

THE CAUCASIAN RIVIERA: Pitsunda Cape, a "people's resort" on the Black Sea coast

Soviet Architectural Gem

Resort Being Built on Black Sea Hailed As Revelation of New Design Standards

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Special to The New York Times

PITSUNDA, U.S.S.R. — This spot of paradise on the Black Sea, known previously only as the place where Nikita S. Khrushchev demonstrated fun and games at his vacation headquarters, is about to become the showplace of Soviet architecture.

To this observer, one of the first foreigners permitted to see a nearly completed appraisal resort here that represents the most advanced Soviet building today, the visit was a revelation of new design standards still unknown beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.

Pitsunda Cape is a small, sheltered stretch of Black Sea coast east of Sochi, where a superb crescent beach is bordered by a primeval pine forest and a theatrical backdrop of Caucasian mountains wreathed in mists.

From Sochi to Batumi the area is called the Caucasian Riviera. In beauty of setting, it is second to none of the better publicized international playgrounds.

A Russian resort, however, is totally unlike familiar Western versions, and Pitsunda is a resort Soviet style. It is a concept hard for Americans to grasp.

Although the effect of the high-rise buildings, pools, restaurants and shorefront promenade, arranged in an elegant curve along the water's edge will be as soigné as any constructed elsewhere, the similarity ends there.

Pitsunda is being built by the All Union Trade Union Council, the national trade union organization, with headquarters in Moscow. Vacation facilities are controlled by the trade unions.

A 'People's Resort'

Like other seashore and mountain retreats, Pitsunda is a "people's resort," and its hotels are "rest homes" for the workers. Space is allocated to various unions for the annual "rest, recreation and treatment" arranged for workers and their families on a sliding scale of subsidized costs. Food, lodging and medical treatment are provided.

Because Pitsunda is considered an undertaking of national rather than local scope and importance, it has been designed by the chief architect of the Soviet Union, Mikhail V. Posokhin. As head of the State Committee for Civil Construction and Architecture, Mr. Posokhin is the top architectural decision maker in the Soviet Union.

Pitsunda represents the latest and highest standards of Soviet design and an important new trend in Soviet building. This radical change in architectural course was glimpsed first by the outside world in the 1961 Palace of Congresses, a completely contemporary building constructed inside the Kremlin in Moscow. It is still engendering controversy. The architectural team responsible for the Palace of Congresses was also led by Mr. Posokhin.

Today, the new style is breaking out all over. It is appearing dramatically along Kalinin Avenue in Moscow in a series of high-rise towers stretching almost a third of a mile. It has flopped in the Hotel Russia, the new air-conditioned nightmare for 6,000 guests.

At best it is an extremely creditable, sometimes striking version of international modern, based on the experimental prefabrication of standardized, reinforced concrete units on a national scale.

Pitsunda, in its still unfinished state, struck this viewer as a complex that would rate high in design terms on any scale of international achievement. It is a far cry from the classical cake molds and crumbling five-story walkups of the nineteen-fifties that have become the popular cliché image of Soviet building.

Pitsunda's engineers are attempting to come to grips in particular with finishes, one of the most serious problems of Soviet construction. It is highly improbable that the contemplated buildings will have the technical polish of the best Western products, but it is also unlikely that they will suffer from the tacky joints and surfaces so much in evidence even in brand-new Soviet structures.

Special measures are being taken to insure a technical level related to the superior design level.

Not only is the resort considered of national importance, but its setting is also ranked as a national trust. One of the stipulations was that not a single

ancient pine tree should be cut. The project has been conceived and carried out as a dual exercise in development and conservation.

The completed resort will consist of seven 14-story and 15-story towers spaced on a 185-yard stretch along the curved beach set in cypress and pines. These towers are done, except for finishing details.

Each building will have a roof cafe and solarium. There will be single rooms with shared bath facilities for single workers, and one-to three-room-and bath arrangements for families. The rooms average 129 square feet, but glass walls can be opened to balconies and breathtaking views.

A restaurant and café, well along in construction, will hold 900, and the same building will contain a 900-seat movie theater. A heated swimming pool for winter use has been begun. There will be another restaurant-theater building for 1,300. The completed resort will accommodate 3,000.

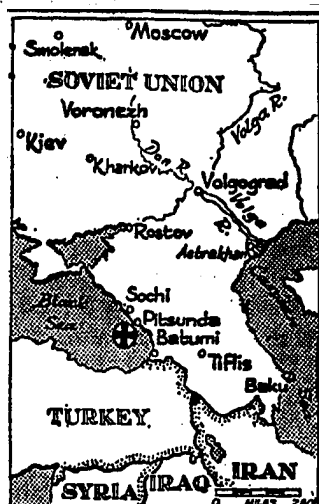
Service buildings, including residence for the staff that will operate Pitsunda, are farther inland.

The structures are all made of factory-produced, precast elements trucked to the site. At present, this is done along hairpin turns of spectacular Caucasian roads favored by strolling mountain cows.

The large-scale standardization and industrialization of building parts are the massive preoccupation of the Soviet construction program today.

The exterior walls of the towers are modular concrete panels faced with creamy mosaic tile finished at the factory. The restaurants will be white marble and glass.

The shorefront promenade is random Georgian marble, grad-



The New York Times June 17, 1967

PROGRESS IN PARADISE: Advanced Soviet design is seen in Pitsunda (cross).

ing from chalky white to beige. The towers' interior Venetian blinds will have contrasting hues on their two sides for random accents.

Pitsunda is scheduled to be finished and occupied later this year. Total costs, including all furnishings, will be 35 million rubles, or \$38.5-million, but United States and Soviet costs defy comparison. Utilities will be all-electric.

A debate is already under way about future expansion. The feeling at present is that the naturally self-contained beauty of the site makes expansion undesirable. This, in itself, is a departure in design philosophy in a society that tends to think of building in mass multiples of thousands.