Russia to Sweden

Description

Go back to The Stans post.

Atirau to Astrakhan (380 km)

It was with great relief that I got to the Kazakh/Russia border! The last 50 km in Kazakhstan had been on horrible road where old broken tarmac was mixed with new road construction. It was dusty and sandy in places â?? perhaps the worst surface for a motorcycle.

We made the optimistic plan to start at 5 am from Atirau so I got up at 4.45 and started to get ready, however, it was still dark and wouldnâ??t get light until closer to 6. The â??Green hotelâ?• served breakfast early so we had a bite before leaving a bit after 6. The first 150 km of the road wasnâ??t too bad (but with deep tracks from heavy trucks) and we could keep a good speed. As we got closer to the border the road got worse to culminate in the terrible conditions of the last 50 km.

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Horrible road leading west out of Kazakhstan to Russia.



Road under construction.



â??Donkey headâ?• oil pumps. Must be oil under ground.



Lots of free running horses along the road.

Since we gained an hour in Russia we were at the border around noon. My entry into Russia was straight forward but Mikeâ??s took some time. He had a general entry into a number of countries, including Russia, and the immigration people at this entry point had not seen this before. After an hour we were in Russia! The road was now beautiful asphalt and it felt like heaven!

At one point we crossed a part of the river Volga that makes up the delta of the river as it enters the Caspian and it was a pontoon bridge made of metal, it was kind of weird as the tracks in the metal was pulling the bike in one direction. Before entering the bridge we had to pay a toll and we had no Rubles, however, Mikeâ??s visa card worked without problems! Back to civilization were credit-cards and, later, ATMâ??s work! A big relief after the problems in, particularly, Uzbekistan to obtain cash. Surprisingly, â??Pay-waveâ?• works where you can make payments by waving the card close to the detector machine. Amazing!

Astrakhan 25 June, 2019

I wasnâ??t feeling great so I mainly stayed in the hotel but went out to see the sights and get something to eat. I found a burger place called â??Kotletaâ?• spelled with the Latin alphabet and they served me a very nice burger. As it happened one of the staff had a birthday and I was invited to join the celebration with tea and cake. It was very nice and they were very curious about my trip.

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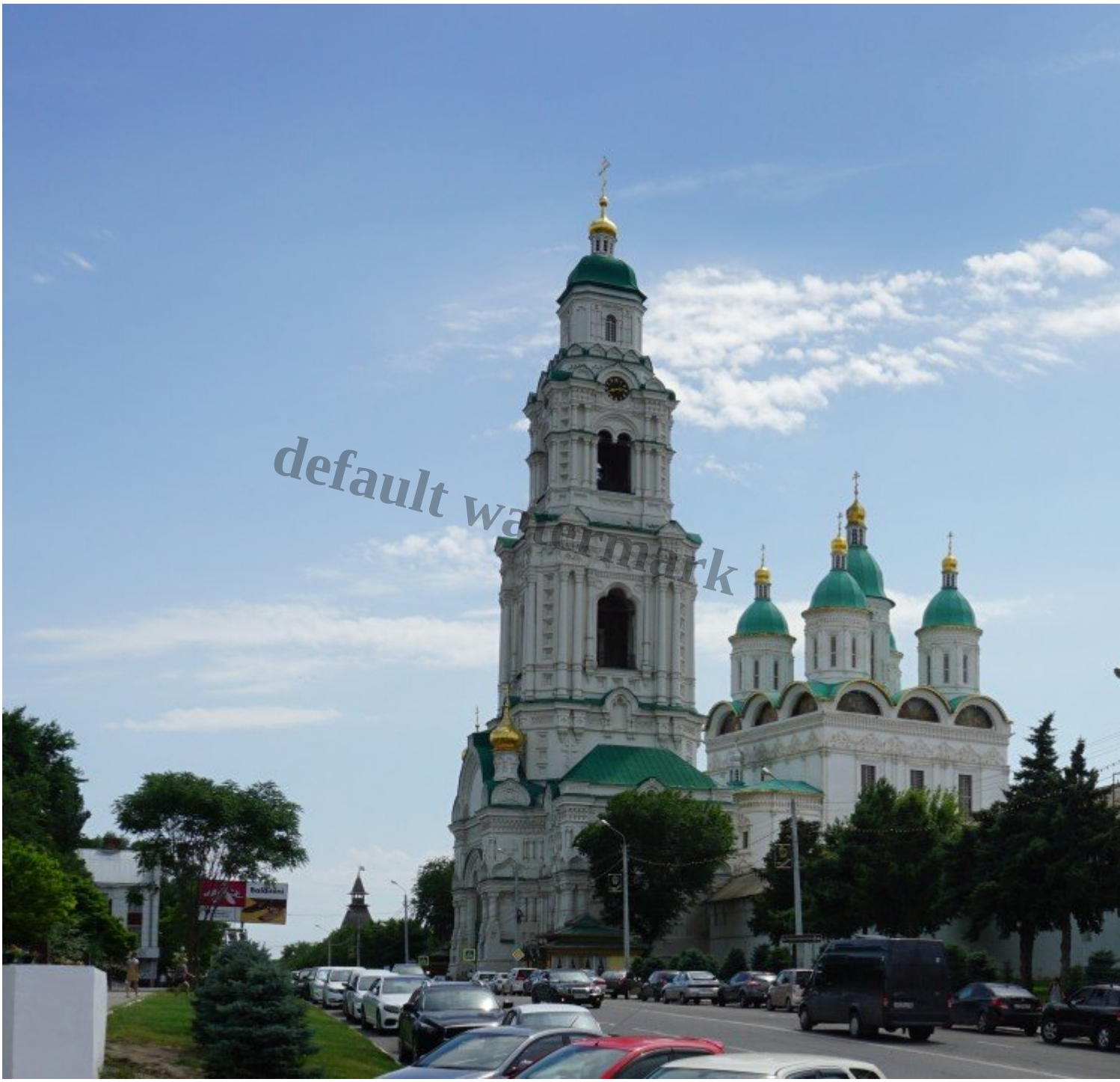
Astrakhan is a nice city with lots of green parks and the â??Astrakhan Kremlinâ?• which is very close to our hotel.



Our hotel.



Lots of green parks.



Astrakhan Kremlin.



Birthday party!

Astrakhan to Volgograd (420 km)

Weâ??re heading towards Moscow and the first leg was to Volgograd. Of course, Volgograd used to be Stalingrad where the most decisive battle of the 2nd world war took place with the Soviets beating the Nazis. It was the bloodiest battle in the history of warfare with close to 2 million casualties.

Coming into the city, it looked like a grimy industrial town, but as we got closer to the center it started to look nice. Weâ??re staying in the center within walking distance of the Volga river and we went there for dinner and have a look around. Thereâ??s a park along the river with lots of activities for kids and adults and there were a lot of people around.



By the Volga river.



Kids playing in the water park by the river.

Volgograd June 27, 2019

Mamayev Kurgan is a dominant height fiercely fought over in the battle of Stalingrad, now itâ??s a large memorial park that commemorates the battle. It is very impressive with the big statue â??The Motherland Callsâ?• being 85m high. It was installed in 1967 and was under renovation at our visit but the scale of it is still clear.

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The Motherland Calls.



The eternal flame with the walls showing names of soldiers that died during the battle.



Changing of the guards.



Murals depicting the street fighting nature of the battle of Stalingrad.

Volgograd to Tambov (520 km)

Weâ??re getting further north and the temperature kept a pleasant 20-25 C for the duration of todayâ??s ride. The road was good but many stretches of road construction slowed us down a bit. The vegetation is changing and there are a lot more birch trees and also pine trees which we have not seen before on the trip. The road goes straight for pretty much the whole stretch over very open land and to

stop the wind being too strong on the road birch trees are planted along the road to break up the wind. The road goes in the middle in a wide swath of close to 100m with the birch trees being the boundary to the enormous wheat fields and steppe to the sides.



Birch trees planted on both sides of the road to stop the crosswind.



Finally some fir trees. Looks almost like Sweden!

The total distance traveled so far is 13964 km and around 4000 km since leaving China.

Tambov to Ryazan (320 km)

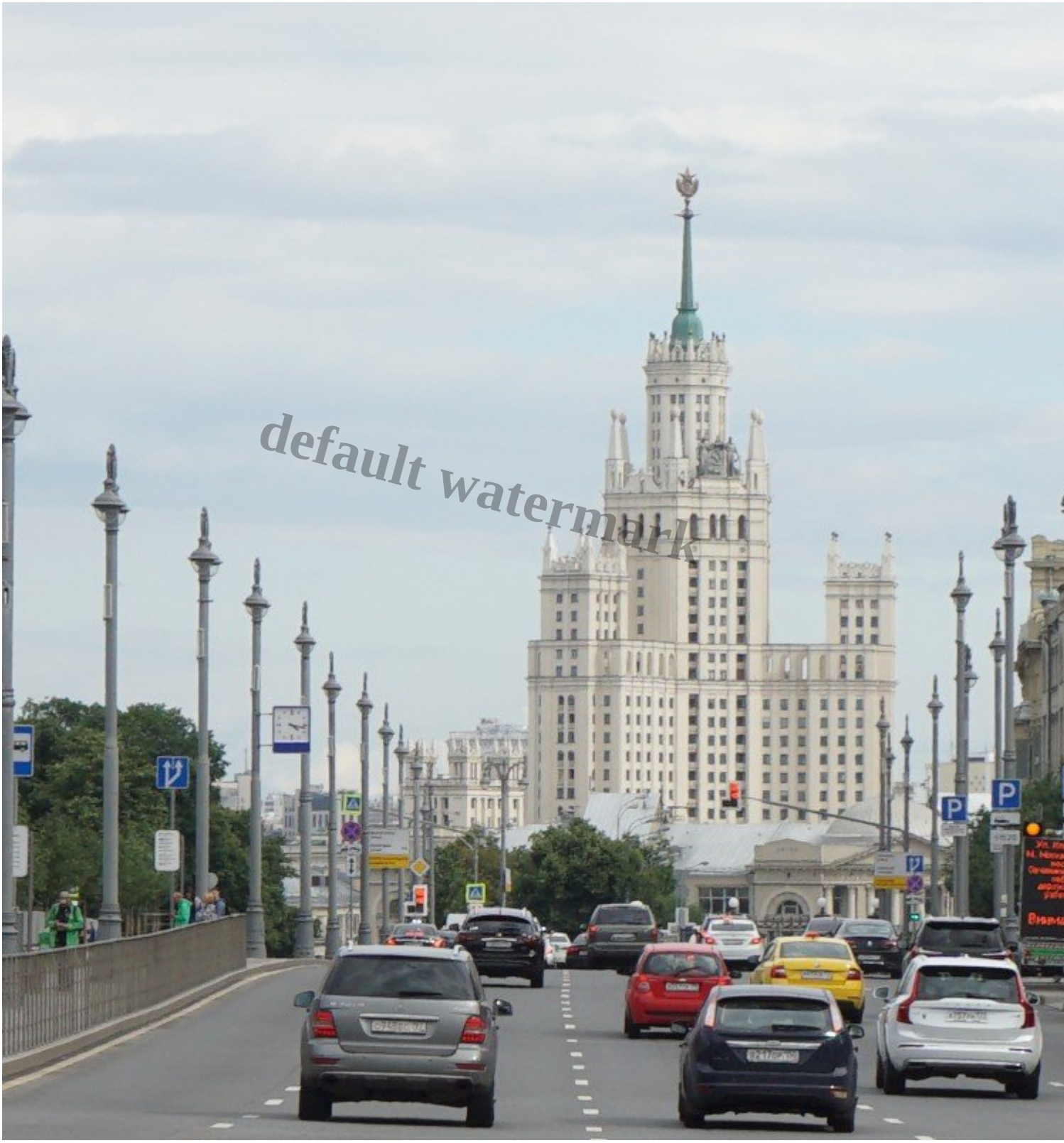
The weather turned cold and rainy when we set off. The plan was to go to Vladimir, 180 km east of Moscow, to attend a blues and bike festival but after 150 km in the miserable weather and worn road I decided to turn along M5 towards Moscow and stop in Ryazan while Mike carried on to Vladimir for the festival and to meet his friend. I figured the festival would not be much fun in the inclement weather and I saw for myself a muddy field with bikes falling over in the wet terrain which also might have meant the end for my clutch..

I thought M5 meant motorway 5 but as it turned out for most of the distance it was no motorway so I believe the M stands for Moscow. After 150 km along the M5 I turned off to Ryazan leaving around 200 km to Moscow. Itâ??s continued raining all day but I think tomorrow is going to be better.

Ryazan to Moscow (220 km)

It was a Sunday and the traffic was light, there were some holdups in a town 50 km from Moscow but nothing major. My hotel is in the center of town and I rode past some of the buildings Iâ??ve seen in the news. Later on I walked to the red square and admired itâ??s buildings and the sheer size of it. The centre of Moscow is very impressive!

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The Moscow white house.

Moscow Jul 1, 2019

I spent the day sightseeing and in the afternoon I joined a Subway tour since Iâ??ve read the subway stations are beautifully decorated.

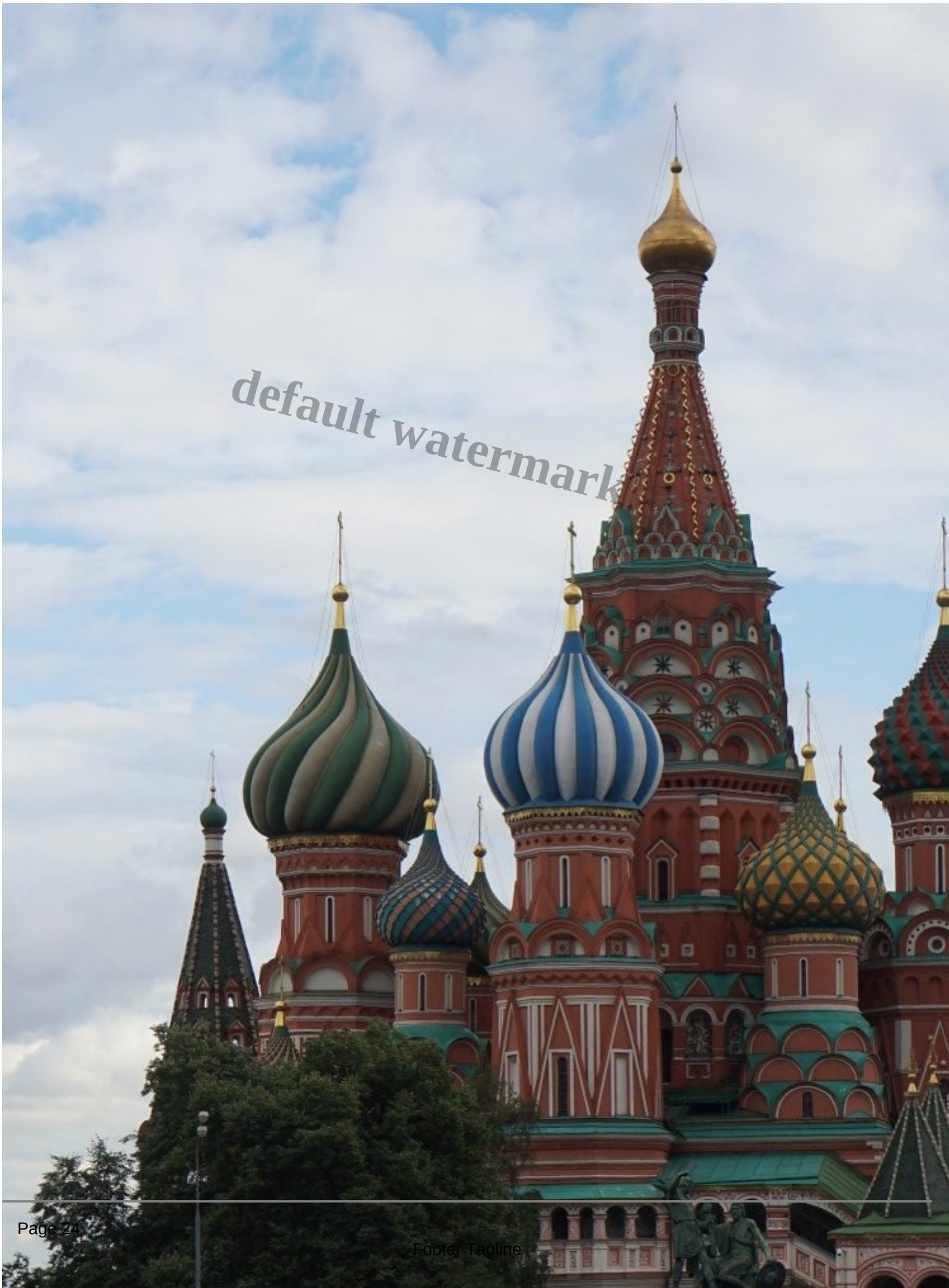
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Karl Marx monument on the Revolution square.

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The Kremlin.

Our subway tour guide, Alina, took us to several stations and explained the art in them and the history behind and since we were only three in the group we had the chance to ask a lot of questions. The subway system was started to be constructed during the 1930s while Stalin was in power. The reason, we were told, to make such beautiful and elaborate stations was to motivate and make people happy while going to work in the morning. Iâ??m not sure if it worked but it certainly made the Moscow subway a tourist attraction today!



Lenin. Alina told us there used to be a lot more pictures of Lenin previously but a lot of them had been taken down. Of course, Stalin, has been totally discredited and itâ??s difficult to find a single picture or statue of him.


МИР
по всей земле
МИР

The station where the motive was related to intellectuals.

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Station depicting people of all walks of life, including soldiers, students, parents and athletes.





Moscow to Velikiye Luki (460 km)

I wanted to get out of Moscow while the traffic was light so I started a bit after 6 and was soon on the M9 highway leading to Riga. In the beginning there were 5 lanes diminishing to a normal highway after around 120km. I had booked a hotel at the halfway point to Riga and reached there soon after midday.

The weather was sunny but cool and I was wearing the cold weather gear. The hotel turned out to be a motel with lots of big trucks parked and idling their engines making for a slightly noisy place to rest.

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First Motel of the trip. Characterless but very practical!

Velikiye Luki to Paldiski â?? ferry port close to Tallinn (640 km)

The weather was gray, windy and rainy for most of the time to the Russia/Estonia border crossing which I reached around noon. The Russian official took a long time to figure out how to clear my bike out of the country and in the end his boss, a stern looking woman in a green uniform, came out and gave him an earful and soon after I was cleared to go to the immigration counter. The woman there looked at my forms and asked me which city I lived in and I told her Singapore. She asked; where is that â?? in Spain. I explained it was in Asia and it was itâ??s own country and after a while she said OK, you can go.



Miserable weather on road towards Tallinn!

So finally, in to Europe and Estonia where the immigration and custom formalities took all of 10 mins! Amazing! After all the long border crossings in Asia it was nice to come to a place where they really knew what they were doing and being very efficient at it. The weather also cleared up and gave me a good welcome to Europe and the 300 km to the ferry port went by pretty quickly.

I had to wait a few hours before I could board and found a nice restaurant nearby after I checked in to the ferry. Paldiski is right by the baltic sea and was very windy and I was afraid the bike would blow over so had to be careful how I parked it.



While waiting for the ferry I saw this home built vehicle based on a Ford V8. The couple riding it had been brave to take it to Russia.

The ferry arrived around 8.30 pm and they started to unload it. There were very few passenger cars but hundreds of huge trucks and I was impressed to see them reversing these juggernauts from the ferry. The ferry was emptied in about an hour and I was waved forward to board.



Bike tied down on the ferry to Sweden.

Kappelskar to Eksjo (400 km)

The ferry arrived early morning at Kappellskar, the port in Sweden which is about 100 km north-east of Stockholm. Riding the bike off the ferry posed no problem and I was soon on my way south. I stopped after a while to get some breakfast and had the classic Swedish Sibylla grilled sausages with mashed potatoes.


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Swedish fighter jets displayed along the road in Linkoping. The one on the right is the â??Drakenâ?• and c



Gota kanal

It was another windy day with some rain as I was getting closer to Eksjo but I arrived without problem at my sisters early afternoon.

Eksjo Jul 5 â?? 8, 2019

Spent several days in the lovely town of Eksjo. They were clever in the 60â??s and 70â??s not to demolish the old wooden houses in the center of the town and itâ??s now a tourist attraction. On the Saturday a marching band was playing in front of the church with a lot of people attending.


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NBV
Välkommen!
ÖPPET

Well kept wooden houses in the center of the town which has kept itâ??s layout for centuries.



A stream runs through the town.



Every Saturday the marching band plays in front of the church and while marching through the town.



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Eksjo to Goteborg (200 km)

I left my sisters place around noon to catch the ferry from Goteborg to Kiel leaving at 6.45 pm. Gray skies to begin with that gradually lightened up as I got closer to Goteborg. The road was great as it was snaking itâ??s way through the hills but not enough turns to make it interesting on a motorcycle. No jams until I reached Goteborg where I was stuck in traffic for a bit before getting to the ferry terminal where I was able to board the ferry pretty much immediately. There were around 20 bikes on the boat and I chatted with some of the riders. One couple had spent 6 weeks riding through Finland to North cape and back and the guy said he started on a Harley but was now standing by a very new RT 1250 and I asked him how the Harley could have transformed into the very new BMW. He said the Harley developed problems with the bearings and there was none available and somehow his insurance got him a BMW to continue his trip. Sounds like a great insurance! I had a cabin and after dinner I went straight to bed.



On board Stena Germanica, quite a few bikes on the ferry from Gothenburg to Kiel.

Kiel to Hook of Holland (600 km)

The ferry was a bit late so I wasnâ??t able to get off it until around 10 am after a good night sleep in the nice cabin. It seems I sleep well on ferriesâ?¦ There had been some discussion while with the group in China that a carnet de passage was required for non-European vehicles entering Germany so I was relieved that there were no checks whatsoever when driving off the ferry and into the town of Kiel. The road layout in the town was good for transiting the town and I was soon on the motorway to Hamburg. There were a lot of roadworks around Hamburg but the traffic was still flowing well with no queues. The autobahn in Germany is fantastic and with no speed limit! I was doing around 125 kph and was being overtaken making me feel like I was standing still!



For short stretches the speed was reduced to 120 km/h!

The weather was very good and I was by the Dutch boarder after 350 km around 2 pm and then it started raining which it carried on doing all the way to the ferry. There was a lot of traffic in Holland and several jams but I made it to the ferry and, again, boarded very quickly. I had a nice shower to warm up and had a good fish and chips dinner. The ferry would take me to Harwich and the start of the last day of my adventure.

Harwich to Feltham close to Heathrow airport(200 km)

The main reason for going to London was so that I could ship the bike back to Singapore. I was not able to find a shipper in Sweden and a couple of international shippers first said they could ship from Sweden but later said no. I also had a quote to ship from Rotterdam but that was close to twice the cost of shipping from London so to London I went, although it meant spending an extra day and ferry to get there. Anyway, the ferry arrived in Harwich on time and I started the ride to Feltham knowing I had to go on the London circular road, the M25, and as expected there were several accidents which meant the trip took a lot longer than it should have. However, I made it to Feltham and motofreight where I was warmly welcomed. It took me an hour to repack and get the bike ready for shipment and then I walked to a nearby pub for lunch.

So now fly to Stockholm for three weeks of vacation before going back to the trip origin in Singapore.

Packing


FBL
7244E

People asked me how I packed and what I brought along for the trip. The picture shows the bike with the two aluminium side bags (on a bike theyâ??re called panniers). Above it is the yellow waterproof bag and on the tank the tank-bag. I packed so that I kept everything I need at the end of the day when not on the bike in the yellow bag such as change of clothes, toiletries etc. I kept my camera and snacks and drinks in the tank-bag so I could quickly access these needed while riding. In the panniers I kept spare parts (bearings, levers, break pads, fork-seals, light-bulbs, fuses), tools, electric air-pump, clothes I didnâ??t think I would need for a few days, tent, sleeping bag and air-mattress, and rain clothes. Also some medication like antibiotics, altitude medication, stomach upset tablets, band aid patches and some other stuff.

I know now that I should have carried an inner tube and tools for getting the tire off the rim. I was very lucky I was riding with Mike who had these. I should also have brought spare clutch plates (or changed them before leaving).

Summary and thanks

I did 18500 km in 10 weeks and had an amazing experience! It was hard work and worrying at times such as when I bent the rim so badly it did not hold air and for a while I was at a loss of what to do to carry on. The ride through China was far too compressed and Iâ??m at a loss to remember many of the days there while I remember the more relaxed days after China a lot better.

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My bike, the Triumph 800 Xrx performed exceptionally well and started every time I pressed the start button. It was among the most fuel efficient of all the bikes in the group through China, while still having great power to go uphill on the serpentine roads. The bike was great for 95% of the distance but for the other 5% it would have been better to have a bike with lower gearing, spoked bigger wheels with inner tubes, and longer suspension travel. The Honda Africa Twin was used by several guys on the trip and that bike is more suitable for the worst road conditions and much more suitable for off-road use. However, I should not complain â?? the Tiger got me from Singapore to London!

I thank you for having had the tenacity to follow along on my trip and hope you enjoyed my photos and ramblings.

Of course, special thanks goes to my lovely wife who gave me her blessings to go on the trip and supported me morally all along!

Category

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