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Travels, Trips and Tours

Traveling is a fine art in any language.

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Путёвка: trip voucher, package tour, trip sheet, good start

I have been traveling a lot in the last six months — more than in the last five (if not 10) years combined — which means that I have been talking a lot about travel in Russian and, as is my wont, thinking about how the Russian language categorizes travel.

Russian has a universal word for a trip: поездка. This is any kind of trip you take in or on a vehicle or animal. One definition specifies that поездка is "путешествие куда-либо с какой-либо целью" (traveling somewhere with some goal), be it business, pleasure, leisure or other. Поездка can be дальняя (distant); длительная (long); or короткая (short). Поездка can be летняя (summer); частная (personal), деловая (business), or рабочая (for work). A trip can go anywhere — за город (outside the city); за границу (abroad); or на родину (back home).

Поездка can sound quite dreary, too: Мы даем высокую оценку недавней поездке председателя Комитета по ряду стран (We are very pleased with the recent trip of our Committee chairman to a number of countries). In many cases, поездка is expensive: На поездку нужны деньги (We need money for our trip). And unless you have planned to stay in touch while you're on the road, you must remember: Отправляясь в поездку, выключите свой телефон (When you set off on a trip, turn off your phone).

The fact that a поездка almost always has a goal— even if it is to relax, do nothing, lie in the sun and stare at the sea — distinguishes it from путешествие (travels) and the verb путешествовать (to travel). Путешествие is almost always in/on a vehicle (or animal — I'm thinking camels, donkeys, horses), it is almost always longish or long, and it is almost always far from home. And it might be almost aimless — travel for the sake of travel. Я ужасно жалею, что из-за работы не могу сейчас путешествовать (I really regret that because of work I can't travel now).

Some folks are lucky: Я ушёл из дому в четырнадцать лет, много путешествовал (I left home at the age of 14 and traveled a great deal). Хватало на всё и еще оставалось на отдых и путешествия (I had enough money for everything with some left over for leisure and travel).

Путешествие is not only a trip or travels, it is also a literary genre in which the author describes a voyage, either real or imagined. В 1676 г. в Амстердаме вышла книга "Три путешествия" переведённую на многие языки мира (In 1676 in Amsterdam the book "Three Voyages" was published and then translated into many languages of the world). This was, by the way, Jan Struys's "Perilous Voyages," which was really "The perilous and most unhappy voyages of Jan Struys Through Italy, Greece, Lifeland, Muscovia, Tartary, Media, Persia, East-India, Japan, and other places in Europe, Africa and Asia."

Sounds great.

Путешествие is also now used to describe a particular kind of trip: Свадебное путешествие в Грецию - отличное начало семейной жизни (A honeymoon to Greece is a terrific start to married life).

That sounds great, too.

Other trips-with-goals sound less fun. Командировка comes from French (commander) and/or German (commandiren) and a few centuries ago had a number of meanings associated with military missions and orders for them. Now it is the standard term for a business trip when an employee is sent by his or her employer. In the Old Days, business trips abroad from the Soviet Union had a variety of benefits: Муж маминой приятельницы как-то из заграничной командировки привёз чудо-средство, которое помогло избавиться от алкогольной зависимости (The husband of my mother's friend once brought back from a foreign business trip a miraculous drug that helped him get over alcohol dependency). Из каждой командировки моя мама старалась привезти для своей коллекции кукол что-нибудь новенькое (My mother tried to bring back from every business trip something new for her doll collection).

The other good things about business trips are командировочные (per diem, travel

allowance). Except when you don't get them: Командировочные ей никто не выплачивал, деньги на поездки приходилось занимать у подруги (No one gave her a travel allowance, so she had to borrow money for the trips from her friend).

But you need to pay attention: командировочные can also mean people: Гостей было много, человек тридцать, местные и командировочные (There were a lot of guests, probably about 30 people, both locals and business travelers).

While we're speaking of money, командировочные (travel allowance) is different from подъёмные (relocation allowance). The latter is usually — hopefully, preferably — provided by an employer who wants you to move to take a job. Я согласился, получил подъёмные от издательства и отбыл в столицу Каталонии (I agreed, got a relocation allowance from the publishing house and set off for the capital of Catalonia).

Now that definitely sounds great.

Today terms for pleasure or leisure trips in Russian are heavily influenced by the English-speaking tourism industry. You can buy туристические поездки (tourist trips), тур-пакеты (package tours); or simply туры по Европе (tours around Europe) all organized by a тур-оператор (tour operator).

But in the Old Days туризм also meant all kinds of walking and hiking trips, including what is now called wilderness trekking, off-trail hiking, or backpacking. It was all the rage and heartily encouraged by the powers that be: Пролетарский туризм ⊠ орудие культурной революции (Proletarian nature hikes are the weapon of the cultural revolution).

These hikes could be quite serious: Эльбрус и подступы к нему ⊠ излюбленные маршруты энтузиастов альпинизма, самого сложного и захватывающего вида туризма (Elbrus and its lower slopes are the favorite hiking routes for mountain climbing, which is the most complicated and captivating form of hiking).

That sounds... daunting.

And then there is yet another word that has a range of meanings depending on speaker, age, and era: путёвка. In the Soviet period, путёвка was a trip voucher to a sanatorium, resort, camp, tour, excursion or even special classes. Getting a путёвка to a good health resort was a major perk of top-tier Communist Party organizations. Those folks had it good: На курорты ездили, по путёвке. В Германии были, в Польше, в Болгарии, на Золотых Песках, в Прибалтике (We got vouchers to resorts. We were in Germany, Poland, Golden Sands in Bulgaria and in the Baltic states). If an employee was valuable, Начальство его ценило, награждало грамотами, премиями, путёвками (The higher-ups valued him, so they gave him awards, bonuses and trip vouchers).

Путёвка can also mean a good start, a foot up, as in the phrase путёвка в жизнь (a great start in life).

Today it might just mean a package trip that you buy: Мы купили путёвки в Грецию (We bought vacation packages to Greece).

And after all the non-vacation traveling I've been doing, that sounds perfect.

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