

Historical Background

Tver is over 800 years old, though it is not known exactly when it was first established. As is the case with the majority of ancient Russian cities, Tver does not have a precise founding date. Its rich history dates back to Prince Vsevolod of the Big Nest, the prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, who built a fortress, the Tver Kremlin, at the mouth of the T'maka River in 1182 in order to protect the area. The Kremlin does not survive to the present day, but archaeological excavations on the site have yielded an abundance of information about life in ancient Rus. References to Tver in ancient chronicles date back as far as 1208.

As Tver was quickly developing, it was often attacked by Tatar-Mongols. The famous Tver Prince Mikhail, Mikhail Tverskoy (1271-1317), played a significant role in the unification of Rus against the Mongol-Tatar tribes. According to the legend, Prince Mikhail rallied the Tver warriors to fight against the tartar yoke, but was ultimately captured, tormented, and died in the captivity. He was later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church and a monument was erected on the right hand side of the Volga river in the City Park in his honor.

Tver was at one time the capital of an unruly mini-state that was Moscow's chief rival in the 14th and 15th centuries. The princes of Moscow fought unsuccessfully for many years to gain power over Tver, but at the end of the 15th century, the Tver principality joined the centralized Muscovite state. In the middle ages, Tver was renowned for its handicrafts and developed trade networks. The early architectural monuments of Tver were almost all destroyed during the years of feudal wars. Only one building remains from this period: the White Trinity Church. An historical monument built in 1563-64 by architect Tushinsky under the reign of Ivan the Terrible, it remains in operation to this day.

Tver experienced a renaissance during the reforms of Peter the Great. Peter himself repeatedly stopped in Tver on his way to his new northern capital of St. Petersburg. The construction of St. Petersburg made Tver a key city between the two capitals, thus promoting its early economic development into the industrial age. Goods were sent abroad through Tver, and some of the first manufacturing industries in Russia were established here.

HISTORICAL SIGHTS

The image of modern Tver with its present, clear, and rational layout is a unique example of 18th century architecture and city planning. Commissioned by Catherine the Great, the renowned Italian architect Rostrelli incorporated many of his ideas for the construction of St. Petersburg to rebuild Tver after a disastrous fire in 1763 that destroyed many of the old buildings in the city. Classical 1700s and early 1800s town houses and public buildings are typical of modern Tver, especially along the downtown waterfront. Although Tver's baroque and classical architecture doesn't put it in the same league as some of the old towns of the Golden Ring, it has a number of attractions worth seeing.

The Putevoi Dvoretz (Road Palace) constructed by Matvey Kazakov in 1763-1775 and later redesigned by Carlo Rossi in 1809, was built as a resting place for members of the Tsar's court on their journeys from one capital to the other. Today, the palace houses two museums: The Tver Picture Gallery, which displays more than 17,000 native works of art, foreign arts, decorative and applied art as well as monumental art from 14th - 20th centuries. It has a rich collection of paintings by Russian artists, mainly portraits by Rocotov and Borovikovsky as well as portraits of peasants by the Tver artist Venetsianov; and The Museum of Local Lore, where objects of ancient Russian applied art, ancient manuscripts and printed books are exhibited.

The Transfiguration Cathedral was built in the late-17th century following the pattern of the Assumption Cathedral (Uspensky Sobor) in Moscow. Its bell tower dating from the middle of the 18th century recalls the belfry of the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius in the old Russian city of Sergiyev Posad. The Cathedral is a functioning church and is situated in the downtown corner of Tverskoy Prospekt and Sovietskaya, which are the two main boulevards of the city.

The Old Volga Bridge was built at the beginning of the 20th century and acquired a symbolic value for the city of Tver. Its unique construction and design are still considered a miracle of engineering.

The Afanasiy Nikitin Monument is also rather original. It commemorates the Russian merchant and explorer who traveled to India in the mid-15th century and was the first in the history of Russia to have made records of his trip. Later transformed in to the book titled "Travels over the three seas", they are considered to be the first written records about international travels in Russia. Needless to say, his name is well known in Tver and throughout Russia, which makes it an excellent choice for the brand name of the locally brewed beer.

Other architectural constructions worth seeing in Tver are: the Tver Drama Theatre (a grandiose building with massive columns that houses the Provincial Theatre Company and is also frequently visited by companies from Moscow and St. Petersburg); the ensemble of Lenin's Square, which comprises four administrative buildings with a statue of the first Soviet leader in its center; the Pushkin Monument in the City Park; Krylov's Garden; the World War II Monument complete with an occasional "eternal flame"; and the Morozov Barracks complex of the Tver manufacturing industries, which has survived since the turn of the 20th century and is still functioning.

The city also prides itself on housing many well-known Russian artists, writers, and statesmen who spent time and

worked in Tver during the course of history. Among them are Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Pavel I, and Alexander I, the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, the fable writer Ivan Krylov, the painters Isaac Levitan and Victor Vasnetsov, the dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky, the famous Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and the satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Schedrin.