

MOSCOW

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“Moscow, breathing fire like a human volcano with its smouldering lava of passion, ambition and politics, its hurly-burly of meetings and entertainment.... Moscow seethes and bubbles and gasps for air. It’s always thirsting for something new, the newest events, the latest sensation. Everyone wants to be the first to know. It’s the rhythm of life today.” Svetlana Alliluevya (b. 1925), Russian writer.

“*Introduction, Twenty Letters to a Friend*” (first published 1963, repr. 1967).

With more than twelve million inhabitants, the capital of Moscow is the largest city in Europe, as well as one of the largest in the world.

Russians and Ukrainians represent the largest ethnic groups in Moscow, followed by nearly 250,000 Tartars.

Moscow was founded in 1147. Since then it has been rebuilt many times, but in the central part of the city, you still find many thoroughfares running in strange directions. The old Russian saying “all roads start at the Kremlin” is quite obvious when you consult a street map. The Moscow subway map has a similar appearance.

The city and its outskirts consist of three major boulevards called the “ring” roads, extending concentrically out from the Kremlin, which is located on the north bank of the Moskva River. The “ring” roads are

intersected by a maze of avenues and cross streets like the design of a spider's web. Although the streets, including the "ring" roads, may seem difficult to navigate, the streets are clearly marked. Current maps have current names, and, while an outdated street sign may be seen on occasion from the Soviet times, the current name will be obvious. In addition, bookstores and kiosks sell a guide entitled, "Passazhirsky Transport Moskvyy." This book contains information regarding routes and schedules for Moscow public transport.

Russian is the national language in Moscow. Although English is taught everywhere from schools to universities, it is not used widely in everyday interactions. Your Russian colleagues are likely to speak some English; nonetheless, it is recommended to carry a good book of phrases and learn basic courtesy phrases to make your introduction to Moscow smoother. Russians appreciate foreigners who take the time to learn their language.

In order to operate successfully, however, it is recommended that you have a good understanding of the Russian language before venturing into any business dealings, or hire an interpreter. Also, by understanding the local language, you may be able to keep on top of the economic and business changes occurring on a daily basis.

Moscow has warm summers and bitterly cold, snowy winters. The city is typically snow-covered from October until March. The heaviest rainfall occurs in July and August.

Due to Moscow's cold and wet climate, it is advisable to bring along water-resistant boots and warm clothing. Even if your visit will take place in the warmer seasons, be prepared for chilly weather and possibly unheated buildings. Conversely, if you visit Moscow in the winter, pack and dress in layers; buildings are kept quite warm during the winter months. Please be aware that most Russian heating units are shut off from April to October, regardless of the temperature.

Additionally, in Moscow, from May to August, the water system undergoes two to three weeks of maintenance, meaning that hot water is unavailable. This rotates around Moscow by neighborhood, and advance warning is given.

Tasteful, conservative clothing styles are preferred in Moscow.

Business suits should be worn for meetings, and you should follow your host's lead before removing your jacket in the workplace. Women should also wear suits or conservative dresses for business meetings.

For social situations, more casual clothes are permissible, although ostentatious styles as well as shorts are both considered somewhat inappropriate in public.

Muscovites are generally conservative in their style, and they do not like to be overt in their actions or expressions. They may be perceived as generally conservative in business matters as well. They also have a reputation of great loyalty and hospitality to those with whom they are close.

Despite the problems inherent in any fledgling free-market economy, the Western market is beginning to make its presence known in Russia. In Moscow, the business environment may be perceived as more bureaucratic in its conventions than are its Western counterparts. Much of the bureaucracy is a holdover from the climate created by the (previous) Soviet government. Therefore, allow ample time in your business dealings, as the Russian penchant for thoroughness may result in a project taking a longer time to complete than what you are used to in your home country.

Business in Russia moves more slowly than in other countries. In bigger cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, almost any business will have Internet and fax. Important documents should not be sent by Russian post. Instead, courier services such as DHL should be used. Russian post is slow and infamously unreliable; however, even letters sent via courier from abroad take a bit longer to be delivered than in many countries. Similarly, all verbal agreements should be confirmed

in writing, as telephone conversations and meetings that have not been transcribed can be easily or conveniently forgotten.

Although communications may encounter delays, punctuality is very important. The traffic in major cities, especially Moscow, can be horrendous during peak hours, so allow plenty of time to reach your destination. If you are on your way to an important meeting, be sure to carry contact numbers of associates in case you encounter difficulties en route. Conservative but stylish is the smartest way to dress for business in Russia. Businessmen can not go wrong wearing dark suits with polished shoes. Females working in Russian business should also take care to dress conservatively, in suits with skirts no shorter than knee-length. In general, urban Russians take great care with how they dress, regardless of income. A positive appearance is vital, demanding that shoes be kept clean and clothes well-pressed.

The rules of business change quite often in Russia. Whatever rules have been installed to maintain stability are constantly being broken to best suit each individual venture. The current Russian legislation requires potential foreign investment to go through a lot of time-consuming bureaucracy in order to be established.

Meetings should be confirmed at least a few days ahead of time, and if possible, again the day before. If anything unexpected occurs and you cannot make it to the meeting on time or at all, be sure to contact your business associates to let them know of the change. If it is too late to call that person, send a colleague from your home office with a message about your delay or cancellation.

Most Muscovites seem to conduct business in a way that is similar to the Western-style. A business meeting would begin typically at 9:00 a.m. around a conference table arranged with beverages and pastries. Talks break for lunch at 1:00 p.m. This could last until mid-afternoon. A meeting involving a negotiation will undoubtedly last throughout the day, for an abundance of information is very important. Russian businesspeople take their time making decisions.

Although most business entertaining takes places in restaurants, it is possible that expatriate colleagues will be invited to dine at a fellow businessperson's home. Outside of official business, some part of entertaining can be done at home. It may be appropriate to host a dinner party for close friends and associates once you have settled in to life in Russia. In the meantime, when visiting a Russian home there are some simple courtesies that are good to remember in order to

avoid embarrassment.

When entering a Russian home, it is expected that you will remove your shoes in order to avoid tracking snow or mud onto the floors. Sometimes slippers will be provided, or you may decide to carry your own for just such an occasion, but if not, it is acceptable to walk around in your socks or stockings.

It is always a nice gesture to bring a small gift for your host and/or hostess. Flowers for the lady and a small bottle of wine or vodka for the gentleman is standard, assuming that he drinks. If your host is known to abstain from alcohol, select another comparable gift. Note, flowers should be given only in odd numbers, as an even number of flowers is associated with funerals.

The toast is a vital part of the Russian dining experience; therefore it is very important to participate. Refusing to do so is considered to be quite rude. You may also keep in mind that, as a special guest, you might be asked to give the evening's toast. If you do not wish to imbibe, it is recommended to merely sip from your glass after a toast is offered, and be polite but firm in your refusals for repeated refills.

Muscovites, like most Russians, are quite well-educated and love discussing culture such as art and music, as well as current events. Although they are quite critical of their own country, Russians are patriotic at heart. Refrain from making overtly negative comments that might alienate your host or fellow guests, such as the cold war. Similarly, avoid stereotypical remarks about how advanced the West is compared to Russia; this will not endear you to your native colleagues. Safe conversation is sports and other topics not related to politics, the economic situation or the government.

Most modern amenities do exist in Moscow. Shop owners and merchants have acclimated themselves to the higher demand of goods and keep shelves well-stocked. New residents may still need to shop around for the best selection and prices, as they vary widely. Despite some inconveniences, an assignment to Russia can be an extraordinary experience for foreign nationals and their families.

Since Moscow is in the midst of economic and political change, personal security remains an important factor for all foreigners living or visiting the country. Theft and pick pocketing are common in major tourist areas, as well as in city streets. There are, like in every big city of the world, occasional violent incidents. Public transportation and underground walkways present an increased risk of petty theft or

confrontation, especially at night. Also at night, there are more inebriated people on the streets, coming from local clubs or pubs. While public consumption of alcohol is officially prohibited, it is still widespread and can be surprising to new arrivals in Moscow or Russia in general.

Until they become familiar with the city and more comfortable traveling alone, many newcomers prefer to travel in groups or pairs. Otherwise, they can use private taxis or drive themselves when appropriately licensed. Keep in mind that taxis are very different in Moscow and are really just evolving as an industry. "Flagging a car" is still very common for Russians, in other words, every car on the road is a potential taxi, and the price is negotiated. For obvious safety reasons, people are highly discouraged from utilizing this system. Official taxis do exist but are not available in great numbers. Official taxis can often take 30–60 minutes to arrive, even to central locations, and they normally have a minimum charge. However, official taxis should be ordered by telephone to create a record of your trip to reduce risk. Getting into an official taxi on the street still carries risk.

Airport pickup should absolutely be planned in advance. If a visitor cannot arrange a ride in advance, use the official taxi stand in the airport. While it may be more expensive, it will be far safer than

accepting a ride from the crowds of "taxi drivers" offering their services. If you have hotel reservations, it is a good idea to request that a hotel cab meet you at the international airport, Sheremetyevo-2.

Some official taxis can be found on the Moscow streets. If you are lucky, you may find an official cab, recognizable yellow Volgas. Otherwise, many are limited to taking unofficial taxis with private cars. These can be hailed from the street, whereas "real" taxis are reserved in advance. Most of the time, neither official nor unofficial taxis are metered, regardless of whether there is a meter in the car. Try to negotiate the fare before you get into the vehicle, so that you do not find yourself getting cheated once the trip is done.

You can hire a taxi by calling Tel: [7](495) 927-0000, the number for the city's Central Taxi Service. The taxi will arrive in 15 minutes to one hour, but the operator will call you back to tell the car plate number and the exact time of arrival. Always ask the driver what you are expected to pay for your journey before you go.

Another new feature in Moscow is two companies called "Pink Taxi" and "Ladies Red Taxi" that are cars driven by women for women. Currently, between the two companies, there are about 30 cars on the

road with over 50 female drivers. Both companies came about to insure that women will get safe rides to and from their homes, businesses, daycare, children's school, etc. Pink Taxi drives only women, whereas Ladies Red Taxi will drive men or women. England, Australia, Japan and Dubai also offer this women's only service.

In Moscow, individuals should avoid large groups or demonstrations. In addition, foreigners should be wary of children, as groups of children have been known to assault and rob foreigners. Airports, hotels, restaurants, train stations and underground walkways are frequent sites for such assaults and other illicit activities. Robberies often occur outside night-clubs and in taxis, so it is wise to avoid drinking in excess, hailing unofficial taxis or sharing any taxi with strangers. Taking a shared taxi at night is not advisable, since there have been reports of robberies by fellow travelers.

Also, expatriates of African or Asian descent may face harassment by some locals. Although this has occurred in isolated incidents, it is a security issue that should be considered by anyone traveling alone. Some travelers have identified rynoks, or open-air markets, as a place where such harassment is more common.

Most expatriates who have been living in Moscow for a while can tell

you about the indifferent approach of the local police or militia. They are better known to stop foreigners for random documentation checks than to help them if there has been a theft or harassment. In the case of petty theft, it does not hurt to go to a local militia station and fill out a report, but most of the time these cases are left unresolved and items unfound. Residents who feel that their safety is in danger may find similar apathy amongst the police. Unless a crime has been committed, more often than not the response is "no harm, no foul," meaning that if no harm has been done, there is no reason to be concerned.

Because of the militia's indifference to threatening situations, it is even more important to remain aware of your surroundings at all times. People who have been drinking alcohol are more vulnerable to theft and attack. If you choose not to abstain from alcohol, it is a good idea to designate a sober friend to make sure that you get home safely.

Inclement weather and drunk drivers account for most of the automobile accidents on Russian roads. Lack of routine road and vehicular maintenance adds to the already hazardous driving conditions, in addition to aggressive drivers that disregard red lights, etc. Pedestrians should never assume that a car will stop, even if the

pedestrian has the obvious right of way. Minor accidents are commonplace. Be aware that traffic police frequently request cash "fines" from drivers.

Police harassment on the roads is endemic and makes driving even more difficult for those who do not speak Russian. Whenever in public, people should have their passports, visas and local registration available. When driving, the driver also must have all required licenses and vehicle paperwork.

There are more serious security concerns in some regions of Russia, particularly in areas such as Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia. Always consult the local news and your embassy or consulate before planning any travel to, near or over these areas.

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