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RUSSIAN TO GET THERE

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Steve Gillick

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24 JAN 2012: The Russian Federation is gearing up to increase the number of Canadian travellers so they can enjoy and thrill to the country's amazing sites, cities, adventure activities as well as experience not only the iconic past but also a promising future.



The advertisement features a dark blue header with the text "GetTODAY Tomorrow" in white. Below the header is a bulleted list of six qualities: "informative", "provocative", "opinionated", "infuriating", "revealing", and "amusing". Following this list is the phrase "... essential" in a smaller font. At the bottom of the box is a blue button with the white text "SUBSCRIBE NOW!".

On January 21st, the meeting of CERBA (Canada Eurasia Russia Business Association) was devoted to “Travel and Tourism Trends in Modern Russia” and it was quite an eye opener. The meeting was co-sponsored by tour operator Canadian Gateway, Transaero Airlines, and the Canada-Russia Association of Tourism Culture and Sport.

Mark Adler the Member of Parliament for York Centre and co-chair of the Canada-Russia Friendship Group began the meeting by bringing greetings from the Federal Government. Adler noted that Canada and Russia have at least three things in common: The coldest capital cities in the world (Ottawa and Moscow), a love of hockey, and both are passionate about good food. Katherine Balabanova, the Regional Director of CERBA, then introduced the guest speaker, Nikolay Novichkov, the Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Tourism for the Russian Federation.

I had an opportunity to chat with Novichkov prior to the meeting and asked him about safety

concerns. I noted that the Canadian Foreign Affairs website seems to itemize many safety issues for travellers in Russia. Novichkov said that the safety of tourists, whether on package tours or FITS is always a priority for the government, whether in the large cities of Moscow and St Petersburg or in the smaller towns that tourists visit on the Volga waterways cruises (e.g. Yaroslavl, Uglich, Kostroma, Nizhni Nogorod and Volgograd). Moreover, Novichkov noted, and repeated in his talk afterward, that for upcoming events such as the 27th World University summer games in Kazan, Tartarstan in 2013 (Kazan is the 8th most populous city in Russia) and the 22nd Olympic Winter Games and 11th Paralympic Games in Sochi, Krasnodar Krai, in 2014, security will be strengthened as a matter of course in relation to the crowds expected to attend.

I also asked Novichkov why Canadians should consider Russia and he noted the similarities in space, Russia being the largest country in the world, with Canada taking the Number 2 position. He also spoke about the ethnic diversity of both countries as well as the sheer number of attractions and activities that will make Canadians feel very 'at home' while on vacation.

In his keynote talk, Novichkov noted that English is spoken at hotels in the larger cities and that there is an ongoing campaign to have restaurants adopt English versions of menus to make the culinary experience more enjoyable for tourists.

As far as activities that Canadians love to experience, Russia has some pretty incredible ones including spas in the Caucasus, mountain resorts and skiing, cultural heritage and history tours, the chance to explore smaller towns that were once

closed off to tourism but now boast connections to iconic Russian personalities such as Lenin and Stalin, and artists such as Sergei Diaghilev the founder of the Ballets Russes.

In the Perm Krai region for example, tourists can attend the Diaghilev Festival of Ballet, visit the Museum of Wooden Architecture, attend the summer festival of White Nights (where cultural events take place every night during the month of June), visit the Museum of Political Repression (which only 30 years ago was a functioning prison), and experience 19th century peasant life including if they choose, living in a peasant village for a few days, learning to tend (and milk) the cows and goats, and cooking (and eating) traditional Russian meals.

Novichkov suggested that in each of Russia's 83 regions, there are unique attractions and activities that will impress tourists, particularly Canadians who rank amongst the top ten nations who send visitors to the Russian Federation.

One of the sponsoring attendees of the meeting was Yury Manukhov, President of Canadian Gateways/YYZ Travel who was recently appointed as the official representative of the Federal Agency for Tourism. Canadian Gateways has a full program of tours in Russia including Culinary Delights of St. Petersburg, Jewish Heritage, Volga River Cruises, Music, the Russian North, travel to 'the Golden Ring', Moscow attractions, the Trans-Siberian Railroad and more.

The unsaid message of the meeting for Canadian travel agencies was the importance of staying tuned in to destinations that travellers not only currently visit but destinations that travellers will

start to ask about and show an interest by spreading their wings and opening their eyes to new experiences.

Just a personal note that I visited Moscow and Leningrad (as it was then called) in 1967. I still have the postcards I mailed home talking about the indescribable beauty of the Hermitage and its wealth of world class paintings; of the awe of standing next to iconic Saint Basil's Cathedral in Red Square, and even visiting Lenin's Tomb. I've been away too long. Now so much more is open to tourists with an infrastructure to match the need to see and experience as much as possible. Now is a great time to learn more in the service of your clients. Russia is waiting for you.





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

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