

The Lenin Mausoleum

By the Kremlin wall on the southwest side of Red Square stands the Lenin Mausoleum. Inside, in a glass sarcophagus, lies Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who died on January 21, 1924. Three days after his death, a wooden structure was erected on this spot. Four months later, it was rebuilt and then replaced in 1930 by the granite, marble and black labradorite mausoleum, designed by Alexei Shchusev.



"Lenin" is inscribed in red porphyry. For more than 75 years Russians and foreigners have stood in the line that stretches from the end of Red Square to the mausoleum to view the once idolized revolutionary leader and "Father of the Soviet Union". Two guards man the entrance but there is no longer a changing of the guard. Photography is prohibited and cameras should be placed out of sight in bag.

Once inside, visitors are still not allowed to pause for long. The mausoleum is usually open 10am - 1pm; closed Mondays, Fridays, and is free of charge. Once in while some die-hard Communists and Lenin Loyalists will gather at the mausoleum to honor the former leader. But after the attempted coup of 1991, the lines to Lenin's mausoleum have diminished dramatically, and sometimes there is no line at all.

In 1994, a German executive tried to purchase the body and take it on a world tour with a final resting place in a Cologne museum. Today there is still a movement within the country to remove Lenin's body from the mausoleum and rebury him elsewhere (he had requested to be buried in St. Petersburg). Ironically though, with the new wave of capitalists, Lenin souvenirs are now more popular than ever, and Lenin's formaldehyde experts are offering their eternal Lenin Deluxe preservation techniques for a price of just over a quarter of a million dollars.



Marble viewing stands on both sides of the mausoleum hold up 10,000 spectators on national holidays. Atop the mausoleum is a tribune, where the heads of the former Soviet Government and Communist Party once gathered on May and Revolution days. Behind the mausoleum, separated by a row of silver fir trees, are the remains of many the country's most honored figures in politics, culture and science, whose ashes lie in urns within the Kremlin walls.



They include Lenin's sister and his wife, Sergei Kirov, Maxim Gorky, A. K. Lunacharsky, the physicist Sergei Korolyov and the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. Foreigners include John Reed and William Haywood (USA), Arthur McManus (England), Clara Zetkin and Fritz Heckert (Germany), and Sen Katayama (Japan). There are also the tombstones of previous leaders of the Communist Party: Sverdlov, Dzerzhinsky, Frunze, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Suslov, Brezhnev, Chernenko, Andropov, and Stalin, who was buried next to Lenin in the mausoleum from 1953-61. Nearby are the granite-framed common graves of 500 people who died during the October Revolution of 1917.

Lenin Mausoleum Closed for Two Months

Every two years the Lenin mausoleum on Red Square is closed to scheduled restoration of Lenin's body. The work usually lasts for one-and-a-half to two months. Lenin's body has already spent over 80 years in the mausoleum and scientists think that another 100 years or more are possible. Previously the state financed the procedure, but this year the funds were taken from science budgets.

Embalment

First days after Lenin's death no one intended to embalm his body - authorities relied on severe frosts. However, numerous delegations from all around the country and telegrams from workers asking to show the body of Lenin to the whole world gave an impetus to perpetuate the body and not commit it to earth. The widow and sisters of Lenin were strongly against making a "doll" of Lenin, but they remained unheard, as a propaganda effect was more powerful than common sense. Nevertheless, Soviet medics managed to operationally cope with the unique task of embalment and a red Soviet pharaoh appeared in Moscow.

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