

Frankfurt: 12/11/2004

I arrived in Frankfurt very tired today. I sat next to a doctor from Perth all the way from Singapore to Frankfurt. By the time he got to Frankfurt he was pretty much full bottle on Buteyko. I even managed to expose him to parts of my Buteyko Power Point presentation on the laptop. The doctor was very tired when he got to Frankfurt.

I popped over to the Sheraton at the airport, hoping to rent a room for the five hours before my Moscow flight left, but at EU135 for the 5 hours I decided to take a look at Frankfurt instead. When I left the train station I buttoned up my coat as I was walking along the cold, grey streets, and when I next looked up I was in Erotica Land.... Surrounded by the stuff, one street after another. I decided to take a holiday here some time, although I decided I didn't really like the city much. There is no way to sit and have a coffee and cake anywhere in the city. Frankfurters do it standing up, at stand up tables everywhere. When I caught a glimpse of a place with benches, I immediately ordered the local cake and a cappucino. But I couldn't sit on the benches because they weren't real benches, I couldn't drink the coffee because the girl didn't know how to make it weak and the cake was a bit dry on its own. Fortunately they have a McDonald's with lots of comfortable chairs to sit on!

I had a lot of trouble finding my way around Frankfurt airport and the train station, even though I speak and read the language. I shudder to think what's going to happen in Moscow.

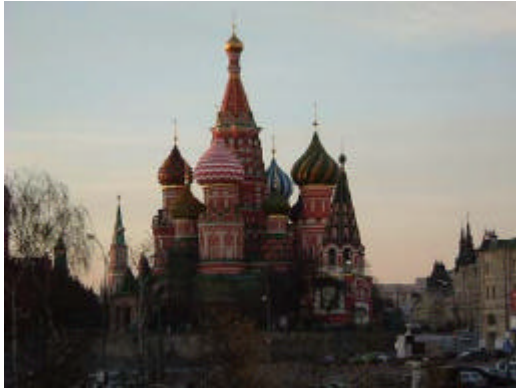
I'm now sitting in the plane with one hour to go before we land in Moscow. I've just been fed, so with a belly full of cookie, BigMac and a lovely plane meal, it will be a while till I have to indulge in cabbage soup. From all reports dieting should be easy in Russia.

Moscow: Sunday 14/11/2004

I sat next to a young lady on the plane to Moscow. She has mixed Russian/English parents and was on her way to a Wedding in Moscow. She's been living in France for a long time but is presently studying law in Oxford. Being fluent in Russian, she helped me at the airport negotiate a deal with one of the millions of newly entrepreneurial taxi drivers. In Moscow anybody with a car can be a Taxi driver. There are official taxis, but I haven't seen any yet. The unofficial taxi drivers try to endear themselves to foreigners by wearing home-made, very crude badges around their neck featuring a photograph and the words "official taxi driver" and some made up number.

The hotel Rossiya is big. It is very big. It is breathtakingly big. It is a single structure occupying probably two office blocks. It is rectangular with a massive internal courtyard. The hotel is central. It is very central. On one side it is lined by the promenade and the other side abuts red-square with the magnificent





St. Basil's cathedral and the Kremlin in the background. The colours in full daylight are just stunning. These two pictures were taken in the late evening.

The outside of the hotel could do with a bit of attention but the inside is quite sumptuous for this price bracket. It has been internally totally refurbished to modern standards with a tasteful mixture of modern and traditional, very aesthetically pleasing. All plumbing and wiring is hidden, as it is even in the Metro. The carpets in the mile long corridors are seamless, wall to wall with the print made to fit exactly up to the walls. There are little dining areas with bars on just about every corner of every floor, all tastefully decorated and quite plush. Everything is clean, neat and functional. The rooms are clean, modern and the plumbing better than any I've seen anywhere other than Singapore where both urinals and taps are automatic - they switch on when you come near to them. The hot water is very hot, very plentiful and it is hot as soon as you turn it on, a remarkable achievement considering the massiveness of the place. The hotel has fully ducted vacuum cleaning, which makes it very quiet at all times, even during cleaning.

There are masses of staff and attendants everywhere. There is security at every lift and the front desk is over-populated with young girls in colourful uniforms. The Russians have a quiet elegance and aloofness about them, which to us makes them look very unfriendly.

When I arrived I proudly addressed the young lady in fluent Russian: "My name is Peter Kolb, I'm from Australia and I've reserved a single room with shower." I had certainly prepared this part well thanks to all the words I found in my valuable phrase book. But what the phrase book had not prepared me for was how to conduct a conversation in two directions. This young lady came back at me with a barrage of words which she carefully chose to be excluded from my phrase book. I was stuck. But never fear, she was fluent in English, notwithstanding her tender years. She sent me up to the 9th floor, turn right, turn right again and there would be the floor attendant who would help me. I waited for a long time for the attendant, and then back to the desk. She drew me a map, but it didn't help. So with my baggage I decided to start walking around the corridor until I could find someone. I walked about a kilometer east, then another kilometer south, (it is a big hotel), and then half a kilometer west when I found the lady sitting at a desk with a computer. She took away my passport receipt and exchanged it for the key.

I decided to use the lift near the attendant when I left my room and found that I came back directly into the lobby. It seemed it had changed a little since I was last there. For one, the taxi counter had moved, but the ATM was still there, and the marble stairway with gilded balustrades still led up both sides to the café-bars on the mezzanine floor. It took a long time for me to discover that there were actually three massive main entrances to the building, all sumptuous and big and all looking pretty similar to each other. You could only get from one to the other via the corridors on the 2nd floor.

Breakfast in the sumptuous dining room was another eye-opener. A huge array of non-controversial food was available, including a range of salads, fried cubed potatoes and just about anything to cater for any taste. I didn't see any of the cabbage soup or ox-tongue boiled in milk. The meal was so good and so fulfilling I forgot to eat lunch and dinner yesterday.

After breakfast I decided to surprise Andrey at his Buteyko clinic. The metro is quite easy to use, very well signposted, very clean, very well maintained, fully heated and air-conditioned – no smells of stale smoke etc...I was trying to decide from my map which exit to use, when a young lady approached and offered help. We had a huge problem communicating, and it seems I made a mistake with the address. Apparently there are many Vladimirskaaya streets around, and it all depends on the sector. She spent a good long time trying to explain it to me and then offered to drive me there, which I politely declined. It was my mess and I needed to clean it up.

I phoned Andrey from the station to try and clarify whether I was on the right track, but for once he wasn't at home or in his clinic. The Lady answering the phone gave me 12 digits of his 7 digit telephone number, and I was struggling a bit to make sense of this. I turned around to go back home, when a delightful young lady carrying a pile of books stepped out of a dream, smiling charmingly and offered to help.

Olga is 24, divorced, drop dead gorgeous with long blonde hair, has one three year old son and works as a publisher. We spent about three hours in a coffee shop where we managed to communicate only through the frantic use of my electronic dictionary. It was frustrating and very tiring. Most of the Russian I learnt disappeared into a far distant haze, the Russian words becoming increasingly confused in my mind. Maybe it was just jet lag, or the smoke from her cigarettes (her only vice as far as I know), but I clearly need to go over my phrase book again. She called the clinic for me and got the right number for me to call Andrey. I promised to call him that evening.



Olga promised to show me Moscow the next day. She had to go back to work and on my way home a lovely young lady from (??????-stan) asked me for the way to the Rossija Hotel. She was taking her dad to a concert there to see one of Russia's favourite singers. Fortunately she spoke beautiful English. She's very elegant and charming and was studying economics at the academy in Moscow. I was able to show her the way and she told me about the famous singer.

After we parted at the entrance to the hotel, two ladies approached me and offered to sell me a ticket to the concert. At first I declined, but for \$20 dollars it would be really stupid to pass up an opportunity to see one of Russia's favourite singers. Fortunately I know enough Russian to get help as in deciphering the starting time for the show, which was hand-written on the ticket.

It turns out that the fourth entrance to the Hotel was actually a massive concert hall. I counted at least 10 huge Video cameras, two on long booms swaying around over the heads of the people in the front half of the auditorium.

The show itself was quite spectacular. That's something the Russian's do particularly well. It was very vibrant, full of energy, obviously masses of good humour from the crowd response. I also saw techniques used I never saw before. She changed costumes on-stage, standing behind a screen with only her head showing over a picture of some lovely young bikini-clad body, all the while cracking jokes. Then they put another costume over her. When she put up her arms she looked like an angel, and then they showed a movie of what was going through her mind as she was singing, her dress being used as a screen. Maybe they do that sort of stuff in the west too, I've just never seen it before. At the end of the show there were long queues of people lining up to bring her huge bouquets of flowers. I'm glad I paid the \$20, which was only twice the price I paid for a small glass of fresh orange juice at the hotel. Never again will I go to any of the restaurants or night clubs at the hotel.

But two things really shook me. One was the sight of desperate very old ladies standing at the entrance to the metro, clutching a rusty cup, asking for money. These are not young deros who are just too lazy to work. These people are just victims of the Russian political and social evolution.

The other thing that disturbed me greatly too, were what looked like glass cupboards along the edge of the entrance to the metro. These were tiny, micro-shops and operated by people who spend the day sitting on a chair, unable to move. They certainly would not be able to lie down in there. Even the chickens in batteries are better off, and Fremantle jail would be a luxury that they would only dream about. No human or animal should have to live like that. The privations these people suffer are often reflected in the faces of the elderly.

I do have to mention something about the Metro. Apart from the excellent signposts, the Metro is also aesthetically pleasing. Floors and walls are clad in marble, and they use expensive incandescent rather than fluoro lighting. Many of the stations also have statues, marble archways chandeliers etc to make the travel experience really pleasant. It is also fully heated and air-conditioned. The trains arrive every minute, and run furiously into the stations, frightening the hell out of anybody not used to the pace of the metro. It functions very well with very old trains, but everything is quick and efficient.

It's now six in the morning, and I'm looking forward to breakfast and my meeting with Olga, who is going to show me the city. I asked her to bring her son. I bought him a flashy American fighter plane with flashing lights in one of the Metro shops.

Sunday Evening: 14/11/2004

I nearly missed Olga this morning. I went out looking for her at the various hotel entrances. But wherever I looked I saw beautiful 24 year old women with 3year old



children that looked just like Olga. It was a complete coincidence that we actually met up again.

We stopped over for another coffee and cake. Her little boy loved the plane. It was cold and windy, but we went to see Lenin in his Mausoleum. In the process I nearly got arrested when we used the electronic dictionary while in a queue. A soldier came up and asked what we were doing. I was also told to take my cold hand out of my pocket as this was disrespectful to Lenin. What really struck me

was how young Lenin looked when he died.

We took the train to Visit Olga's mother. The conditions in which they live really are extremely primitive. It was worse than I had imagined. The flats were incredibly small, old and the entrances decrepit, although the people are clean and try to keep them clean. I was told to wash my hands before I was served a piece of the cake I brought. It is hard to imagine how you can raise a functional family in this environment. Olga turns 25 on the 28th. However, because I am leaving for St.Petersburg on the 28th, I invited Olga for dinner on the 27th to celebrate her birthday.

Today I discovered that I had no problem talking to people in Russian. My problem was understanding what they were saying.

One more interesting observation about the train. There is a never ending stream of entrepreneurial individuals wanting to sell stuff on the train. They stand at one end of the carriage and give a sales talk to all who want to listen, selling things like torches, carry bags and demonstrating how they work. Then there are also buskers on the trains. They're all trying to make a living.

17 November 2004

It's certainly turned very cold very quickly. So I decided to go to the Buteyko clinic yesterday in my colourful ski-jacket rather than my leather jacket, the latter helping me blend in better with the crowd. My jacket drew a comment from one of the locals in the foyer of the hotel: "Amerikanski". The people here take great pride in their appearance and are incredibly well and tastefully dressed. If I was to live here I would have to buy some decent Russian clothing so as not to stand out.

When I popped into the local metro station Kitai Gorad, I had no idea that I would emerge from Perovo to a magical wonderland. Moscow has very wide roads in the suburbs, and masses of trees everywhere. These are bare now that winter has set in. In Perovo I saw the first snow of the season fall on Moscow. It was quite magic. It's about a 15 minute walk to the Buteyko clinic, and I had a lump in my throat all the way.

I had actually been on the right track when I first tried to find the clinic. The very helpful lady who tried to help me the other day, really confused me. I needed a little help to make sure I was on the right road, seeing it had no name on it, and I had some trouble working out their street numbering system, but I found it without too much trouble in the end.

The Buteyko clinic is on the ground floor corner of one of the buildings overlooking a park, with access from the outside. The doctor's plaque is prominently displayed at the door. (Picture next week.) The inside is very tasteful, neat, clean and again has the modern blending with the traditional. I am again struck by how a nation with such wonderful taste has to have so many of its citizens live in such primitive homes.

There were a lot of framed historical photographs on the walls, probably a little over half being ones I took at the Buteyko conference in New Zealand. Some of Victor's cartoon drawings, including the cover of my orange Buteyko booklet, was also blown up and framed.

The clinic had an interesting drinking fountain. It has both cold and hot water from adjacent taps.

Although I can communicate reasonably well with Andrey, they provided an interpreter. She makes a living out of translations. Her English is not that good, but we communicated quite easily in German. I've been there twice now, have met two of the other doctors who work at the clinic and will meet the fourth one this evening when Ludmila holds a further education seminar for them. I was also able to sit in on a few patient interviews and some of the actual therapy sessions. I had either Andrey or the interpreter there to help explain the proceedings.



On the way home I passed by a supermarket. I have to say, the Russians have access to everything, including liter bottles of Coca Cola. They have a huge range of cold meats from all over Europe, and a huge diverse range of just about everything,

including fresh and exotic fruit. I even saw Kiwi fruit. I bought some cheap Russian wine to help me enjoy my evening bath more. I think I could be a happy drunk here!



A little more about the Russian people. I found they don't have the same attitude to environment we do. Everybody throws their cigarettes on the street. The men also have a nasty habit of spitting on the street. For this reason, the street sweeping trucks don't just sweep the streets, they wash them. They have huge water tanks at the back and squirt water over the roads as they hurtle down the lanes with giant brushes scrubbing the roads. They double as snow-ploughs in winter, by applying the plough to a special attachment on the front end. Again as with everything in Moscow, the pace at which things happen is sometimes quite overwhelming. You'd better get out of the way when you hear one of those trucks coming.

While a lot of the gear is very old, probably some of it pre-war, it all works well. That's probably a testament to the durability of their goods. The trains have had many coats of paint over the years and have actually been well maintained. The wooden escalators in the Metro are huge and very fast. The automatic gates into which you have to shove you're Jeton to gain access to the metro, open and close in a flash. You just wouldn't want to get your legs caught when it decides to close.

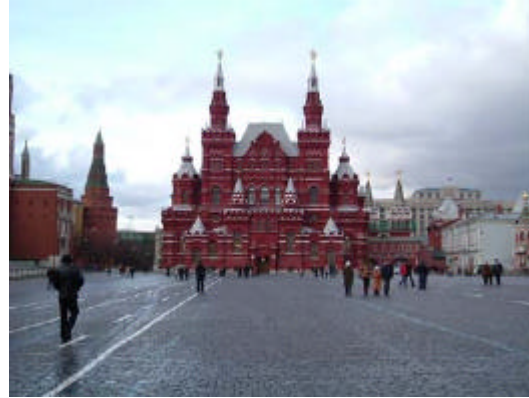
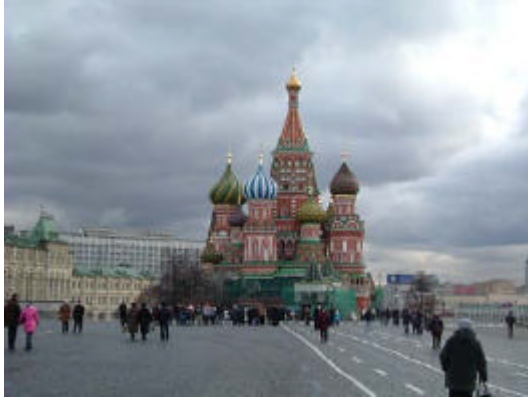
While the poverty that is there on the streets sticks out at you, it really represents a tiny fraction of the visible population, and is probably no worse than in New York. It seems to affect mainly the elderly. The young people are very smart and seem to be coping with the new order very well.

18 November 2004

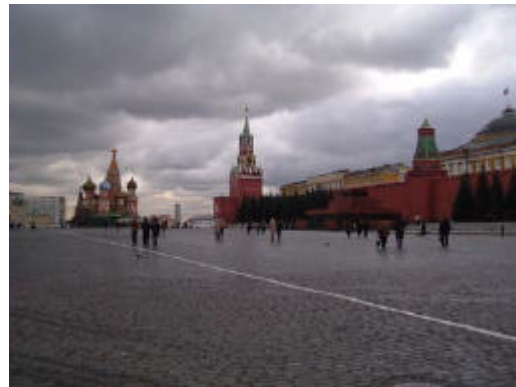
Andrey didn't know what to do with me today, so he gave me a holiday. The huge red building at the end of red square, after which red-square is named, is the national historical museum. On the other end is the famous St. Basil's Cathedral. Yesterday I was inside the cathedral and today I visited the historical museum.

The Museum was purpose built as a museum some 200 years ago, from what I've been able to gather, and it is well worth a visit. I took the audiocassette tour in English. There is no doubt they take a great pride and interest in history from ancient times till now. They are also continually restoring and maintaining historical sites.

While I was at St. Basils Cathedral, there was a major restoration in progress. All over the city you can find old cathedrals and other buildings that are undergoing restoration.



The third side of Red Square runs alongside the Kremlin, with Lenin's (ЛЕНИН) mausoleum in the middle. Next to the Mausoleum is a row of crypts and marble busts of the great leaders of the past.



I've been looking everywhere to try to find a compass. "Kompass?", the girls ask me with a questioning look. "Yes," I say in my best Russian, "when it is cloudy I don't know where is north." There is usually a lot of smiling and laughing and they ask their friends where I could get a compass, then they give me a long explanation in Russian which I never understand but I say "thank you" anyway. But today I hit the jackpot. I was buying some souvenirs for my children, when I asked the girl if she might also have a compass. She pulled out a lovely military style compass complete with communist emblem, which I bought and will treasure forever. I was immediately going to use it to find my way back to the internet café, but then realized that I left my map at home. I also looked at her furry hats. But they were real rabbit skin and I have a psychological aversion to wearing a bunny on my head. However, while going back home, very tired from the long walk through the Museum, an old man on Red Square flogging military hats, persuaded me he had just the thing I need. 50% synthetic, 50% wool, he told me. I don't think there is any wool in it but I bought it anyway. I'll give it a real good



wash before I actually use it. I might also ditch the communist emblem while hanging around Moscow.

Olga phoned me yesterday and we made a date for dinner for this evening, a remarkable feat seeing she can't really speak any English and we didn't have the luxury of the electronic dictionary for use on the phone. She came after work, travelling for an hour. It had been snowing. She was ice cold and covered in snow. I sent her home by taxi after dinner, because the Moscow streets are quite dangerous and all the businesses have private security. The girl who sold me the souvenirs, warned me of a trick they use to steal money from visitors. Two blokes work together. One drops some money in front of you. You pick it up, run after him and give it back to him. He tells you there was more money and what did you do with the rest of it? Then his mate comes along and together they clean you out.
