

Title:

Siberia, Russia Part 3 - Communist Planes and Defining "Fluent"

Word Count:

579

Summary:

In the first two parts of this series, we covered my decision to move from San Diego to Chita, Siberia to be a professor at Chita State Technical University. We pick up the story aboard the flight from Anchorage to Khabarovsk, Russia.

Keywords:

sibera, russia, travel, travelogue

Article Body:

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Day 3

Technically, it's day two and half. I think. Time began to blur as we flew over the international date line. Wait, do we add a day or lose a day? I was so confused that I didn't know whether to whine about losing or gaining a day in my life. Whatever day it was, we were flying along happily on Aeroflot.

I must say that communism had some things going for it. The average airline ticket in the U.S. should come with a shoehorn to help wedge you into the seat. God forbid if the person in front of you should put their seat back. Damn people in first class! Communism solved this problem nicely.

I wouldn't say our plane was old, but the younger planes around our gate were crowding in to hear our plane tell stories about the first flight of the Wright brothers. Despite some interesting details [My God, does that look like a crack in the wing? That better not be duct tape!], the "maturity" of our flying bull had some distinct advantages.

A central concept of communism is that there is only one class of people, to wit, the workers. Theoretically, everyone gets the same treatment. The benefits of this theory are debatable, but I can tell you it stomps capitalism into the ground when it comes to flying.

The seating compartment on our plane was uniformly first class. There was plenty of space for one's rump and legs. Each two-seat section was the equivalent of three seats on a U.S. airline. It was at least two feet to the seat in front of me. Those that fly a lot will understand as I quietly shed a tear in memory of that flight. Dozing comfortably, I didn't give a damn if the wings fell off. At least we were going in style!

Our flight consisted of about 100 people. Of these, 90 percent were Russians. Grae and I counted as two and the remaining five or so people were religious volunteers going to convert the godless masses. They appeared to be having no luck on the plane, but Grae and I were able to strike up a few conversations.

I must say that the Russians on the plane were extremely nice and very honest. While honesty is generally a good thing, their frankness made me a bit uncomfortable. First, there was a clear consensus that we were out of our mind for agreeing to go to Chita. "You are going WHERE?!" was followed by a lot of whispering between Russians and bulging eyes. Since I doubted the pilot would be willing to turn the plane around, this wasn't particularly comforting.

Our conversations raised an additional problem regarding the definition of "fluent". In my mind, being fluent in a language meant that one could get directions, tell boring stories, etc., in the language in question. It quickly became clear that Grae's definition of "fluent" was something less. This was verified when he turned to me and said, "Man, I've forgotten a lot."

Great. Khabarovsk was only a few hours a way. But that's a story to be told in Part 4 of this series...