no desire to compete against his wife and therefore prefer Russian women that are educated and professional but for whom family life and family values are the most important.

Russian women mostly make use of marriage agencies to advertise themselves. They will respond to ads placed by men as well but only if you use the same marriage agencies to place them. Russian women rarely use general dating sites because they have to pay for their services and marriage agencies are free for women to

join. A marriage agency publishes men's ads in their catalogs that are sent to female members for free, or on the Internet translated to Russian. A Russian woman will never respond a man's ad if it was not placed in Russian or if the man did not say he was looking for a Russian wife. You also probably would not be writing to a Russian woman who placed her profile on a Russian dating site looking for somebody locally. There are lots of Russian women who would never consider a foreign husband as an option and don't want to leave Russia even though it would mean to stay alone for life. So if a woman decides to look for a foreign husband, she will look at the places where men look for foreign wives, i.e. through the foreign ads in Russian newspapers or on the sites of marriage agencies.

So it is practically impossible that a Russian woman would respond to your ad placed somewhere else, for example on the personals site that is not Russian-oriented and where anyone can place a free ad. I would advise to stay away from such sites if you look for a Russian wife. As in any industry there are people that will misuse the system. These types of absurdities mostly happen on large personals sites where anyone is invited to place a free ad. This is where you will find women that will at one stage ask you for money for some sort of costs. One piece of good advice is to never send money to any woman if you have not met her in person before - even if you trust her. Rather use well established Russian-oriented sites to contact women or place your own ad through the same agencies.

Some agencies also organize tours to Russia and Ukraine where you can meet Russian ladies seeking husbands abroad. If you have not been in Russia before, a romance tour that is arranged by a reliable marriage agency could be the most suitable option for you. I know you would enjoy it immensely. It is an incredible feeling when you meet so many beautiful ladies and they are welcoming and treat you nicely.

But in any case it is a good idea to first start corresponding with Russian women. If you decide later to go on a tour, you will be able to make arrangements to meet the women you were corresponding with, and it is wise not to put all your eggs in one basket. I was thinking many times what I would do if Elena and I did not get along. I would have to start all over, and I would have spent lots of money and time for nothing. I realize now I was very lucky.

This is the end of my story about my tour to Russia.

Thank you for reading, and I will be glad to receive your feedback, and to find out if my story was of any help. I will be also glad to answer your questions if you have some.

Best luck in your quest,

John

