

Traveling without a picture or medical...

A family's personal experience with an unknown referral.

By Stephanie

When I got the call from Tania that my husband, Jonathan and I had a travel date and would travel “blind” to Moscow in 1 ½ weeks, we were incredibly nervous. We had only turned our dossier in a short time before, so we still had a lot that we intended to do regarding travel research, etc.

We immediately did the most critical items on our list such as applying for visas, calling the bank to arrange the withdrawal, booking our flights, and hotel reservations. It was hard to focus because we were so excited and nervous. We really felt like we were the only people in the world who were crazy enough to travel blind. I sent a blanket email to friends and family letting them know that we had a travel date and would be traveling blind. A friend put me in contact with their friends who had just returned from traveling blind to Ukraine. Talking with that family and hearing about their experience helped tremendously because it made me feel like we weren't the only ones and they had a good experience.

When we flew to Moscow on Monday, Michael and Marina who are part of Oleg's team in Russia, met us at the airport with a sign with our names on it. Michael, who was the driver, drove to the hotel while Marina talked with us. They are very nice and tried to put us at ease but we were both overwhelmed by the long trip, the Moscow airport and traffic. Moscow traffic is crazy! I now understand why we need a driver. We went to our hotel and got settled in that night.

On Tuesday, Michael and Marina picked us up at 9:00 am to take us to the Department of Education at 10:00. Because Moscow is so big and traffic is bad, it took a while to get around the city. The Department of Education was small and run down. We waited with several other couples who were there to get their referrals. They were all from the USA and Ireland. We were so nervous. We had no idea if we would get a boy or girl since we were open to either and didn't know how old he or she would be. We went into a small office with two women who asked us some very basic questions and then they presented us with Marat's referral. There was a picture of him at about 1 month. They told just a little bit of information about him including his age (17 months) and that he had a minor heart defect. Marina had to translate. Jonathan started freaking out about the heart defect but Marina and Konstantin (who had come to help with the referral process) told us that we needed to go and meet him before making any decisions.

We headed straight to orphanage #2 with Michael and Marina. When we got there, we were pleasantly surprised about the condition of the orphanage. The building itself looked run down but there were flowers outside and the inside was clean, bright and cheerful.



Moscow Orphanage

We waited for what seemed like an eternity to meet with the director. When we finally met with her, she read Marat's medical history and Marina translated. While we focused on listening to the medical history, the speech pathologist walked into the room with Marat. He was so cute! We stopped talking about the medical history and went to a playroom with Marat. He was definitely scared of us, especially Jonathan and cried if he got too close. We had been warned about that since the children aren't used to men. He did let me hold him but acted more comfortable with the people with whom he was more familiar. Some of the caregivers came into the room and talked to us (in Russian) and told us a little bit about him. They were very nice and seemed like they genuinely cared about the children. They are very serious about the schedules and we had to leave at naptime which was 2:00. Before leaving the US, we had arranged by email for Dr. Svetlana to examine Marat.

[Continued page 2](#)

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We stayed in the room while she examined him and it made me feel good to see her do all the same things that we have seen our pediatrician do when he examined our first son. She took her time and explained everything that we had questions about. We talked about the heart problem and she assured us that everything was okay and she explained why. We stayed and played until 6:00.

Jonathan and I had agreed that we would not make any commitments until we had a chance to talk privately and make sure that we were both in agreement about the baby. We got to the hotel, talked about it and we were both feeling great about Marat. We had prearranged with Dr. Dana Johnson at the University of Minnesota to evaluate any medical information. We went to the hotel business center and emailed the information that we had written down during the day to him. His online submission form was a little tricky and we were tired and grouchy. We weren't confident that he would receive it and respond quickly. When we woke up the next morning and checked our email, we had a response. He addressed all of our concerns and gave us a very positive report so we felt even better. He did say that the heart issue was something that he sees very often on Eastern European referrals and it was not something that should ever cause problems for Marat.

We chose the name Tyler Marat for our new son. On Wednesday, we returned to the orphanage to play with him again for a little while but first Marina had to take paperwork back to the Department of Education. Once again, we could only stay until naptime and then we had to leave to take more paperwork to the notary which took a while. Saying goodbye to Tyler was hard but the plane ride home was harder for me because I felt like he should have been with us. I was also emotional from being so exhausted.



Marina

Overall, it was a great trip. We are so excited about Tyler. Moscow is such an interesting city and both Jonathan and I thought Marina and Michael were wonderful. They were both very helpful and Marina was extremely organized. If we had it to do over again, we would have taken a laptop and an international cell phone. It was so important for us to communicate with our friends and family but the hotel business center was expensive (\$10. for 15 minutes). The instructions at the Internet Café were in Russian. The employees there did not speak English either. We did manage to use the computer there one time. Trying to figure it out at the end of a long day was not a pretty sight. We bought an international calling card once we were in Moscow but again the instructions were in Russian. Luckily the hotel manager was very nice about coming to our room on two different occasions to listen to the instructions and help us. After that we had written everything down and managed to do it by ourselves.

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Note: If you are interested in learning more about this process or talking to a family that has traveled blind, please contact Carolina Adoption Services. We have several resources with whom we can connect you. This is an exciting time but is filled with the unknown, CAS is here to support you so that it is not so scary.