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The Russian dictator's summer vacation home in this seaside city was outfitted to reflect his life and times.

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See Joseph Stalin’s Sochi

LESTER HOLT, anchor:
The current Olympics aside, one of the main attractions here in this Black Sea Resort— the vacation home of Joseph Stalin. As you’re about to see, it says a lot about one of the most murderous dictators in history. Preserved in the hills of Sochi, stands the stately villa or dacha—as it’s called here—that became the favorite of Russia’s most notorious 20th century leader, Joseph Stalin, more than 70 years ago. The ceiling is the original?

WOMAN (through translator): Yes. The ceiling, it’s chestnut.

HOLT: This is very austere. The ruthless dictator who ordered massive purges and executions killing millions of Soviet citizens would retreat here with his family in the autumn months.

WOMAN (through translator): He loved billiards, though he was really bad at it.

HOLT: So these steps are shorter than normal? It was built with Stalin’s afflictions in mind.

WOMAN (through translator): The stairways were made to accommodate Stalin’s gait, he suffered from joint pain.

HOLT: Along with his sense of modesty. This was his swimming pool?

WOMAN (through translator): Yes, he never went to the sea shore.

HOLT: He didn’t like to show his body in public. There were no carpets when Stalin lived here. He wanted to hear if anybody was sneaking up on him. Not very comfortable. A horse hair-filled sofa was designed to stop bullets, specially designed keyhole covers block prying eyes and other threats from his conference room. You couldn’t see through?

WOMAN: Mm-Hm.

HOLT: Yeah. A wax-likeness of Stalin sits in a parlor along with his desk, and the phone that connected him to the Kremlin. I don’t know what the Russian word for creepy is.

WOMAN (through translator): It’s an unusual a surprising rendition. That’s why it produces such an effect.

HOLT: It’s a fascinating, if not disturbing journey into the life of a brutal and long-despised figure whose image in Russia, according to opinion surveys, has actually improved since the end of the Cold War—with Stalin seen by more and more Russians as a wise leader who brought the Soviet Union to might and
GALINA SEMENOWA (Sochi History Museum): Some great victories in our country also are connected with Stalin, the victory in the Great Patriotic War.

HOLT: At this school outside Moscow, students learn all about Stalin, but differ on history’s judgment.

BOY: I will never forgive him for what he’ve done.

GIRL: He brought Russia to next level.

HOLT: In Sochi, he is viewed by some as a sort of city father.

SEMENOWA: We often call a resort as the Stalin Resort, because he personally initiated the development of Sochi.

HOLT: But while Joseph Stalin once relaxed in this idyllic setting, visitors are reminded that it was also here that he may have set some of his most brutal policies into motion. Parts of that home are now used as a hotel, and rooms can be rented there.