



## **Title VIII Research Scholar Program**

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### **Introduction/Research Activities and Goals**

For about four and a half months, I conducted archival research in Moscow, Russia made possible by funding from American Councils. During this trip to Moscow, I did the bulk of the archival research necessary to complete my dissertation, although I will have to return for about a month next summer to look over some files I did not have time for this past summer. I greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded to me by American Councils and know well the struggles of other history graduate students to gain enough funding to travel abroad to conduct research.

My PhD dissertation is a history of American visitors in/to the Soviet Union post-Stalin until the beginning of the tenure of Mikhail Gorbachev as Secretary General of the Communist Party, roughly 1956-1985. In Moscow, I rotated visits to two archives: GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) and RGASPI (Russian State Archive for Social-Political History).<sup>1</sup> RGANI (the Russian State Archive for Contemporary History), the third major archive I need to visit, remained closed due to a pending re-location and no one seems to know when it will re-open. Therefore, I will most likely need to return next year to see what their holdings include. With more than enough material to read at GARF and RGASPI, I could not find the time to visit the third archive – the Moscow City Archive (TsADOM) – I planned to visit before departure. In

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<sup>1</sup> RGASPI, currently, consists of two archives. The larger and more well-known of its two archives holds mostly Communist Party records until c. 1953-6. I visited its second, much smaller archive, located on Profsoyuzna Street, which holds the records of many Soviet youth organizations including the Komsomol.

Moscow, I additionally visited several of the hotels where tourists and other visitors spent time while in Moscow (pictures below). I plan to publish my dissertation and pursue a career in academia.

Overall, I found the archival experience in Russia to be highly interesting and even enjoyable. The staff at both archives, especially the smaller RGASPI where I was often the only researcher present, were both polite and helpful; nor was the experience as daunting or confusing as some led me to believe. More problematically and disappointingly, however, my requests to read several files concerning the Soviet solidarity campaign on behalf of Angela Davis and her 1972 visit to the USSR were denied at RGASPI. Despite being listed in the *opisi* (the list of all files in an individual fond), those files are “secret.” Prior to starting my archival research, I hoped to find enough material about her visits to the Soviet Union and the solidarity campaign on her behalf to write a whole chapter specifically about her time in the USSR and her impact on the country. In GARF and RGASPI, I found some information about her relationship with the USSR but being denied the specific file on her hurts. Initially I planned to write a chapter (or several) about certain notable or celebrity visitors to the USSR, including Davis along with Mohammed Ali, Neil Armstrong and others, whose visits were widely covered in the American and Soviet press and individuals who were often called upon to endorse certain aspects of Soviet policy or proclaim Soviet superiority in certain areas. Now, I will have to reevaluate this plan.

Additionally, several other files from the fond for the Committee of Youth Organizations (KMO) (fond M3 at RGASPI) concerning either the annual Soviet-American Youth Forums or reports written by Soviet guides/interpreters about the visits of young Americans were also denied to me because they remain “secret.”

At GARF, I worked mostly with the following fonds: 9612 (Inturist), 9576 (SSOD or the Friendship Societies and specifically the National Council for Soviet American Friendship) and 9520 (Central Council of Labor Unions - Tourism).<sup>2</sup> Those files contain a variety of different documents - reports, statistical data, correspondence, memorandums, itineraries and other plans – relating to international tourism, exchanges and American visitors to the USSR. The documents make clear that once Soviet authorities opened their borders to international tourism, which began in the late 1950s as part of Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful co-existence with the West, many Americans, especially those on the political left, were eager to visit the USSR in great numbers. Americans were interested in both general tourism (visiting the main tourist sites such as the Kremlin or the Hermitage) and for more specific reasons, especially to meet with their professional counterparts and to experience life “under communism” and beyond the “Iron Curtain.” Founded originally to support the American-Soviet wartime alliance, the documents from the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (NCASF) in GARF make clear the group’s main functions over time transitioned to facilitating visits to and from the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, to facilitate such tourism and promote a more positive image of itself abroad, the Soviet Union enlisted citizen diplomacy, a network of private groups and friendship organizations, such as the NCASF, in an effort to draw in possible allies. Soviet officials repeatedly pestered the NCASF to send to the USSR “prominent figures” in the realms of culture, politics and business. The American “friends” usually left their Soviet colleagues disappointed. As mentioned above, a few prominent individuals visited the USSR during this period. Unlike the fellow-traveler days however, only a few offered the Soviet project their full-throated endorsement.

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<sup>2</sup> At GARF, I also read documents from fonds 7298 (The Soviet Women’s Committee) and 9539 (the Soviet Peace Committee), specifically the files containing correspondence between these committees and Americans – some of whom planned to or had just visited the USSR.

At RGASPI, I examined the records of the Komsomol (fond M1), the Committee of Youth Organizations (KMO) (fond M3), the Young Pioneer Camp – Artek (fond M8), the Bureau for International Youth Travel – ‘Sputnik’ – (fond M5) and the Young Pioneers (fond M2) at RGASPI. The documents here were similar to those in GARF, except they concern youth tourism and exchanges rather than general tourism. (I also found a few documents in the fonds of Artek and the Young Pioneers related to Samantha Smith, the young American girl who visited the USSR in 1983 in support of peace). Because the Soviet Union defined “youth” broadly (encompassing even those between the ages of 18-30), a few problems occasionally occurred, such as at the inaugural Soviet-American Youth Forum held in Minsk in 1972. The US Delegation to the forum consisted of college students who were surprised to discover their Soviet “youth” counterparts in Minsk included people in their late 30s. The Soviet delegation was much more prepared and ideologically correct (nearly all were Komsomol members, a fact not disclosed to the Americans) than the rag-tag group of ideologically diverse American students. Some of the most interesting documents I worked with at RGASPI included a great number of letters written by young, financially pressed Americans to Sputnik, the Soviet agency which handled youth tourism, either to plan their trip or begging for a discount or a free trip. Most of these Americans expressed a wish to meet Soviets their own age with many wanting to avoid running the usual tourist gauntlet to instead see what life was really like in the USSR.

### **Co-Curricular Activities**

Additionally, I used my time in Moscow to meet other researchers in the Russian/Soviet history field. Some years ago, my home university, Indiana University, had many PhD students studying Russian or Eastern European history. Over the last few years or so, the number studying this region at my university has been significantly pared down. So, it was a great benefit to me

both personally and professionally to meet quite a few other researchers (at various stages in their careers) in Moscow. I also attended a Russian language class at International University in Moscow once a week on Mondays and participated in the first weeks in a Russian-American discussion group.

### **Project/Research Findings**

My research seeks to gain a better understanding of how American visitors thought of the USSR and the consequences this re-opening (post-Stalin) to tourists had for a country long considered closed and secretive. This project takes a particular interest in examining the gaps between how the USSR sought to represent itself and what visitors actually thought of the country. Currently my project is the early stages, but I intend to focus on how the Soviet Union used foreign tourism to serve its own political goals.

Despite the Soviet Union often being classified as a “closed society” or one inherently suspicious of foreigners, the fact that nearly ten million foreigners visited the Soviet Union between 1956-1985 suggests otherwise. While travel restrictions increased during the latter part of Stalin’s tenure (1946-1953) and the USSR during this time could legitimately be called a “closed society,” Stalin’s successors, namely Nikita Khrushchev, changed course. Even Leonid Brezhnev, who opposed many of Khrushchev’s reforms, never rolled back the relative opening of the USSR to foreigners. Rather during the détente years, over which he presided, tourism increased even more. While by this point economic motivations drove the expansion of foreign tourism, a political element remained. From the beginning, Soviet leaders fought an uphill battle to convince outsiders, particularly in the West, that the USSR was not the totalitarian dictatorship it was often portrayed to be. Visiting the Soviet Union was one such way to change minds. And prominent foreigners to the USSR were still feted by Soviet authorities in the hope of winning

their approval just as they were during the high-point of the notorious fellow-traveler days of the 1930s.

This project has two sides to it: the experience of the American visitors and the response of their Soviet hosts to their presence. The Soviet side of the project will discuss why attracting international tourists was so important to the post-Stalin USSR. And it will focus on the dilemmas posed by such a policy, which allowed millions of foreigners to cross Soviets borders, while the state still attempted to ward off ideological contamination. Was this opening due to economics or politics? How did the USSR attempt to market itself to foreigners? How did they try to win over the hearts and minds of visitors? These are a few of the questions I will ask in my dissertation and I found some partial answers in the archives in Moscow.

My dissertation also discusses the managed nature of the Soviet tourist experience and how visitors sought to rebel against this control not only in how they attempted to depart psychically from the planned tours but also in the ways they disregarded the messages communicated to them by their Soviet hosts. For instance, visits to factories shared a dual purpose of showcasing not only the cutting-edge and gargantuan nature of Soviet industry but additionally to highlight the social and workplace benefits offered to Soviet workers. Not everyone left impressed, however. Per reports from guides, some thought they saw lax safety standards, backwards production, and low productivity, while others were unimpressed with the subordination of unions.

Overall, my dissertation will show that the USSR was “open” to the outside world and eagerly sought to show itself off, albeit in a highly-controlled way, to foreigners, even those coming from its primary opponent. The “Iron Curtain” was hardly impenetrable. A fundamental contradiction also existed within the Soviet tourist industry and the tourist experience in the

USSR. Tourists wanted to “see” and “experience” authentic Soviet life and culture but for the visiting tourist Soviet authorities manufactured an alternate reality meant to portray the USSR in the best possible light as well as to ward off ideological penetration. Moreover, and ironically, while visiting tourists often wished to experience communism and see how different life was like beyond the “Iron Curtain,” Soviet authorities attempted to design a tourist experience that very much portrayed their country as a normal one.

When we generally think of western visitors to the USSR, we think of the so-called “fellow travelers,” a group of sympathetic Westerners who journeyed to the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>3</sup> The post-Stalin period is comparatively understudied despite there being far more visitors in this later period. (According to internal InTurist reports, Americans were among the most frequent visitors to the country. By the 1970s, Americans even outpaced those from other “western” countries except Finland. In 1972, for example, more than 66,000 Americans made the trip to the USSR. InTurist planned to up these numbers to 150,000 Americans by 1980).<sup>4</sup> Additionally while historians lack a history of international tourism in the USSR, we have two recent and extensive histories of domestic tourism in the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> We also have a few

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<sup>3</sup> On Americans in the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s, see: Peter Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967; Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928-1979*, Oxford University Press, 1981; Tim Tzouliadis *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia*, New York: Penguin Press, 2008; Sylvia Marguiles, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968; Choi Chatterjee, “Everyday Life in the Transnational Perspective: Consumption and Consumerism, 1917-1939,” in *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present*, eds., Choi Chatterjee, et al., Indiana University Press, 2014; ; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*; V.K. Furaev, “Sovetsko-Amerianckie Nauchnye-Kul’turnye Sviazi (1924-1933 gg.),” *Voprosy Istorii*: 41-57; Alexander Etkind, *Tolkovanie puteshestvii: Rossiia i Amerika v travelogakh i intertekstakh*. Moscow, 2007; M.D Kressova, “Inturist v 1929-1939 gg.: struktura, kadry, napravleniia deiatel’nosti,” Dissertation, Moscow State University, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> The number of Americans visiting the USSR grew continuously with only one minor blip (the early 1980s when Ronald Reagan became president at Soviet-American tensions worsened to a significant degree). The most numerous visitors came from the Eastern Bloc, particularly those states which maintained close relations with the USSR: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, Oxford University Press, 2011; Diane Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream*, Cornell University Press, 2013. There is also an older Soviet era work G. P. Dolzhenko, *Istoriia Turizma v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii i SSSR*, Rostov on Don, 1988.

recent works exploring visits of Soviet citizens to the U.S.<sup>6</sup> There have also been some recent works examining the impact international tourism had on authoritarian societies, including communist Eastern Europe.<sup>7</sup> The closest such work to the one I plan on doing is an unpublished dissertation by Shawn Salmon, which is largely an institutional history of InTurist from its beginnings (1929) to the end of the USSR.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation, contra to my own work, argues largely that the USSR post-Stalin was opened as a tourist destination for economic reasons and that the political motivation behind such tourism was of much lesser importance and a relic of the interwar period. While this was surely partially true, the political element of touring the USSR (the desire to change minds, the careful management of tourism) and the number of “celebrity” type visitors who continued to be feted, as mentioned above, continued and remained deeply important too.

This is confirmed by findings from the archives. The commercial and economic implications of this type of tourism weighed heavily on both tourist officials and those who dealt directly with visitors. For example, many reports written by Soviet guides and translators discuss mundane problems plaguing the Soviet tourist industry (the lack of hot water and broken elevators in hotels, poor quality food in tourist restaurants, crabby bus drivers) arguing such defects limited the growth of the tourist industry in the Soviet Union, harmed the bottom line and projected a less than modern image of the USSR. To overcome such problems and to attract even more visitors, massive amounts of money were invested in hotels and other sites intended for

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<sup>6</sup> Andrei Kozovoi, “The way to a man’s heart: how the Soviet travel agency ‘Sputnik’ struggled to feed Western tourists,” *Journal of Tourism History*, Sept. 2014; I.B. Orlov and A.D. Popov, *Skvoz' "zheleznyi zanaves": sovetskii vyezdnoi turizm, 1955-1991*, Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola ekonomiki, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Scott Moranda, *The People’s Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism and Dictatorship in East Germany*, University of Michigan, 2014; Sasha Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship: Europe’s Peaceful Invasion of Franco’s Spain*, Palgrave, 2006; *Yugoslavia’s Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950-1980)*, eds. Karin Taylor and Hannes Grandits, Central European University, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Shawn Salmon, “To the Land of the Future: A History of Intourist and Travel to the Soviet Union, 1929-1991,” Dissertation, University of California Berkley, 2008.

tourists. Moreover, by the 1970s, InTurist started to participate in international tourist fairs in the United States to promote a variety of its tours. In Seattle, for instance, the massive Soviet booth at an international tourist fair measured more than a thousand square feet and played up the Soviet Union's status as a modern culturally and ethnically diverse tourist hot spot. The Soviet Union promoted international tourism for good reason because by the 1970s only oil brought in more foreign currency. Yet, those same reports cataloging various problems continued to categorize many of the visiting tourists ideologically and report back any anti-Soviet or politically incorrect things muttered by the tourists. For instance, the standard evaluation forms filled out for Sputnik guides included a question about whether any anti-Soviet incidents occurred during the tour. These reports almost always concluded with the guides quoting some of the tourists expressing goodwill towards the Soviet Union and their praise for the country, not for the hotels or food they ate but for the Soviet "achievements" they witnessed: new mass housing, schools, health care facilities and cultural centers.

Guides and interpreters tasked with working with foreign tourists received special "ideological-political" training, which their bosses at InTurist constantly fretted about. Authorities occasionally described dealing with foreign tourists, especially those from the capitalist west, as an ideological battle with the guides being on the front lines. Sites visited by tourists, whether they be state hospitals, nurseries, schools or factories, were discussed, evaluated and carefully selected prior to any visits with only the best sites being made open to visits. A fundamental goal of the Soviet tourist industry was to showcase the Soviet Union and its achievements to all visiting foreigners. They sought to project an image of the Soviet Union as a modern, culturally sophisticated, and (in particular for American visitors) "peace loving" country. Soviet authorities hoped, as it was during the fellow traveler-era of the 1930s, that visits

to the USSR would change the minds of skeptical foreigners, winning over hearts and minds. In the Cold War battle of images with the United States, the Soviet Union, often portrayed by its adversaries and the Western media as a dark, totalitarian, materially deprived state tried to correct this image by projecting a more inviting image to visiting tourists.

A few problems existed however. Many tourists came via the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship and other left-wing groups already devoted to seeing the Soviet Union as a success. In short, many of those who visited were already believers in the Soviet Union and thus didn't need to be "won over."

Moreover, in this later period, certain sites became more prominent depending on the political situation. Many American Jews visited the USSR in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when reports about Soviet anti-Semitism became a major concern for the American Jewry. In response, the Soviet Union sought to project an image to these particular visitors (many of whom had family in the USSR or were themselves born in the USSR or parts of the former Russian Empire) of a country free of religious bigotry of all kinds and in particular anti-Semitism. They accomplished this through visits to synagogues and meetings with Soviet Jewish figures. In several reports, guides acknowledged the difficulty and frequency of such questions, which they considered anti-Soviet slander. Still they concluded such visits to Soviet synagogues had the potential to change minds on the subject and in fact did so, according to the guides, on a few occasions.

Finally, Soviet authorities at SSOD (the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Contacts, the successor organization to the much better known and studied VOKS) continued to seek contact with prominent Americans, as VOKS did in the 1920s and 1930s, in the hope of winning their support. Moreover, they urged the American-Soviet Friendship society

to make inroads with important cultural, business and political figures in the United States. Over this period the Soviet Union hosted a number of figures of various notability – Arthur Miller, Lee Strasberg, Sam Spiegel, Mohammed Ali, Linus Pauling, Angela Davis, Samantha Smith. Historians who play down the role of politics and propaganda in international tourism in the post-Stalin era often ignore these prominent visitors and the Soviet attempt to win them over and get them to endorse certain Soviet policies, such as Linus Pauling, a Nobel prize-winning chemist, on the nuclear disarmament.

Soviet authorities additionally worried about the detrimental impact of foreign tourism and sought to create a balance between containing the subversive foreign goods and ideas entering their country via tourists and reaping the financial and propaganda windfall made possible by opening their borders to hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists.<sup>9</sup> In internal SSOD documents I looked over, Soviet officials constantly worried that American authorities used the introduction of foreign tourism in the USSR and the 1958 Lacy-Zarubin cultural exchange agreement for their own nefarious propaganda purposes. They believed the American side trained tourists to promote the American way of life and that individual tourists acted in politically provocative ways while in the country for supposedly tourist purposes. One official described foreign tourism as a new kind of Cold War weapon. In response, these officials argued the Soviet Union needed to do the same – to more aggressively promote Soviet achievements to foreign tourists through specialized programs designed specifically for them and identifying among the visitors those who could be potentially useful in the future.

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<sup>9</sup> Others have argued that general cultural exchange between the US and the USSR, in the form of exhibitions, distribution of foreign newspapers/magazines, academic, book and film exchanges played a vital role in the collapse of the USSR. Yet, the issue of tourism has yet to be thoroughly integrated into the study of Soviet-American relations and exchange. See: Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, Penn State University Press, 2003.

Soviet authorities were not the only ones who considered such trips as inherently political. The American tourists themselves saw their journey to their nation's Cold War opponent as a deeply political endeavor too. After all, visiting the Soviet Union was an atypical tourist experience. Shopping was usually limited to the hotel gift shop, while eating out was confined either to the hotel restaurant or pre-approved eateries while using InTulist coupons. Nor did most tourists go to the USSR to relax on a sunny, sandy beach on the sea shore. (Soviet authorities did invest a significant amount of money in Sochi, a resort town on the Black Sea, and its health sanatoriums. Few Americans however spent an extended time in the city or on any Soviet beach). Visiting Americans instead traveled to the Soviet Union to cross the "Iron Curtain" and experience life "under Communism" in their own nation's Cold War rival. These American visitors were deeply curious about how the average Soviet citizen lived, how Soviet businesses operated, and how Soviet children were educated. They were willing and eager to learn, but also criticize. A typical activity for the visiting tourist included a visit to a Soviet school, hospital, factory or farm. Although these factory visits (a staple on InTulist itineraries) have often been mocked as tedious and exceedingly boring, many visiting foreigners enjoyed them. And many visitors, through the Friendship Society, requested special counterpart meetings where they could discuss their professions with their Soviet colleagues. These specific requests, which the Soviet side occasionally struggled to accommodate, made the task of presenting an idealized picture of the USSR an easier feat to pull off.

### **Policy Relevance**

My project primarily sheds light on how some individual Americans from a variety of different backgrounds came to think of the USSR after visiting the country. As with some Americans and the USSR, some in the US continue to be attracted to authoritarian societies

opposed to the US. My research attempts to ask why? How and why did the USSR draw Americans in? Also of interest for policymakers is the second major aspect of my project, which discusses why the USSR was so interested in attracting foreign tourists. I argue it was not just about making money; instead Soviet authorities saw tourism as an arena to secure propaganda victories. While the USSR no longer exists, certain Soviet legacies have continued into the present, and while tourism in modern Russia is far less restrictive than it was during the Soviet period, there are certain continuities. Current Russian officials are still obsessed with how their country is viewed in the West, especially the United States, and they seek to portray certain aspects of their country as superior to those of the West. Tourism and images of the country intended for the West were heavily politicized during the Soviet period and such an argument can be made about post-Soviet Russia. Finally, the desire to win over prominent westerners, now often over-the-hill athletes and D-list celebrities such as the boxer Roy Jones Jr. and the actor Steven Seagal, has continued into the present period.

The House of Friendship, Moscow, where many counterpart meetings took place



The former Hotel Ukraine, Moscow, now a Radisson

