

# A Slow Discovery

Words and Pictures by  
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With its beautiful and striking architecture and outstanding natural beauty, Russia really is a sight for sore eyes. But travelling across this vast nation on the Trans-Siberian Express, it is the train that steals the show.

俄罗斯·自然风光秀丽·建筑壮观·各类美景美不胜收。乘坐横贯西伯利亚的快车游览此泱泱大国·更为旅行增加了别样乐趣。

**R**ussia is big, really big. Mother Russia spreads her arms wide across more than 6000 miles; it is the world's biggest country and takes up more than an eighth of the world's total inhabited land mass. It is not an obvious choice then for travelling slowly by train. But then, the Trans Siberian Express is one of the Epic Journeys that travellers everywhere endlessly discuss making. It is a Great Wall or a Machu Picchu.

We started in Hohhot and as soon as we opened our first menu we realised we had left China proper. Despite the fact that Inner Mongolia, of which Hohhot is the capital, is still part of China (it is an Autonomous Region, like Hong Kong and Macau), gastronomically we could have been in another world. The beer was better - darker and more brooding - and the lamb was served in succulent char grilled chunks in unsweetened bread. It is somewhere I wish I could have spent longer. From our hostel downtown, had we the time, we could have easily arranged a two day trek on horseback across the

region's grassy steppes or ridden camels in the desert and explored the vast emptiness of the Mongolian plain.

There are two ways to approach the TSE: to be brave and book your tickets in person at each station, or to play it safe and book them all in advance through an agency. We took the safe option and thus we had only the time to explore that the schedule allowed. If I were to do it again, I think I might approach the endeavour with more courage. As it turned out, our 24 hours in Hohhot was enough to enjoy a couple of good meals, a few more good beers and to visit a stunning old mosque that decoratively resembled a Buddhist temple. We also visited the national museum and learnt that from Mongolia's plains the Chinese space program takes flight.

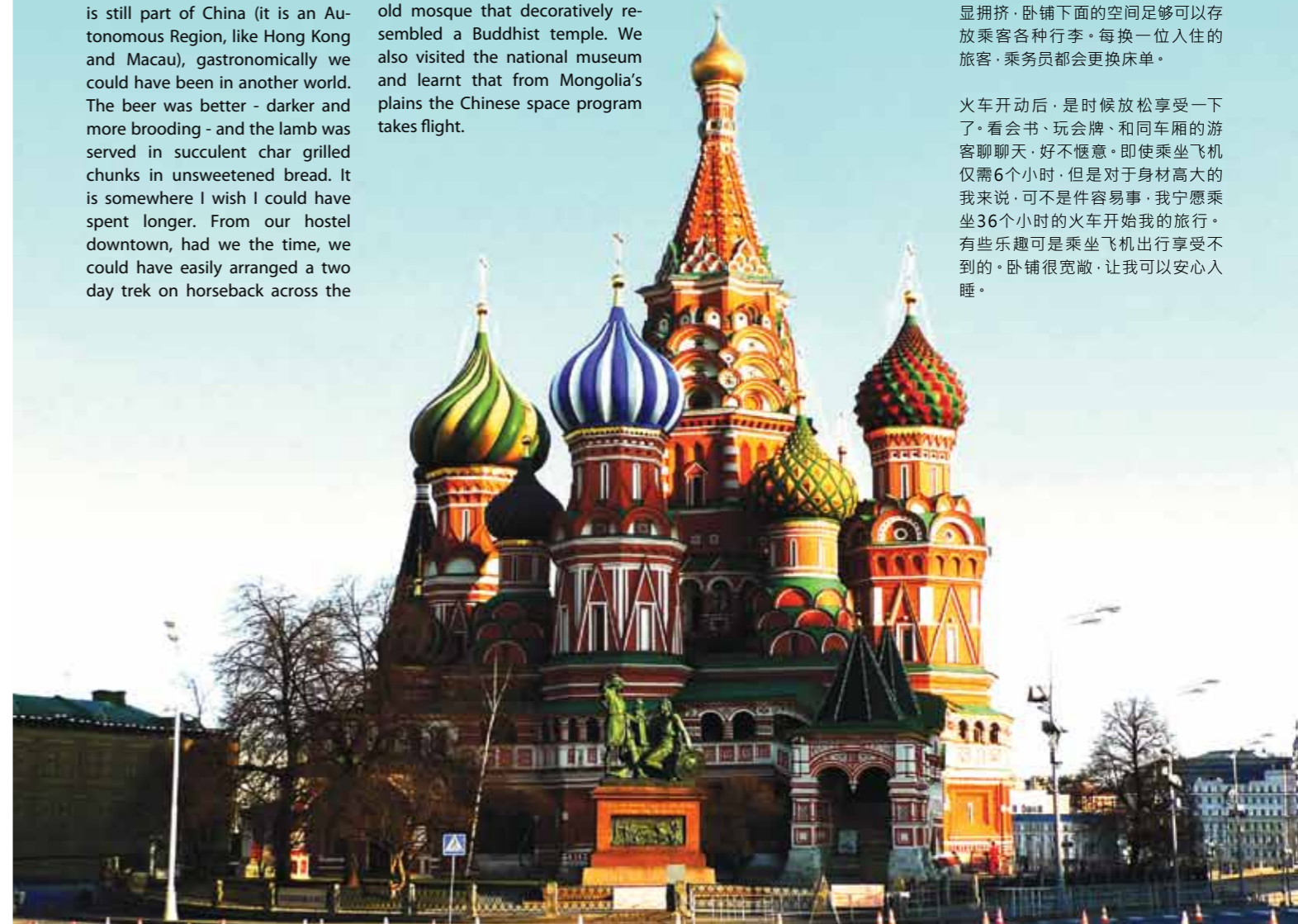
俄罗斯是世界上面积最大的国家·地域跨越欧亚两个大洲·与多个国家接壤·绵延的海岸线从北冰洋一直伸展到北太平洋·占世界陆地面积的1/8·坐火车观光这个泱泱大国·看似不是一个明智的选择·其实不然·搭乘西伯利亚快车开始史诗之旅的游客不计其数。

我们的长征之旅从内蒙古的省会呼和浩特开始·从打开菜单的那一刻·各类美食---啤酒更加香醇·鲜嫩多汁的烤羊肉配上无糖面包·让我们意识到已经离开了喧嚣的城市·真希望可以在呼和浩特多呆些时日·从我们住在市中心的旅舍来看·我们有时间安排一个两日的草原骑马之旅或者骑骆驼在沙漠中跋涉·进一步游览广阔的蒙古草原。

两种方式可以预定搭乘西伯利亚快车：一是每一站都现场预定车票·这可需要一定勇气的；一是通过中介机构提前预定所有车票·此法安全可靠些·我们选择了后者·因此不能随心所欲的到处游览·只能严格执行既定的计划·如果可以再选择一遍的话·我会多些勇气选择前者·值得庆幸的是·在呼和浩特所停留的24小时内·我们好好享用了几餐美食·几杯啤酒·游览了装修类似佛教寺庙的古老清真寺·参观了国家博物馆·并从中了解到中国的太空计划。

登上火车之前·会有一位或是微笑或是严肃的检票员检查你的车票和护照·确保乘客安全·告知乘客下车站次·一上火车就会感到车厢奇怪的宽敞·两对上下铺还有一张桌子·并不显拥挤·卧铺下面的空间足够可以存放乘客各种行李·每换一位入住的旅客·乘务员都会更换床单。

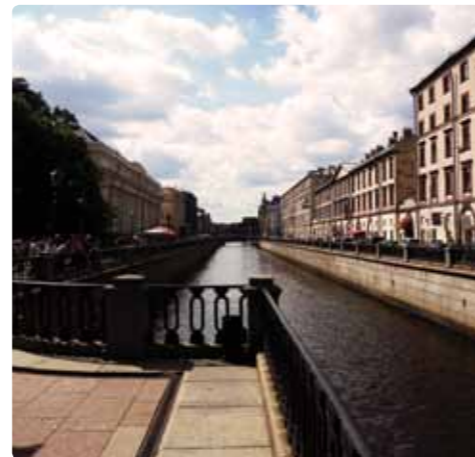
火车开动后·是时候放松享受一下了·看会书·玩会牌·和同车厢的旅客聊聊天·好不惬意·即使乘坐飞机仅需6个小时·但是对于身材高大的我来说·可不是件容易事·我宁愿乘坐36个小时的火车开始我的旅行·有些乐趣可是乘坐飞机出行享受不到的·卧铺很宽敞·让我可以安心入睡。







## Some Highlights



## 旅行亮点

从伊尔库茨克出发，第一站就是世界最深的淡水湖---贝加尔湖。我们上了一辆摇晃的破旧巴士，7个小时后到达了轮渡，乘船20分钟后到奥尔洪---被世界第三大淡水湖环绕的岛屿。踏上岛屿，享受着明媚的阳光，租下几个帐篷，就在湖边安营扎寨了。我们喝到了乌克兰家庭自制的烈酒，还品尝到了自制的家熏驯鹿肉，一直玩到午夜。那是一个难忘夜晚。

奥尔洪的美景让人叹为观止。我们徒步进入深山老林，探寻洞穴。也可租自行车、沙滩车、或者骑马开始探险之旅。我们可是从来没有想过要游泳。即使是夏季，水也是冰凉透骨的。只有顽强的俄罗斯人可以冒险尝试。

在叶卡捷琳堡，我们知晓了俄国革命之前，统治俄罗斯的沙皇罗曼诺夫一家的命运，参观了白桦林深处的墓地。东正教认为此处是俄罗斯最神圣的地方，并认为罗曼诺夫一家是烈士。

来到圣彼得堡，不划乘小船沿着错综复杂的运河游览涅瓦河畔，就不算到过这里。傍晚时分，日落较晚，可以尽情欣赏着夕阳照射下老城区的迷人剪影。艾尔米塔什博物馆（冬宫）目前从规模和藏品上仅次于卢浮宫，也是必去之地。进入博物馆，震撼惊叹之情油然而生，我们才明白为什么称其为俄罗斯的艺术宝库。

但是，冬宫的建筑本身更增加了艺术宝库的魅力，体现了罗曼诺夫王朝的繁荣昌盛。（这里可

没有古代沙特艺术展品和安妮·莱波维兹的摄影展。）冬宫的第三层，虽被大部分旅行团忽略，但是一间间展厅里面展出的都是欧洲大师的佳作。感谢圣彼得堡让我有幸如此近距离的欣赏毕加索的大作。

阳光明媚的早晨我们来到莫斯科红场，圣巴西尔大教堂的圆形屋顶在阳光下闪闪发光。我们同其他游客一起，有序的排队等待着进入列宁墓。进入墓地前，背包、相机、手机都被仔细检查过。能如此恭恭敬敬的瞻仰这位伟人很是难得。随后，我们在丽思卡尔顿酒店的屋顶酒吧品尝鸡尾酒（我们的花费超出了预算），俯瞰克里姆林宫还有交通高峰时期的拥挤，回忆我们走过的旅程。

俄罗斯带给我很多回忆：那里广袤的原野上散布着村镇，人们友好开放。他们不常微笑，但是总会尽力帮助我们。那是一个精神生活丰富的地方，教堂和寺庙是真正的社会中心，每时每刻都有祈祷活动。那里也是享受生活的殿堂，啤酒屋、俱乐部营业到凌晨，不苟言笑的人们常友好的共饮啤酒和伏特加。这里并不富有，但是物价和上海或伦敦一样高。

最后不得不提一下火车。现在你可以乘坐飞机去任何地方，但我认为这样也会错失一些了解千英里外国度的机会。乘坐火车旅行，在火车上你什么都没有，除了时间。放慢脚步，花些时间，静静的深入了解一个地方。这样的旅程才算完美。

## Our Trans Siberian Express 跨越西伯利亚之行

**Places to Stay 住宿**  
Ulaanbaatar 乌兰巴托  
UB Guesthouse UB招待所  
ubguest.com

Moscow 莫斯科  
Ritz-Carlton  
丽思卡尔顿酒店  
ritzcarltonmoscow.com

Ulan-Ude 乌兰乌德  
Hotel Baikal  
贝尔加湖旅馆  
+7 (3012) 210 070

**Useful Websites  
实用网址**  
Ticket agency 票务中心  
realrussia.co.uk

Lake Baikal 贝尔加湖  
Nikita's Homestead  
尼基塔之家  
olkhon.info

**Hotels 预订酒店**  
hostelworld.com

St Petersburg 圣彼得堡  
MIR Hostel MIR旅社  
mirhostel.com

**Train times 火车时刻表**  
seat61.com



Before you board the train, your ticket and passport are checked by a smiling - or grouchy - train lady whose demeanour will never change - she is one or the other, all the time - and looks after the passengers, making sure that everyone behaves and letting people know when to get off. Once aboard, the compartments are surprisingly roomy. Four bunk beds are divided by enough space to house a small table and there is enough storage beneath them to get four people's bags out of the way. Clean sheets are provided every time a compartment's occupancy changes.

As the train departs the station, it's time to sit back and relax; something that's easy on a train. We read books, played cards and got to know our fellow travellers. It is a great way to move, so that whereas a six hour flight fills me with dread (I'm six foot five), a 36 hour train journey no longer does. There is a whole world to watch going by, and you can do it fully reclined. At night, the beds are (just) big enough for even my giant frame to fall asleep in.

### Ulan-Ude - Irkutsk: 26hr

From Irkutsk, the closest stop to Lake Baikal, the world's deepest, we took a rickety old bus for the seven hours it takes to get to the 20 minute ferry crossing to Olkhon, the third-largest lake-bound island in the world. Once ashore, with the sun shining, we hired a couple of tents and camped by the side of the lake. We drank homemade schnapps with a Ukrainian family and ate their home smoked reindeer until the sun finally set at nearly midnight. It was a beautiful and memorable night.

The landscape on Olkhon is breathtaking and we explored its deep forests on foot, finding coves and caves with nary another soul to be seen. We could have hired bikes, quad bikes or done our exploring on horseback. At no point however, did we ever seriously consider a swim. Even in summer, the water is cold enough to painfully numb your feet. Only the hardest Russians braved the deep clear waters - except to drink from them.

### Novosibirsk - Yekaterinburg: 28hr

In Yekaterinburg we learnt of fate of the Romanovs, the tsarist family that ruled Russia from grand palaces before Russia had its revolution. We visited the site, deep in a forest of silver birch, where they were buried after being shot in town. There, the Orthodox Church is reclaiming the family as martyrs and the site is one of Russia's holiest.

### Yekaterinburg - St. Petersburg: 35hr

In St Petersburg, no visit is complete without a boat trip around its labyrinthine canals that arc to and fro from the great Neva River. Do this at night, as the late sun sets and see the old city in stunning silhouette. You must also visit the Hermitage Museum. Formally the Romanov Winter Palace and the seat of their power, it is now arguably second only to the Louvre in terms of scale and scope of its content. There, in the most fabulously decorated rooms, we came to understand why it is known as the de facto reservoir of Russia's considerable artistic heritage.

But what made the Hermitage special is the building itself - it must been to be understood just how richly the Romanovs lived - and the things you do not expect to find there: an exhibition of ancient Saudi artwork, and a temporary exhibition by the photographer Annie Leibovitz. On the third floor, much overlooked by the numerous and voluminous tour groups, are room after room of the European Masters. I got up close to my first Picasso there and will thank St Petersburg forever for it.

### St. Petersburg - Moscow: 4hr

In Moscow, on a bright morning in Red Square, the sun gleaming off the onion domes of Saint Basil's Cathedral, we queued with everyone else for the chance to descend into Lenin's tomb. There, our bags, cameras and phones checked, we respectfully filed past the grandfather of the

Big Idea. It was a solemn and bizarre occasion. Later on, we spent more money than was strictly necessary on cocktails in the Ritz-Carlton's rooftop lounge, overlooking the Kremlin and the horrendous rush hour traffic, reflecting on our epic journey.

Russia is many things: it is a vast wilderness of unexplored spaces punctuated with towns and cities filled with friendly, open people. They don't always smile, but they will always try and help. It is a deeply spiritual place: the churches and temples really are the centre of the community, with services taking place pretty much all the time, but it is also a hedonistic place. The beer houses and clubs stay open until dawn, and those friendly, unsmiling people are always quick to share a beer or offer you a shot of vodka. There is real poverty and yet, it can seem as expensive as Shanghai or London.

Finally however, there is the train. Yes you could fly to nearly everywhere we stopped but to do so would be, I think, to miss the point: the slow considered journeying between places thousands of miles apart. It takes time to understand a place, and on the train you have nothing but.

