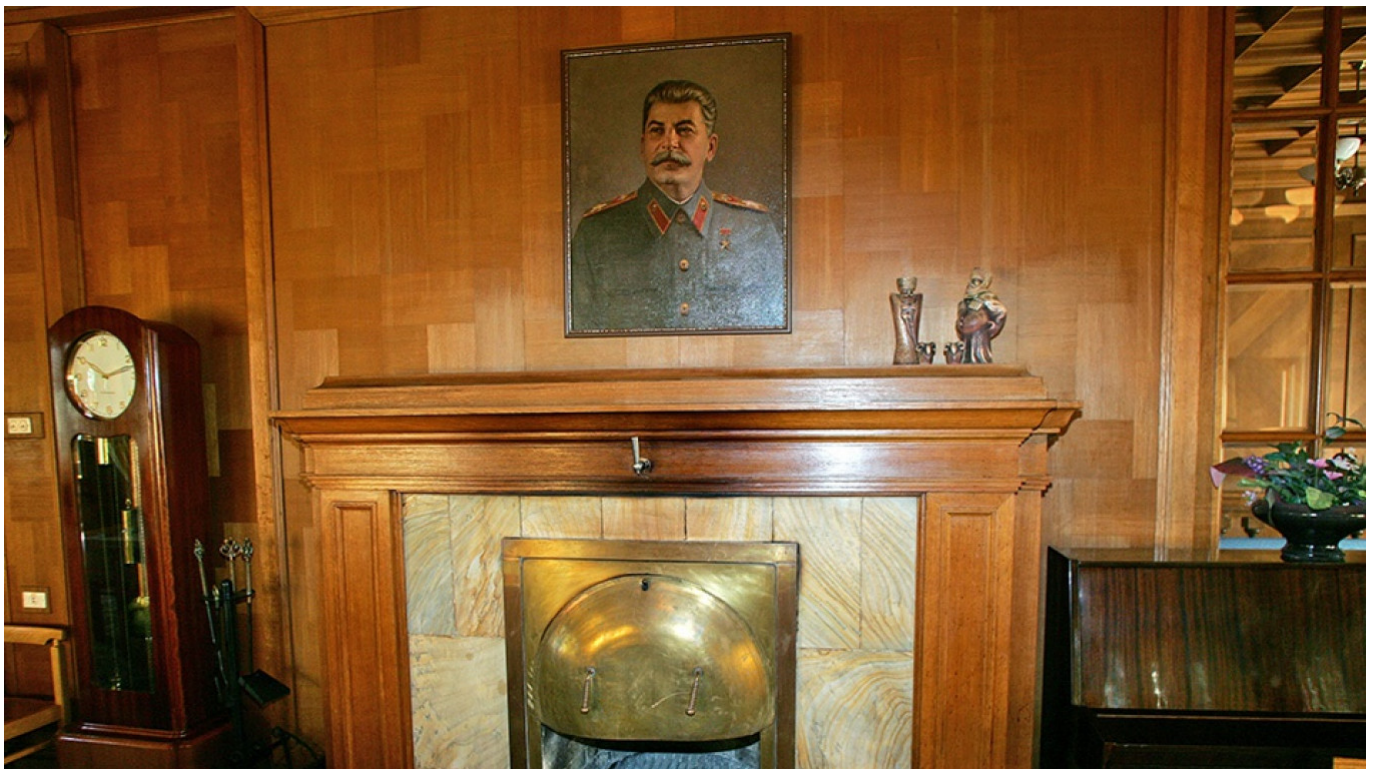


Inside Stalin's Sochi Villa

Don't miss Stalin's holiday villa in Sochi, whose star began to rise back in Soviet times.

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Andrei Golovanov and Sergei Kivrin / TASS

Sochi began functioning as a resort during imperial times, when it catered mostly to the aristocracy; at one point, even the royal family took up lodgings nearby. These vacation offerings got an approving nod from Vladimir Lenin after the revolution, and the Soviet leader declared the area open to the proletariat.

Josef Stalin was not the first to think of making Sochi a socialist resort, but few would refute how much was done on his orders to turn the city into the alluring paradise it was during the Soviet period. Sochi received more than 1 billion rubles for its transformation in the 1930s — a fantastic sum by the standards of the time.

Much of the money went to developing the Matsesta region's healing sulfur springs, which a number of the country's political leaders have used to regain their strength and fight off

aging. Stalin came to Sochi to soak in the Matsesta baths as a way to treat his rheumatism. While in the city, Stalin stayed in a former local entrepreneur's dacha, but this temporary arrangement did not quite align with the party's position on capitalism, so the Soviet leader ordered that his own dacha to be built not too far from the bathhouses.

A resort fit for a General Secretary

The work on Stalin's dacha made it all the more important and urgent to turn Sochi into a first-rate resort. The main transportation artery running along the coast was named Stalinsky Prospekt, now Kurortny Prospekt, and strict dress and behavior rules were observed there. The road was cleaned three times a day, drivers had to wash their cars to go on it, and women were forbidden from parading around in their bathrobes.

Meanwhile, landscape and construction work went ahead at record breakneck speed. Ministries, factories and unions hastened to build sanatoria for their workers in the area. Vacationers from the party elite were sent to the Rossia sanatorium, the miners went to Ordzhonikidze, the metalworkers to Metallurg, and Frunze had the honor of hosting party workers, labor camp survivors, foreign communists and cosmonauts.

Sanatoria

Many of the sanatoria are now open for public bookings but continue to operate according to the Soviet formula — "three diet meals per day plus medical procedures." Life in a couple of them has stayed pretty much the same as before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Voroshilov military sanatorium, for example, has smoothly passed over from the jurisdiction of the Soviet Red Army to the modern-day Defense Ministry.

Stalin's Villa

If the walls of this house could talk ... Actually, it's best not to speculate what they would say. Stalin's dacha provided the setting in which the general secretary made some of his most significant political decisions, hosted esteemed (sometimes trembling) guests, and freely expressed his paranoia by equipping it with the latest security inventions.

The dacha was built for Stalin in 1937. It is situated on a hill 50 meters above sea level, with scenic views of the Greater Caucasus mountain range and surrounded by a forest. The views and fresh air were supposed to help improve Stalin's health, but he probably valued them even more for the security they provided.

You can appreciate that fully if you decide to scale the hill by foot and then attempt to locate the moss-green house among the trees and shrubbery. This natural defense shield was not enough to relax Stalin, so he had the dacha surrounded by three security cordons while staying there.

Also anxious about his privacy, Stalin had special keyholes made in his bedchambers to prevent any overly curious servants from spying on him. Stalin usually stayed in Sochi from August to October and was accompanied on these visits by his wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva.

VIP Dacha

After Alliluyeva's death in 1932 and the completion of Stalin's personal dacha complex, members of the party elite took up nearby cottages to keep their boss company. These included Vyacheslav Molotov, future foreign minister, and the head of the secret police apparatus Lavrenty Beria. The country's most powerful men would come to the dacha at mealtimes and discuss political questions over food. Some of the key decisions about the repressions were made here and then orders were dispatched by telegram to the capital.

Dacha Life

The Dacha became a safe haven for Stalin's daughter, daughter-in-law and granddaughter during World War II and the ruler himself came here incognito in 1945 after suffering a stroke.

Stalin lived in a separate building from his support staff — allegedly, he disliked the clatter of plates and the smell of food in the dacha kitchens. One local legend claims that there was supposed to be a fountain in the middle of the complex, but it was taken out because Stalin did not want to be disturbed by the sounds of dripping water.

See how Stalin lived

You can see how the Soviet leader lived by arranging a visit to the dacha, the lower floor of which now functions as a museum. Stalin's billiards table and personal items are on display and a wax figure of the dacha's original owner sits behind the worktable in uniform. Also take note of the low staircase steps, designed this way due to Stalin's rheumatism.

Getting there

Open *Daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Tickets 300 rubles

Kurortny Prospekt, 120 +7 862 267 0502

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