

Developing Tourism

Karen Hasara—with Bruce Wicks and Katya Lakshanova

Three central Illinoisans with no previous ties to the American Home and little knowledge of the true status of tourism in Vladimir, spent a week in Russia at the same time the team examining recreation programs was there. We each brought a particular strength to the project: Katya was invaluable with her obvious knowledge of the language (she is originally from Moscow), and also with her understanding of the culture; Bruce had the book knowledge and tremendous credentials not only as a professor, but also as a consultant on many projects both in the U.S. and internationally; Karen had been responsible for a convention and visitor's bureau in Springfield, Illinois and had first hand experience in all facets of its responsibilities and how citizens reacted to various projects.

We were there because government leaders in Vladimir saw a need for assistance in building tourism for present and future economic growth and in competing in the tourism market that is beginning to blossom in Russia. That foresight was a motivator for us in our work.

We spent five very busy days examining every facet of the potential for success in developing tourism in Vladimir. We were, of course, tourists ourselves, which enhanced our efforts even more. We visited the wonderful museums in the area, and other tourist attractions such as churches, recreation areas, and historical sites. We interviewed many people, including hotel and restaurant owners and managers, city and oblast officials, tour company owners, and guides and site managers. Pertinent data were examined and discussions were held at the local Tourism Academy. We also visited nearby towns, looking for opportunities to work together for the benefit of Vladimir and the surrounding area.

After gathering all the information we could, we made an oral presentation to city and oblast officials while we were still in Vladimir, outlining the area's strengths and weaknesses, and making a few preliminary recommendations. Upon our return, we completed a detailed report with a number of suggestions and comments, and we look forward to continuing to assist in their implementation as we are able and needed. Our chief recommendations are the creation of a tourism bureau for the region whose goals would be similar to those of our own bureaus, and the design and implementation of a new English language web site for Vladimir. We continue to assist in locating funding for these projects, and Katya (with help from Ron and others) is working hard on the web site. (Go to: www.vladimir-russia.net. Feedback will be very much appreciated. Write to Katya at: lakshntv@uiuc.edu. Please keep in mind that the site is in the early stages of construction.)

A Side Note on the American Home: We were new to the concept of the American Home. Its reputation and accomplishments were amazing to us. We know that if our recommendations become reality, it will be due not only to the desire of the city officials to make changes, but to the hard work of the American Home staff and the AH's fine reputation and what it means to the people of Vladimir. That relationship has to be one of

the most successful that any American organization has developed in Russia, and we marvel at the commitment of the people who have worked so hard and remain committed to its success.

We thank the wonderful citizens of Vladimir for their hospitality, and Ron Pope for allowing us to participate in this exciting venture. We believe it is safe to say that we feel that the time and effort we have invested in this project have been rewarded and will be even more so as we watch—and continue to assist with making—the recommendations become reality.