

Title:

Only in Russia - Tinda

Word Count:

439

Summary:

While living in Siberia for a year, I agreed to speak at a human rights conference. Only in Russia will you find a place like Tinda, a city we stopped in on our way.

Keywords:

russia, human rights, tinda, trans-siberian railway, communism, john lee hooker, bum railway, stalin

Article Body:

While living in Siberia for a year, I agreed to speak at a human rights conference. Only in Russia will you find a place like Tinda, a city we stopped in on our way.

Trans-Siberian Railway

When living in Siberia, the only way to get around is car, helicopter or the Trans-Siberian Railway. Since I had neither a car nor helicopter, the train it was. Unfortunately, the train to my conference left at 4 AM after a night spent trying to acquire a travel visa on the sly, which meant drinking a lot of visa.

Dutifully, my travel partner, Oleg Vladimirovich, and I made the train where we were met by a local reporter, Nina, who was coming along. The Trans-Siberian Railway can offer some amazing views, but not at four in the morning. I went to sleep.

The thing about Russia is you simply can't grasp how big it is. Although we were traveling in the same state ["oblast"], the trip took 30 hours. Since it was winter, the view out the train was mostly of snow covered trees. Yes, it sounds romantic until you have to sit there for a day. Fortunately, the Russians have good taste as the train radio blared John Lee Hooker most of the way. No, I don't know why.

Tinda

Only in Russia will you find a city like Tinda. During the Stalin era, it was

determined that the timber and natural resources in a particular spot of Siberia were very valuable. Unfortunately, nobody lived within 500 miles of so of the location. To solve the problem, the authorities decided to build a railroad and city from scratch.

Building in the middle of Siberia is just a slight challenge. Just to get to the location of Tinda, the Russians had to build a railway over permafrost, bogs, huge mountain ranges, roaring rivers and I won't even mention the bugs in the summer.

The unfortunately named BUM railway was started in 1930 and finished in 1984. During this process, hundreds of five story concrete buildings were built to form the city of Tinda. A hundred thousand people were uprooted from their homes and moved to this city in the middle of nowhere. Walla, the communist authorities had a labor force to exploit the natural resources.

With the fall of communism, the authorities in Russia are no longer interested in the area. The city is failing and people are flocking to live in cities with jobs and better wages. The ones that remain in Tinda are in desperate straits. It is a sad statement to the legacy of communism, where the interests of the state dominated.