



Classic Travel

By Ross Millen

Moscow to Beijing - the world's longest and greatest train journey

The thing about travelling, and the Trans Siberian is a perfect example, is that it's not about the destination, but the journey itself. You have new friends, new stories and are having a good laugh.

Nearly three months earlier my wife Lynda and I embarked on the ambitious task of travelling from London to Auckland without using any planes. In that time we had meandered through Europe going as far south as Naples, Italy and as far north as Riga, Latvia. We had sailed the Adriatic Sea, met up with the Danube River at least 5 times in 5 different countries, seen enough churches and cathedrals to last a lifetime, fought off gypsy thieves, climbed several mountains, and unfortunately spent most of our money. This was a bit worrying as we had only managed to cover a fraction of the distance we had to go. However we had a plan...

It was a cold and misty morning when our train pulled up into the busy Moscow Station. A man met us, he was dressed all in black, and he gestured us to follow him. We did and he took us to his car. Once in the car, he silently slid us an unmarked envelope.

"Instructions are inside" he said in a heavily accented voice.

No more words were said. He dropped us off at a hotel without a word and drove off into the mist.

It seemed to us that this was a bit like something from a spy movie, rather than just a travel agent delivering our Trans Siberian train tickets. But we guessed that is just how things are done here.

Our plan was to take the greatest and longest train journey in the world; the Trans Siberian / Trans Mongolian railway from Moscow to Beijing. It would take the equivalent of six days, and

take us 8000km before depositing us on the continent of Asia. In actual fact it would take us longer than six days as we would be getting off in Siberia and Mongolia. It is a special kind of person who can sit for six days on a train without a break. As it was we would be spending four days on the train before we reached our first stop.

When I first explained to a Russian friend of mine that we would be taking the train from Moscow to Beijing, he just looked at me. After a noticeable pause he said.

"Ross... That is a long way, why do you not just fly?"

Another Russian friend commented about Siberia.

"Ross... Why not go somewhere warm."

Obviously the thought of travelling by train to Siberia does not fill a Russian native with enthusiasm. But despite their scepticism, we were determined. So we boarded our train in Moscow with gifts