

A City Planner's Journey Around the World

Leslie S. Pollock FAICP

LAI, Ely Chapter



Route of the Journey

LAI member Les Pollock journeyed around the world from August thru November 2017. Come travel with him, vicariously, to visit portions of Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Israel, Italy, Morocco, and France. A PowerPoint presentation of his travels is to be presented as part of the LAI Global Chapter Programs, November 13 at 15:00 UTC. Check the announcement for the dial in telephone number.

Les followed the sun and traversed 23 cities, towns and villages, together with their adjacent countryside, by air, bus, rail, car, boat and foot. Travelling mostly alone, he met many people, and shared overnight trains and intercity buses that required him to converse in broken Russian, German, French, smidgeons of other languages and English.

In addition to his interest in circumnavigating the world, Les, an experienced urban planner, sought to understand the varied geographies, cultures and characteristics of the places he visited by focusing on the physical structure, local character and peoples of the places he visited.

Les will offer a presentation that includes lessons he learned about the places visited, people he met and the challenges of solo travel. He will also offer pointers on how to go about travel planning, living out of a small carry-on suitcase weighing less than 15 pounds for four months, meeting local people enroute, and dealing with unexpected contingencies.

His PowerPoint offers observations and insights regarding each of the places visited including his almost month long experience of riding the Trans-Siberian railroad between Beijing and Moscow, and the places he visited enroute.

Les draws three broad conclusions from his journey:

First, **He confirmed that the world is a fascinating and (often) welcoming place**, full of mostly pleasant surprises even for the most wizened traveller. His journey was replete with a host of experiences, both built and natural – pleasant small capital cities like Bucharest and Sofia, energy and contrast between old and new, center and neighborhood, as experienced in Hanoi, Singapore, and Jerusalem; fascinating views and town character as in several Transylvanian towns, the medinas and kasbahs of Morocco, the lush environment that is Luang Prabang, Laos, and more. These provided endless lessons in the creation of urban space, both formal and vernacular, how people use and form markets, community meeting places, residential neighborhoods and civic centers.

His presentation offers insights into fascinating and beautiful sites and situations. Including the beauty and majesty of the Laotian and Vietnamese highlands and the splendor of Lake Baikal in Siberia. Join him to enter the ancient city of Angkor Thom, Cambodia through the astounding Bayon Gate. Ride the 200 MPH maglev train into Shanghai from the airport. Stand in Moscow's Red Square among the ghosts of the recent past.

Last, but not least, hear about the people he met that created the sense of the journey. Help always seemed available when needed; interest was often shown regarding his travels, and there was often an eagerness to share stories, no matter how limited the shared language.

Helpfulness, cheerfulness, support for one another. Les sees travel as really learning about humanity.

Now, many people have seen all or more sites through a series of individual tours or trips, individually or as part of group tours. But, Les shows that negotiating all these places within a relatively limited time-frame as a solo traveller is a different experience. Share the opportunity to observe these similarities and differences in a condensed manner; comparing what one sees in one town with what was experiences in the next. It makes for a great education about the form, life and culture of cities.

Second, Les confirms that **to travel one must get out of one's home-culture bubble**; to be with the locals and use the same forms of transportation as they do, to stay in modest hotels and hostels where one mixes with people unlike you, to eat in local restaurants, often alone and learning what to eat by watching or asking what the locals eat. He confirms that English is the global language, and people are often eager to practice it with a native speaker. Yet, he also finds that being able to speak a local language, even in broken phrases, connects you better with the local community. He shows that travel is about the journey, not just the destinations; to have opportunities to meet, mingle and talk with locals and travelers from other than your own country; and to learn elements of the local language, especially terms such as hello, please, thank you and "where is ...". Courtesy opens so many doors!

Les also learned that that **most people share the same concerns, aspirations, and values**; namely to be respected, to be safe, to live comfortably, to experience different places and things, and to be able to afford to do these things. Economic security is one of these shared concerns. Many people he met seemed generally comfortable in their life styles, but conversation also suggested that such comfort often existed by a razor thin margin. Many seemed to struggle, and he always saw or met those who were on the economic edge.

Lastly, Les' presentation suggests that to travel is to experience the spectrum of society; It provides the context to determine how you and your culture fit into the mosaic of the world. Come see yourself in this context, as his presentation addresses experiences in particular cities or groups of cities and towns along his route of travel.



With my host Katarina at the Asia-Europe divide in the Urals, just west of Yekaterinburg, one of many people I met and swapped stories with. She was born at the time the closed city of Yekaterinburg opened up to foreigners and changed its name from Sverdlosk back to Yekaterinburg. That year many

baby girls, like her, were named Katarina in honor of this change. She said that when teachers asked a question and called on “Katarina” most of the girls in her class started to answer the question.