



CASINOS OF RUSSIA 1993

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The first time we went to Russia in 1979 it was part of the Soviet Union. There were no casinos that I knew of. In fact the only form of gambling that I saw was Sunday afternoon trotting races at the Hippodrome in Moscow. I went just to experience the scene and to compare it to our local track, Roosevelt Raceway, which is now closed.

This July, 1993 we went back to see the changes that we read had taken place since it became a separate democratic state.

We flew to Russia from JFK on Aeroflot. The magazines on board were of course Russian. I was surprised to see how many ads there were for casinos throughout Russia.

After a terrific eight day cruise up the Volga River, we spent four days in Moscow. I had read that there was a new casino in Moscow and I was looking forward to getting chips for my collection. When we finally arrived in Moscow I tried to get as much information as possible from our intourist guide. She was neither too knowledgeable or anxious to help me. What she did tell me was that there many casinos in Moscow but she had never been to one. Since I don't read or speak Russian I was dependant upon her. She said they were mostly in the larger hotels and that they charged an entrance fee. We were staying at the "Hotel Izmailovo" the large hotel built for the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. There was a casino on the first floor, called the "Kings Casino". Our group consisted of twenty one people, three of whom expressed an interest in playing in the casino until they heard there was a \$10 entrance fee. I went alone.



The "Kings Casino" was a small room with one roulette table, one blackjack table, a poker table and a bar. I told the manager that I would like to play but not for the \$10 minimum bet the sign on the table stated. He was a pleasant, young Australian fellow (the only one who spoke english) and said that since it was very slow that evening he would make an exception and lower the minimum to \$5. I was the only player at first but soon two Russians sat down. All the casinos in Russia only play with U.S. dollars. Most of the dealers were young Russians girls, fairly well trained but poor counters. Two dealers were at the table at all times. One was a watcher, the other dealt, there was no "eye in the sky". The only english they spoke were words related to the game, like "SPLIT?" (when I had a pair of tens), or "DOUBLE DOWN" (only on 9,10,11), or "INSURANCE" when she showed a ace. The dealer didn't pull her second card until everyone was finished playing. If you doubled or split when she had an "ACE" showing and then pulled a Blackjack you lost both bets. Great for the house!. I spoke to the Australian manager about it and he just shrugged it off as the house rules. Since I had all the chips I wanted and was a few dollars ahead I decided it was time to go.

It was our last day in Moscow before I could leave the tour to find another casino. This one was in the "Intourist Hotel" near Red Square. We were constantly told that crime in Moscow was on the rise and we should always be alert. The casino door was guarded by security men who looked like former "KGB" men. They made me check my camera and walk through a metal detector after I paid the \$10 entrance fee. Once inside the room was pretty garish, and empty (it was four in the afternoon). A few people were playing roulette. I was interested in seeing what their chips looked like so I went to the cashier's cage and asked for \$1 chips. They had no writing on them except the digit "1". I asked if I could see the \$5 chip. They were red and black and had the casino name "EMPRESS CASINO" on them. I bought several of them and walked out. It would have been impossible to explain why I wanted them, no one spoke English. They looked at me as if I were "nuts". Getting back to my hotel from Red Square for supper on the beautiful Moscow subway was an experience in itself.

I didn't go to the third and final casino until I was in St. Petersburg (formally Leningrad). When I questioned the local guide about the casinos in St. Petersburg she said there were "hundreds" of them. I doubt that very much. I did get to go to one on my last night. It was the "ADMIRAL CASINO" in the Hotel Astoria. This one didn't open until 10 PM so I was on my own again. I was asked to sign the register after I paid the entrance fee. This room was larger and prettier than the other casinos I saw. I didn't have time to stay because we were leaving at 4 AM for the airport and home. I went to the cashier, bought all the chips I wanted in different denominations and left. These chips were "CHIPCO," very pretty chips. They also had slot tokens with the casino name on them.



The illustrated Russian chips that accompany this article are samples from CHIPCO INTERNATIONAL LTD., and are not necessarily the same chips that author Dr. Karmen is offering.
Editor