

**October 25, 2012 (Helsinki, Finland)**

I do not sleep well again. I sleep well initially, but by 3 AM I'm wide awake. Part of this could still be the jetlag, but part of it is definitely the start of the World Series with Game 1 beginning at 3 AM Finland time. I turn on my computer and try to find if there's a live video feed available. I do find a website with pirated rebroadcasts of sporting events that is streaming the game online, but they require the installation of a utility. No thanks. I'm not familiar with it and don't know what I'd be installing.

I really have nothing to do today until this evening when I catch the ferry to St. Petersburg, Russia. Even though I received little sleep, I make



no real effort to get out of the hostel until the 11 AM checkout time. I walk down the street to the small grocery store to pick up some bananas, cookies and muffins to snack on during the overnight ferry.

By 11 AM I've checked out of the hostel and stop by the McDonalds down the street for a Big Mac.

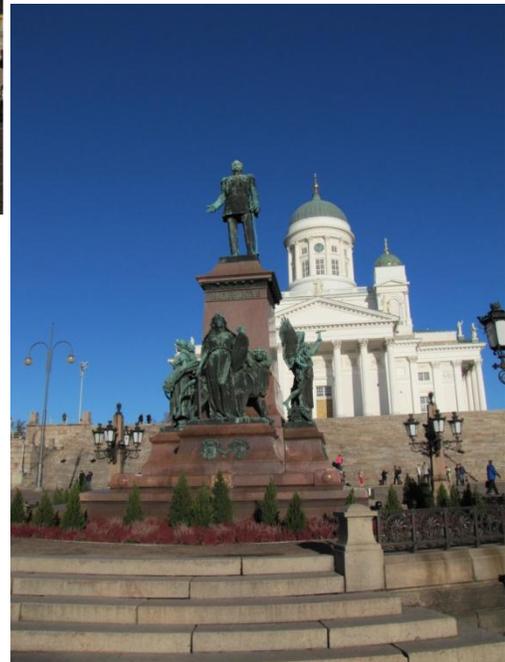
The first thing I want to do today is visit the large church I could see from Uspenskin Katedraall the other day. It's just north of the harbor area and not that far of a walk from the hostel.

I arrive at Tuomiokirkko and am met with an amazing sight as the church is high up on the hill with many stone steps and a statue in the square below the steps. This chalk-



white Lutheran church was

designed by C. L. Engel. Although Engel died in 1840, construction on the church persisted until it was finished in 1852. I use this as a good opportunity to take another Flat Stanley photo for my niece.



I climb the steps to get up to the church, a little tiring as I'm probably just getting old. Up at the church, I want to go inside, but am met with a sign that says the

interior is closed until 1 PM for a communion service for government officials. I will definitely come back.

I walk back down to the harbor. Unlike the other day when I was here and it was overcast, today it's bright and sunny, albeit a bit colder as the temperature is probably in the upper 30s.

My guidebook suggests walking on the northern side of Katajanokka, a small island just to the right of the harbor and connected by a small footbridge, to see the fleet of icebreakers docked up. I walk over and get a good view of them from another dock. I can't get very close to them.



I walk back to the harbor and go back to Tuomiokirkko. The communion service is now finished and I can go inside. For such a large church, the inside is sure Spartan. There are a few

statues of Martin Luther and several other prominent figures in the reformation. The inside of the church is fairly plain white like the exterior with the exception of the pulpit area in the front and the organ pipes high in the back.



I really have nothing else specific to see today. I walk around the shopping district and see the many high priced stores... Louis Vuitton, Zara, etc. I have my iPhone out and look for unsecured wifi so I can check email. I eventually find it.



As it's cold and I don't have a warm hostel to go back to, I decide to walk the 30 minutes to the ferry terminal. I figure that I can sit there and play Finland's national game, Angry Birds, and wait in warmth.

When I arrive at the ferry terminal at 3:30 PM, I get my ticket and see that the ship is open for boarding.



The ship is not what I would call a ferry, although it has several levels for cars on the bottom. It's really a small cruise ship. I find my room on the 4<sup>th</sup> level. It's a 9 square meter room with 4 beds. Fortunately I have a lower bed. Soon 2 guys from Australia and an American arrive. Zane, from the San Francisco area, is familiar. It turns out that we shared a room at the hostel in Helsinki a

couple of nights ago. He's traveled extensively around the world and we talk for awhile.



As it's only a little after 4 PM and the ship doesn't depart for St. Petersburg until 7 PM, I decide to walk around the ship and see what there is. There's a small café with a



children's play area on the 4<sup>th</sup> level. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> levels are guest rooms. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors



are restaurants, bars, nightclubs and casinos. There's also a large duty-free store that sells mainly perfumes, electronics, cigarettes and alcohol. There are some food items also being sold. The thing that stumps me are the bottles of American brands of rum and whiskey that are selling for far less than in the U.S. Are they counterfeit or is the shipping cost to Russia much less than the U.S. taxes? This is a Russian ship so anything is possible.



It's also possible to go outside and walk around on the deck, although it's very cold. Mostly just smokers are out there.

I go back down to my room and take a couple hour nap until I hear the engine hum get louder and the ship departs the dock. Zane tells me that he's been told to make sure to eat the buffet. I go upstairs to check it out and see it costs €33 (\$43) and includes a shot of vodka and unlimited wine. I decide that I'm really not very hungry and really don't want to put much alcohol into my system.



I check out the food options in other places. I finally decide on the fancy sit-down restaurant that borders the casino. There are very few people eating there. And although they have beluga caviar on the menu for €150 (\$200), I order the chicken Keiv and a Coke for €18 (\$24). The chicken is breaded with something green like spinach in the center. It's served on what I describe as fried mashed potatoes with a mushroom sauce. I'm also given a basket of bread and butter. The food is very good.



I walk around the ship. It's a different type of place with people. It's obvious that some use this overnight cruise as an opportunity to drink a lot. All the video poker and slot machines are being used in all the corridors. The nightclub is full with a few people

dancing and some guy playing electric guitar to recorded music.

I see signs for a sauna on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level. I walk down there to check it out. There's a swimming pool and only an older fat woman using it.

I return to the room. The Australian guys return briefly and suggest I should go up to the nightclub around 11 PM to see the dance show performed by a Russian group. The problem with this ship is I'm not sure whether the times are Finnish time or Russian time (an hour later). Some places list times both ways while other place list just one time.



I set my watch to Russian time and around 11 PM I walk up to the nightclub to see what's going on. The Russian group is on the stage dancing and are just finishing up their routine. It's very cheesy. I do see about 5 minutes before it ends.

Next a Finnish rock band takes the stage to play. It's just 3 of them and it doesn't seem like something I want to stay around for. I give them 5 minutes of my time.

I walk outside on the deck to see what there is to see this late at night. We're somewhere in the middle of the Gulf of Finland. The only things to see are the lights of some other ships out on the water in the distance.

I return to the room and go to bed. Soon Zane and the 2 Australians also return. I'm thankful that I'm sharing a room with 3 other guys whose focus is wanting to see St. Petersburg and not getting boozed up on the ship.

