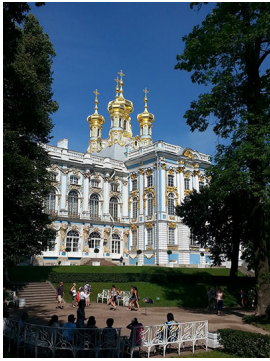


Fifteen local travelers visited Russia on a river cruise with Heart Warming Travel and local group leader, Vicki Martin.



The trip began in St. Petersburg, visiting gilded 18th century palaces of the Tsars, traveling by hydrofoil (a high speed boat providing local transportation on the Neva River) and marveling at over 16 hours of daylight with sunset after 10 p.m. and rising before 6 a.m.

Alice Rosenthal, Neshkoro, loved the 1,000mile river route to Moscow with endless views of wilderness and forests dotted with rural villages. The river wound through 18 locks, each one operating slightly differently, many taking two river ships at the same time. In a small village along the way, travelers were able to visit open air markets selling farm produce, freshly picked wild mushrooms, as well as mass produced clothing.

Jane Erickson, Wild Rose, was surprised with the large number and beauty of centuries old cathedrals, many with golden onion-shaped domes. Their interior walls and ceilings were completely covered with religious frescos and icons hundreds of years old. Other ports of call along the river include Kizhi Island featuring a 17th century 22-dome church.

Cris Van Houten, Plainfield, was not quite sure what to expect and commented on the contrast between new and old. In the bustling city of Moscow the 500-year-old Kremlin is surrounded by 16-lane roads. They also had an opportunity to travel as most of the 15 million Muscovites do, in the extensive subway system adorned with mid 20th century art depicting rural life and Russian heroes.

The trip culminated with a Russian history and culture ballet in Moscow showcasing exquisitely

trained dancers. All agreed that it was an amazing trip and returned with a better understanding of the world's largest country-Russia.