

Russia: WWII Battlefields and Memorials

On June 22nd, 1941 fascist Germany in coalition with Italy and Japan attacked Soviet Union with 190 divisions (5.5 million people), more than 3000 tanks and 5000 military aircrafts. World War II, Great Patriotic War, as it is known in Russia, left many soldiers dead. In many cities of Russia such as Moscow, Yekaterinburg and others, the eternal flames are lit to commemorate those who died during the war. Similarly a number of memorials were built for people not to forget.



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow

It is located in the Kremlin Alexander Garden. The monument is composed of a gravestone decorated with a bronze banner, a soldier's helmet and laurels on it.

The history of the memorial is very interesting. Victory Day in Great Patriotic War has been celebrated with an impressive ceremony only since 1965. It is then when Moscow received the status of the heroic city and the 9th of May became a national holiday. In December, 1966 Moscow was getting ready to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the German army defeat near Moscow. At that time the first secretary of the Moscow city committee of the communist party N.G. Egorichev, came up with an idea of creating a memorial in honor of soldiers who fought and lost their lives in battles near Moscow. But he realized that this memorial should have not only local, but also a national significance.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier became such a memorial, one of the most famous ones in the entire country. Children and old people come here not just on Victory Day. The newlywed couples, delegations from different countries and the main figures of Russian government come to the eternal flame to lay the flowers, showing the infinite respect to the unknown soldiers.

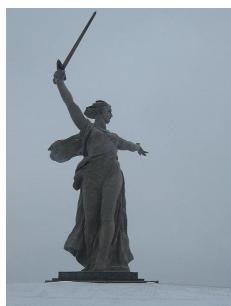


Kursk Battlefield Memorial

The battle started on July 15, 1943 and lasted till August 23, 1943. It was one of the most important battles of the World War II in its size, forces, tension, and political results. Kursk Battlefield Memorial consists of a six hundred meter long green boulevard, located in the Northern part of the Victory Avenue (Prospect Pobedy) between the two highways, tall three-storey Temple of the Great Martyr George the Victorious, triumphal arch, crowned with equestrian statue of the patron saint, bronze statue of Georgy Zhukov and granite tombstone of the “Kursk Battlefield Unknown Soldier” on the common grave. Kursk Battlefield memorial was built to commemorate the 55th World War II Victory Anniversary.

First monument that the visitors see upon entering the memorial is the T-34 tank monument in honor of the tank men who fought during the Kursk Battle. Next is the stele, symbolizing the front line. Along its edges are antitank guns that helped to stop the tank forces of the enemy. In the center of the memorial, between the common graves, symbolizing the memory, eternal flame is lit.

In the Hall of Combat and Military Glory personal belongings of the battlefield participants, weapons and relics are displayed. At the southern end of the memorial there is a World War II bunker, that was used for firing a machine gun, and is called “dzot” or “Derevozemlyanaya”, meaning made of wood and dirt, firing point. Inside the bunker there is a 76–mm 7 divisional gun model ZIS–3, that played a significant role in suppression of the tank power of the enemy.



One of the most beautiful buildings of the memorial is the Temple of the Great Martyr George the Victorious, that was opened on the 65th World War II Victory Anniversary. The names of the fallen soldiers are written on the walls of the temple.

Mamaev Hill in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad)

This is where the Stalingrad battle took place between September 1942 and January 1943. It is one of the most famous battlefields of the World War II. Mamaev Hill battle lasted 135 days out of 200 days of the Stalingrad battle. Slopes of the hill were dug up with bombs and mines, even during the snowy days the hill remained black. Snow melted instantly, mixing with dirt from the artillery fire. When the Stalingrad battle was over, 34500 fallen soldiers were buried there. No wonder that in the first spring after the battle, Mamaev Hill didn't turn green, grass didn't grow on the burnt soil.

There are 200 granite steps, a step for each day of 200 days of the Stalingrad Battle, from the Square of Sorrow at the base the hill to its top, where there is the main monument of the memorial – The Motherland Calls – sculpture of a woman holding sword and calling for battle.

For more information about Russia World War II Memorials and tours visit
http://discoverrus.com/Russia_Tours_WWII_Memorials.htm

Date: 2012-06-25

Article link:

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