

Adventures in the Russian Arctic City of Murmansk



I posted this article on my old website on kt70.com/~jamesjpn 20 years ago. It was hosted by my friend Kengo Tahaha for free. A few years ago he told me he would stop paying for the server. Only today, Dec. 9, 2020, I realized I hadn't copied it to this website.

"Murmansk (Russian: Мурманск, is a port city and the administrative center of Murmansk Oblast in the far northwest part of Russia. It sits on both slopes and banks of a modest ria or fjord, Kola Bay, an estuarine inlet of the Barents Sea. Its bulk is on the east bank of the inlet. It is in the north of the rounded Kola Peninsula which covers most of the oblast. The city is 108 kilometers (67 mi) from the border with Norway and 182 kilometers (113 mi) from the Finnish border. The city is named for the Murman Coast, which is in turn derived from an archaic term in Russian for "Norwegian". " – Quoted from Wikipedia

I visited the Russian city of Murmansk by train from St. Petersburg a total of ten times from 1995 to 1997. Murmansk is the largest city in the world that is north of the Arctic Circle. Though north of the Arctic Circle, the winters are relatively mild due to a warm ocean current that crosses the Atlantic from the Gulf of Mexico. There are nearly 24 hours of darkness from Dec. 2 to January 20 and 24 hours of daylight in June and July.



Murmansk (red circle drawn around it) is located on the Kolsky peninsula near the Arctic Ocean. You can see St. Petersburg is located about 1000 Kilometers to the south. Winters are long and summers very short with only about 14 really nice warm days. Anybody with any money at all goes down south for their summer vacations, often to the Black Sea.



Here you can see the relationship of the Kolsky peninsula with the rest of the world.



Murmansk in the summertime! The body of water in front is the Kolsky bay.
Lenin Street, Murmansk.



This is the main street of the town that runs past the train station. There's a large statue of Lenin still standing in a small park on this street.



What Murmansk usually looks like! Cold, drab, and dreary.



The poor lady in the photo has to stand outdoors all day to sell a bit of fish and beans to make a living! Let's think about her the next time we are tempted to complain how "bad off" we are!



March of 1996, Murmansk. I'm standing next to a park buried in snow.



Yana and Ruth. Ruth is a native of Murmansk who decided to become a follower of Jesus after receiving the Gospel from my fellow missionaries in Russia.



See, it's not cold all the time! A nice warm June day in Murmansk. July turns cold again with rainy weather with highs only 13 C or in the lower 50s F.



A man collecting beer bottles to resell to make a living. Unless the bottle is broken, it won't be lying on the ground for long in Russia. Some people even intentionally leave their bottles on the street for the poor to pick them up.



With Ukrainian Faithy just before boarding a train to go to Murmansk. It's a 36-hour train trip one way from St. Petersburg. I've been back and forth exactly 10 times which means I lived 25 days on that train!



The lady in the middle and her friend on the right was so glad to meet Faithy and me! She lost her business due to pressure from the Mafia.



With Inna Hairdresser and her friend Anna.



Ukrainian Lydia with children at an orphanage we visited.



Natasha from Monchigorsk with a Sami girl. The "Sami" people are the same as the Lapp people of northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden. They are reindeer herders. Once I saw a race with reindeers pulling sleighs around a track during a winter festival in Murmansk. It was fun but also very cold that day so I couldn't stay outside for more than 30 minutes without freezing.



Snezhana with Sergei. Sergei served as an Army Officer in the Soviet Army for 20 years. He says he doesn't believe in God. He does seem to believe in alcohol to help him overcome his problems. Poor guy! I really tried to help him. But no, he "knows too much" to believe in God, ha! However, he did laugh at my jokes.



Another proof that Russia and even the Russian Arctic is NOT cold all year round! Over 400,000 people live in Murmansk and the surrounding area.



During a festival in the central town square where we often distributed Gospel tracts. Once when a policeman asked what I was passing out, I told him it is religious literature and how glad I am I have the freedom now to preach the Gospel in his country! He agreed and said, "Ten years ago, I would have thrown you into prison!"



Again with Inna Hairdresser and her friend Anna.



Anna in the center with her friend the librarian on the right. This is at the entrance of a college dormitory. All the dorms in Russia seem to be co-ed. We visited this particular dorm frequently to share with the students the Message of God's Love and the Gospel and made many friends. Anna is Jewish. There wasn't a single time during the 3 and a half years I spent in Russia that a Russian Jew objected to me sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them! They were all sweet people.



The Murmansk team of the summer of 1996! Left to right: Yanek, me, Swedish Teen, Andrew, and Angela.



At a top high school in Murmansk. This school is right on Lenin St. in the heart of town. The head of the English department invited me to speak in English to the students on a regular basis. She gave me the freedom to speak on any subject I chose, so of course, I chose Biblical subjects! There was no pay for this but they did give us lunch. There was never a time in the schools in Murmansk that I was forbidden to read from the Bible! – Something I can't even do in my own country (the US of A)!!! Actually, it is technically a no-no in Russia too, but Murmansk is so far away from Moscow

and nobody really cares what the central government says anymore. At least they didn't care when I was there from 1994 to 1997.



With Snezhana (her name means *snow flake* in Russian) and Natasha from Monchegorsk. The name of her city means "beautiful city". The name *Monchegorsk* is a combination of two words, the first from the Sami language and the second from Russian. I've never been there, but I can bet that the only thing beautiful there is the beautiful people who inhabit it, not the ugly drab Soviet-style architecture!



Three people trying to pull a refrigerator up a slope!



With a school principal of one of the schools in Murmansk. She wanted to take me on summer vacation to her home country of Belarus.



Belarussian Yanek with Natasha and friends.