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The first thing I noticed when I arrived yesterday morning was..... SP has some things in English...wow! Hahaha, after Moscow that was a surprise (especially in the [metro](#) with station stops, directions, etc). Now, I am not complaining about Moscow because I don't expect a foreign city to have things in my language simply for me! But it did make it easier, "no guesswork and hope I got it right", when I arrived here. Even having Russian words in the Roman as well as Cyrillic alphabet simplified things for me. Same with info at tourist sites and restaurants-----many have their menus posted and in multiple languages. It is nice to view a menu before you go in. (actually we need to do this more in the USA as well). People have been friendly. A man saw me consulting my map, as I was dragging my suitcase, making my way to the hotel from the metro station. He stopped and asked in his best English if he could maybe help me. Very sweet.

My hotel [3 MostA](#) is just behind the [Church on Spilled Blood](#) so, when walking up the Kanala Griboedova street from [Nevsky Prospekt](#)

to get there, what a sight! The church was gorgeous! I love the canals! Once settled into my room, I could see part of the top domes of the church from my room window. :)

As I went out for my first (of many) exploratory walks, it started to rain. So....I popped into [St. Isaac's](#)

....wow! I thought I was a bit burned out on churches after Moscow (really, one can only take in just so many icons and church interiors before they start to blend together!!) but....St. Isaac's was really impressive. The mosaics and the dove in the dome....beautiful. (So everyone.....stand under the dome, look up and you will see the dove). It was a great place to get out of the cold rain. (maybe not cold to you but, coming from the hot Arizona desert it felt like winter to me!!) The view from the outside top of the dome was cool too, gave me a nice 360 degree layout of the city. Blinis are great---Perfect for a quick snack! It was still nice out so I got to enjoy it in a little piazza near the canal and

[Kazan Cathedral](#)

. (I thought Kazan was a government building at first with that incredible colonnade). Later I stopped into Stolle and sampled their food.

The vibe here is very different than Moscow and I felt it immediately. I am not sure yet how to describe it...need a bit more time to let it sink in. I just know it is like night and day. (Definitely a

lot more tourists everywhere here.....)

Due to the gloomy forecast, I am spending today and tomorrow in the [Hermitage](#) . I have the 2 day Internet pass so....***BTW, pre-purchasing the Hermitage ticket online is the way to go---you don't have to specify dates, just need to use it within a 90 day period.*** The queue this morning was long, long, long....but the Internet ticket queue----only 5 people in front of me. I literally walked right in! That peacock clock is incredible---Make sure to spend the 4 minutes watching the video of it.

When I came out of the museum 4 hours later, there was the sun! Yay! Weather is very strange this summer everywhere. Two snow storms when I was in the Dolomiti....more extreme heat than normal in Arizona (so I am ok with a little rain). And OMG!!!! Ended up at [Zoom Cafe](#) for dinner.....yummy! What a fun place, even chatted with 2 local guys at the little bar while I had a drink and waited for my table. I had good timing...only had to wait maybe 5-10 minutes. Def going to go there again!

Post Script----a few tips:

- Take the hydrofoil to [Peterhof](#) but come back on the mini bus. Hydrofoil over gives you great views on SP from the water, Gulf of Finland and then an incredibly beautiful walk up to the palace along the flowing water of the main fountain. Mini bus ride is a must do experience, just for the thrill of the wild ride. (At least with the driver I had!)
- Visit the Grottos at Peterhof. Even though the little tour is only in Russian and you will likely be the only foreigner, it is worth seeing the cascade from behind the scenes. Great photos too!
- Attend a performance at the [Mariinskiy Ballet](#) but.....purchase tickets online at the theater's website. You will avoid all the exuberant costs of a ticket agency. I had incredible seats for two performances and paid about a third of what the agencies charge. There are also tickets for some performances available at the theater's box office so that would be another good option.
- Splurge for dinner at the L'Europe at the [Grand Hotel Europe](#) . Amazing food and impeccable service. Friday for the Tchaikovsky Night with live music (Tchaikovsky pieces of course!) as well as a ballet duo performing)
- Go to the Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad to get a brief glimpse of that

dark period in history.

- Take the [Music Boat](#) at midnight to see all the bridges open.
- walk, walk, walk....take in all the little details.
- Stay in touch with [St. Petersburg Guide](#) ----Max is a great resource; you feel like you have a local friend.

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