

Title:

Chita, Siberia - A Little History

Word Count:

374

Summary:

In 1999, I decided to live a year in the city of Chita, Russia. For those not in the know, Chita is a city in Siberia.

Keywords:

russia, siberia

Article Body:

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History

The City of Chita is a the administrative center of the Chita Oblast, which is similar to a state. It is located smack dab in the middle of Siberia and is about 500 miles east of Lake Baikal.

From the 1930's through the end of communism, Chita was a closed city. During this period, foreigners were prohibited from traveling to Chita as were many Russians. The basis for the closing of the city was apparently its proximity to China and military installations.

In some circles, Chita is known as the City of Exiles because prominent intellectuals starting with the "Decembrist" were exiled to the city after failed uprisings in 1825. Despite this informal name, the arrival of the Decembrists was a boon for the city. The well-educated exiles made an effort to educate the citizens of Chita and pursue trade. Through these efforts, the City became a major trading portal in Siberia, particularly since the natural resources of the area included timber, gold and uranium.

Architecturally, Chita is a clash of styles. Foremost, Chita is populated with communist concrete buildings. The apartment buildings are almost universally five stories tall and, frankly, not the most appealing things you've every scene. In contrast to these soviet signatures, Chita is also populated with individual homes made primarily out of wood. The homes are the equivalent of

those you would see in any mountainous area and are very comfortable. Clashing with these two styles are a number of buildings in the center of Chita.

During World War II, a significant number of Japanese soldiers were taken by the Russians as prisoners of war. Through whatever machinations present at that time, they were put to work in the construction industry. Yep, you guessed it. In the center of Chita you will find buildings with a definite hint of Japanese style. The buildings are not overtly Japanese, but they definitely differ from the other styles present.

Having lived in the city for a year, I can definitely say it is worth a visit. The Trans-Siberian Railway passes through the city, so access is very easy.