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Natives of Moscow, as well as those who made this city their home long ago, lose track of how many winters they have borne out here. But I am still counting. For me, this will be my third consecutive winter in Moscow and my fourth winter in Moscow overall.

When does a newcomer stop counting? Maybe it is when the cold no longer chills to the bone. I reached that stage after my first winter here, a season that reset my thermostat. I remember an especially bitterly cold afternoon in February a decade ago when I was standing outside and slipped off gloves and then mittens — yes, I was wearing both — only to watch my hands turn blue. Ten years later, I sometimes forget the gloves at home and use my coat pockets if my hands get cold.

Perhaps the counting ends when the snow is no longer a burden. That point, too, has passed. On a wintry morning last year, I phoned for a taxi to catch a red-eye flight and spelled out my address. But confusion ensued anyway, and I ended up dragging a suitcase half a kilometer through 15 centimeters of snow at 4 a.m.

I didn’t mind a bit. When you have only one option, as is often the case in Russia, you deal with it. That’s winter in a nutshell: From December through March, it is the only choice. Russian traditions embrace the season, with much-loved sports in the snow and ice, a steam-filled banya, and an appreciation of the snow’s solemn beauty. In this year’s Winter Guide, we touch on all of these aspects of winter. There are articles on fitness, spas, travel and sightseeing, in addition to a preview of the season’s gigs, concerts and comforts. In other words, we make the most of our sole choice. We wish you a season of warmth and celebration this winter. Happy holidays.

Rachel Nielsen, Supplements Editor
r.nielsen@imedia.ru
Getting Out and About

FROM NEW YEAR'S REVELRY TO CHRISTMAS DESSERTS TO MOSCOW RIVER CRUISES, YOU CAN TAKE YOUR PICK OF WAYS TO ENJOY THE SEASON. MARK THE HOLIDAYS WITH PASTIMES BIG, SMALL AND IN-BETWEEN.

C

elebrate the holidays with cheap eats, formal dinners, folklore themes, trin- ket shopping or river views — or all of these. Whatever you’re looking for during Moscow’s holiday season, it is here for the taking. As the season spins from Western Christmas and Hanukkah in December to New Year’s and then Orthodox Christmas in early January, it is easy to find a reason to be festive. It also should be easy to find a place where you can enjoy yourself:

HOLIDAY SWEETS

Volkonsky Cafe bills itself as “cafe – confectionery – bakery.” It certainly tries to live up to all three parts of the promise from Dec. 15 onward, when it begins to sell its New Year’s and Christmas goodies. Those include classic gingerbread houses and buche de Noel. The company keeps a shop off Rublyovo-Uspenskoye Shosse, the highway to super-rich neighborhoods, but you can find more accessible locations in the city, such as 2/46 Bolshaya Sadovaya Ulitsa near Metro Mayakovskaya, tel. 699-3620, or 27/29 Ulitsa Sretenska near Metro Sukharevskaya, tel. 607-1980. Volkonsky’s other shops in Moscow are listed online at www.volkonsky.com.

CHILDREN’S THEATER

The School of Dramatic Arts is promising a proper winter tale for the Russian holidays with “Taina Propavsheho Snega,” or “The Secret of the Fallen Snow.” This play for children is both a family outing and a work for “children from six to 99,” according to the playhouse web site. The central character is Ai, a young girl and amateur detective. The play runs from Dec. 24 to Jan. 7 with showtimes at noon and 4 p.m. The show is just under an hour and a half. The theater is situated at 19/27 Ulitsa Sretenska, a 15-minute walk from Metro Sukharevskaya. Tel. 632-9344. www.sdart.ru

CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Moscow may not believe in tears, and it may never sleep, but its heart will be warmed by a months-long festival this December and January. The fifth annual Russian Winter Christmas Festival will come to Ploshchad Revolyutsy, near the Kremlin, from Dec. 1 through Jan. 19. Although the festival continues a five-year tradition, organizers have promised modifications this year: European customs have been added to the existing Russian folklore themes, and the square will be decked out with four huge holiday trees, red Christmas huts, and animal figures forged by blacksmiths. Also, organizers have said new world records will be set on the square each Saturday by record-hold- ing strongman Alexander Muromsky. Other attractions include an ice show, kids’ rides and an ice bath for diving. Gifts, souvenirs and arts and crafts will be on sale at a craft fair styled to look like a 19th-century village.

RED SQUARE FIREWORKS

Witnessing the New Year’s fireworks from Red Square is a fantastic mix of dazzling pyrotechnics, popping corks and crackling sparklers. (Imagine the picture at left with sound.) Getting to midnight takes patience and stamina, but it is worth the wait, as the cacophony of lights, bursts and pealing bells is overwhelming and unforgettable. To land a spot on Red Square proper, arrive at the Okhotny Ryad metro station by 9 p.m. Probably there will be a long queue for metal detectors and bag searches, but the lines go quickly and calmly. Once you’re on the square, any spot is a good one. For latecomers, alternative locations are Manezh Square, Tverskaya Ulitsa, the front steps of the Lenin State Library and the embankments of the Moscow River.

FINE DINING

The best restaurant in Russia, the height of Russian haute cuisine, five out of five stars. All of those laurels have been tossed at Cafe Pushkin, which opened its antiqued interior and launched its fine dining menu in 1999. Most prices are commensurate with Pushkin’s highbrow tastes — but if you have a weekday afternoon to spare, you can sample the restaurant’s dishes for about $40 per person during its business lunch. The price includes water, coffee, tea or other basic drinks; a salad course; a soup course; and a main course. The portions are modest, but the food is delicious and filling. It’s acceptable to wear jeans (though best with a blazer or blouse) and you can pay by credit card. Thus, using an afternoon of winter vacation can allow a peek into the five-star haute cuisine best. Tel. 739-0033. 26A Tverskoy Bulvar. Metro stations Pushkinskaya, Chekhovskaya, Tverskaya.

VEGETARIAN EATS

Jagannath, one of the most popular and established vegetarian restaurants in Moscow, will keep dishing out its fare through the winter, including holidays. It’s open every day from 10 a.m. till 11 p.m. Near the Kuznetsky Most and Lubyanka metro stops at
11 Kuznetsky Most Ulitsa, the cafe-restaurant serves vegetarian versions of Russian favorites like shashlik, cutlets, borsh and shchi, as well as a smattering of Thai, Indian and Japanese. The prices are just as unique, with most dishes costing about 90 rubles. You also can print out a coupon for a 10 percent discount from the Skidki tab at jagan-nath.ru. General telephone and reservations, 628-3580.

MULTICULTURAL PALATE

On the second floor of a South Korean hotel in the Russian capital, taste the fusion cuisine from a French chef. Les Menus, a restaurant that claims “the bold and experimental cuisine” of Michelin three-star chef Pierre Gagnaire, is in Lotte Hotel Moscow between the Arbat and Novy Arbat. The opulent white, gray and gold interior will seat guests for a sumptuous multicourse meal. Dishes will include foie gras terrine with smoked duck, salpicon of scallop and shrimp with green curry and roasted pheasant with green peppers, plus desserts. The price is 5,000 rubles. Reservations, of course, are required. Tel. 287-0515. The menu and price, listed under “Special Offers” at www. lottehotel.ru., are available Dec. 19-30.

MOSCOW BY WATER

Whereas other cruise ships stop plying the Moscow River in the deep of winter, the five ice-breaking cruise ships run by the Radisson Royal Hotel keep sailing. Moreover, they do so in such a graceful manner that waiters onboard don’t have to worry about spilling as they fill up the champagne flutes, the web site for the hotel company’s cruise promises. Passengers can spend the whole time in the restaurant admiring the sights through arcing panoramic windows or venture out on deck for a closer view. The cruises depart from the pier outside the Radisson Royal Hotel (also known as the Hotel Ukraina) near Metro Kieskaya, and they follow the river through the center of Moscow before turning around at Novospassky Monastery just south of the Taganka neighborhood. During the cruise, which lasts from two and a half to three hours, passengers will see such local landmarks as the White House (the center of the Russian government), Novodevichy Convent (the gold- and silver-domed church estate from 1524), Moscow State University, Dom-na-Naberezhnaya (where Soviet officials lived), the Kremlin and St. Basil’s Cathedral. To get everyone in the holiday spirit, the Radisson cruise ships will have a Christmas tree onboard from Dec. 17 through Jan. 8. Boats leave two to three times a day on weekdays and five times a day on Saturdays and Sundays. Children 5 years or younger sail for free, 6- to 12-year-olds can go for 600 rubles and everyone else pays the full ticket price of 800 rubles. Tickets can be booked online at radisson-cruise.ru (click on the British flag in the upper left-hand corner for English) or over the phone at 228-5555.
Listening to Moscow’s Sounds

Music For, During and After the Holidays

Thursday, Dec. 15
Shesnadtsat Tonn
Murakami. Rock alternative with two spunky, energetic frontwomen.

SDK MAI
Muzikalny Kollektiv Petra Nalicha (The Peter Nalitch Music Collective). Soulful singer backed by guitar and sometimes saxophone.

Friday, Dec. 16
Shesnadtsat Tonn
Delfin (Dolphin). Sad drums, lonely guitar. A star of the Russian alternative music scene.

Saturday, Dec. 17
Krizis Zhanra
Krakatoa. Back-to-the-basics retro rock from London. Krakatoa is a young band looking to make its name.

Sunday, Dec. 18
Milk Moscow
Blastfest 2011. Britpop forefathers Suede are set to headline the event, but fellow Londoners S.C.U.M. will represent the next generation.

Wednesday, Dec. 21
Crocus City Hall
Jose Carreras. The Spanish-born opera great performs with symphony orchestra and children’s choir.

Friday, Dec. 23
B2
Kvartal. Jazz group in the avant-lounge genre.

Shesnadtsat Tonn
Underground Hip-Hop Xnas
Good Hash Production. Also playing will be MESR (Chyornaya Ekonomika), Zhyoltaya Vetka (The Yellow Line), dj Yojimbo, Tyvordy Milki (Polumyagkiye), SNEZ, Neshito (Something), nevponyatkah and KPRh.

Saturday, Dec. 24
B2
Bumboks (Boombox). Ukrainian funk-rock group.

Krizis Zhanra
U-Phone. If you grew up on Western rock ‘n’ roll, you can hear familiar tunes from this local cover band.

Sunday, Dec. 25
Arena Moscow
Korol i Shut (The King and The Joker). Spiked hair and heavy beats. Punk rock band with a mix of styles, from head-banging beats, to acoustic guitar and violins, to frenetic drums.

Wednesday, Dec. 28
Shesnadtsat Tonn
Splin (Splean). Songs about love, loss and life. The group won Video of the Year at the MTV Russia Music Awards in 2007 and released its most recent album in 2009.

Saturday, Dec. 31
B2
New Year’s at B2. Four floors of DJs and bands, including 1980s disco, pop singer Alexander Titov, pop rock-fusion singer Valery Storonsky, young jazz singer Polina Kasyanova and Djangoband, and more.

Shesnadtsat Tonn
New Year’s Party 2012 at Shestnadtsat Tonn: The Bi-2 Holiday Concert. Chart-topping Russian group Bi-2 rings in the new year with their brand of goth- and industrial-flavored rock.

Wednesday, Jan. 4
Shesnadtsat Tonn
Zimavsvegda (Winter Forever). A band known as Russia’s answer to pop rock group Maroon 5.

WHERE TO GO & HOW TO GET THERE


**B2.** 8/1 Bolshaya Sadovaya Ulitsa. Metro Mayakovskaya. Tel. 650-9909, 650-9918. b2club.ru

**Crocus City Hall.** Crocus City in the Crocus Expo Center, Pavilion 3. 65-66 Kilometer of the MKAD. General and ticket office tel. (499) 550-0055. www.crocus-hall.ru/contacts

**Krizis Zhanra.** 16/16 Ulitsa Pokrova. Metro Chistiye Prudy. Tel. 623-2594. kriziszhanra.ru

**Milk Moscow.** 9 Ulitsa Sergeya Makeyeva. Metro Ulitsa 1905 Goda. Ticket office tel. 726-0998. milkclub.ru

**SDK MAI.** 4A/1 Dubosekovskaya Ulitsa. Metro Voikovskaya. Tel. 785-1760. www.cdk.ru/sh_new.html

Pavilion is an iconic restaurant, with Russian cuisine and elements of the Soviet era. 7 Bolshoi Partiarsky Pereulok, Moscow

Pavilion invites you to celebrate the New Year’s holiday with us! A cozy atmosphere, a nostalgic menu inspired by the Soviet past, savory meats and, of course, unbelievably delicious fruit liqueurs — you can find everything at Pavilion Cafe. It’s a wonderful place to bring in the New Year.

Pavilion is like the classic New Year’s movie “Irony of Fate” — everything is so familiar but still exciting. And with the holidays coming, the cafe draws guests like a magnet. It’s not just the unique location in the picturesque Patriarch’s Ponds. Even far from mysticism and superstition, people say this place has a special energy. No wonder Bulgakov chose to describe these ponds in his immortal novel, “The Master and Margarita.”

Even the most fussy connoisseur is not likely to resist the flawlessly presented dishes, such as dressed herring, river fish cutlets with mashed potatoes, cherry dumplings; the list goes on and on. Meat lovers will also not go hungry. Pavilion offers a special meat menu all winter. You can start with an appetizing venison carpaccio; the tender deer meat cut into thin strips is served with pine nuts, sea buckthorn sauce and marinated red onion. Among other tasty “bounties of the forest” offered in the fall menu are wild boar medallions with pear jelly, as well as bear meat baked with barley risotto and porcini mushrooms. Vegetarian dishes include bell pepper lecso, eggplant caviar and salted white mushrooms.

The most important aspect, though, is the cafe’s unique atmosphere, embodied in darling interior details like curtains on the windows, stylish black-and-white photographs on the walls and even hostesses dressed in ‘50s fashion — not to mention the musical accompaniment, composed and compiled by Valery Syutkin. Hits by Alla Pugachyova, Yury Antonov, Alexander Rozenbaum and other maestros of the Soviet era are often performed live for guests.
Spas Make Your Wallet Lighter

But Winter Brighter

Though their services won’t come cheaply, Moscow’s 5-star hotel spas can help you relax with skin and massage treatments. You just might be tempted to let them.

By RACHEL NIELSEN

Moscow’s five-star hotels receive visitors for business conferences, interview sessions and weekend getaways — but they wouldn’t mind if you visited for a massage or a facial.

That’s because the international five-star hotels that have opened here in recent years include on-site spas, where an array of massage therapies, skin treatments and other specialties await. For this issue of Winter Guide, we poked around for special offers from these spas and even tested the spa experience to find out what the hype is all about.

Along the way, we made some findings about the spa business at Moscow’s five-star accommodations. The most curious finding was that spas are seeking male customers, as well as customers who visit as a pair (as in a pair of friends) or a couple (as in a romantic couple). Upscale hotel spas provide, for example, side-by-side massages and double whirlpool baths. They also sell gift certificates for those who want to give spa visits as a present. And though women are the No. 1 customer of spas in Russia, as they are worldwide, hotels are fishing for young and middle-aged men with skin care and massage services.

Facials and massages are the cornerstones of the so-called day spa, which draws in clients for one- or two-hour sessions. In that amount of time, clients can receive the skin or body therapy. (A facial is a deep cleaning of the complexion.)

At most spas, sessions last an hour, and offerings run the gamut from Swedish to Thai to Chinese acupressure to fusion styles. Stretched out on a massage table, the customer receives a toe-to-head kneading, and that was my fate as well. I also received a pounding and a slapping, but you can tell the massage therapist to use a lighter approach, as I did. The lighting is dim, and spas play music for relaxation in the background. I listened to crashing waves in a minor key as the therapist worked me over.

Except for the head, the feet and the part of the body that the therapist is massaging at that moment, the body is covered with towels so that it stays warm and limber. After the massage, you put on your robe or clothes in the massage room — you can relax on the table for a few minutes, but not so long as to delay preparation for the next appointment — and then head to a lounge for a cup of tea.

The massage therapist served me a cup of mint tea with butter cookies, and I enjoyed those while I read GQ Magazine in Russian and leafed through an article about Ryan Gosling and how fabulous he supposedly is. Overall, it was a mellow experience.

Facials are the other part of the spa experience. They are a deep cleansing of the facial complexion and, for women, of the decolletage and neck as well. Though I didn’t test this service, I learned from my reporting that facials should adhere to strict rules. They should be performed by an aesthetician, or skin care specialist, who trained at an institute and knows how to evaluate minor skin problems and treat them without making them worse. In short, this person’s job is to make your face healthier.

Just like massage clients, skin-care clients receive a locker, robe and slippers. Because skin treatments could stain clothing, a facial also requires that you undress. You’ll lie on a towel-draped table, face up, with towels covering you.

Facials follow a set procedure. The aesthetician examines the skin under a bright lamp. Once the skin type is determined (oily, dry, combination or normal), the specialist chooses a treatment. If necessary, it could involve coaxing the pores of the face open with warm towels or light steam and extracting stubborn acne. Some clients report that the so-called extraction process is painful; in the hands of a skilled aesthetician, it should be a mild experience.

The most enjoyable part of the facial ritual is the mask. If the phrase “face mask” conjures up an image of a green-faced woman with her eyes and mouth ringed by glop, you would be correct. At a spa, however, that substance is a facial cleanser from an expensive skin care product line. It is applied as a mask so that the complexion can be treated at the pore level. The product is spread thinly on the face with warm towels or light steam and extracting stubborn acne. Some clients report that the so-called extraction process is painful; in the hands of a skilled aesthetician, it should be a mild experience.

Five-star hotels tend to make a point of training their spa staff. At the Mandarin Spa inside the Lotte Hotel Moscow, all staffers “go through a professional training provided by a certified trainer from Elemis and Mandarin Spa,” said Natalia Lapshina, a spokeswoman for Lotte Hotel Moscow. She said each aesthetician at the spa has a medical degree and a cosmetologist’s
Two-hour massage can run up to 9,400 rubles for a combination face massage and facial. Elsewhere, Mandara charges 5,800 rubles for a 70-minute sport massage costs 3,000 rubles. It's possible to buy a massage or facial at an upscale hotel spa for $70 to $120 dollars. (For less expensive options at standalone spas, including treatments marketed to men, see the box at right.)

What's more, while standalone spas can provide morning- or afternoon-long spa sessions, hotels can offer a multiday spa experience within the hotels by combining a room package with spa treatment. But you pay for what you get, as most of the services at the spas at five-star hotels cost $100 and up. At Swissotel's Purovel, a 60-minute facial costs about 5,000 rubles. That price, which runs until Dec. 31, includes aromatherapy. Also, Mandara is adding a 25-minute massage to its 6,100 ruble Frangipani flower and coconut body wrap from now until Dec. 31. Similarly, a half-hour salt-and-oil scrub at The Ritz-Carlton's ESPA is 3,500 rubles, while prices at the Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow run along the lines of 4,500 rubles for an hour. On top of the price, the usual Russian tip of 10 percent is generally expected (but not required).

For a winter favor to yourself, of course, you can go a much more moderate route. It's possible to buy a massage or facial at an upscale hotel spa for $70 to $120 dollars. (For less expensive options at standalone spas, including treatments marketed to men, see the box at right.)

What's more, there are discounts at some hotels this winter. At Swissotel Krasny Holmy, for example, from now till Jan. 31, free access to the pool, sauna, jacuzzi and tanning beds is given to people who purchase a massage. The guest can use those facilities the same day as the massage or make an appointment for a different day. Mandara Spa at the Lotte has a super-luxurious, hour-and-a-half, four-hand massage package for 5,800 rubles. That price, which runs until Dec. 31, includes aromatherapy. Also, Mandara is adding a 25-minute massage to its 6,100 ruble Frangipani flower and coconut body wrap from now until Dec. 31.

No matter what services or location you use, preparing for a visit is straightforward. Call for an appointment a few days ahead of time. Feel free to ask questions about the spa staff's certification and training, facial or massage procedures, protection for your belongings or any other topic; if the receptionist can't answer your questions and do so without an attitude, call another spa.

For either a massage or facial, spas recommend arriving at least 15 minutes early, giving yourself time to check in and change in an unhurried way.

INSIDE HOTELS….

Quantum Spa & Health Club at Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow
Perhaps the most rarefied spa, with exclusive club membership and a Roman bath. 4 Nagatinsky St. Metro Stations Kuznetsky Most, Lubyanka. Tel. 783-1234 moscow.park.hyatt.com/hyatt/pure/spas/

Mandara Spa at Lotte Hotel Moscow
Exudes cool, calming elegance with dark stone and a lowly lit interior. 8 Novinsky Bulvar, Bldg. 2. Metro Stations Smolenskaya, Light and Dark Blue Lines. Tel. 745-1000. www.lottehotel.ru/facility/mandara-spa-as

ESPA at The Ritz-Carlton Moscow
Prides itself on its decorum and its broad selection of massages and facials. 3 Tverskaya Street. Metro Okhotny Ryad. Tel. 225-8888 www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Moscow/Spa

Purovel Spa & Sport at Swissotel Krasny Holmy

As for what you need to bring, the answer is, almost nothing. Spas give you towels, a bathrobe, slippers, shower soap and shampoo, as well as use of showers, hair dryers and a cabinet with a lock. It's a good idea to have your own shower shoes, plus deodorant and anything you'll need to reapply after a shower.

Last but not least, you'll need to bring your wallet. If the spa lives up to its promises, you will leave with less money, but also a rosier glow and an easier state of mind.

... AND OUTSIDE OF HOTELS

Petit Spa L'Occitane
At its four locations in Moscow, this spa uses beauty products from L'Occitane en Provence for women's and men's facial treatments. There is also a selection of massages, including Swedish-Balinese, hot stone treatment and deep tissue. Most facial and massage services are about 3,000 rubles to 4,000 rubles.

7 Krasok
At First Spa, you can find massage services, hair cutting and styling, makeup services and dermatology treatments. In general, a one-hour massage typically costs 2,450 rubles. For the guys, it offers a spa program called “Men's Health” for 5,400 rubles that consists of massaging bath with sea salt and seaweed, a body peel and a massage. There is also a men's spa program called “Superman.”

Garmoniya Spa Club
Its vast array of services includes fitness evaluations, massages from various traditions, three-hour multimassage packages, body peels and makeup services. At Garmoniya, a half-hour facial costs about 2,000 rubles, an hour-long sugar peel is about 3,000 rubles and a one-hour Thai massage is 2,200 rubles. Gift certificates are available.

7 Krasok
The chain offers Thai and Balinese massage for low to medium prices. In fact, 7 Krasok gives price options on its web site, even noting the lower-priced hours at its high-end location. Those are 6-11 a.m. at Novy Arbat spa in the Elite-Holding Business Center, 101 Povarskaya Ulitsa. Tel. 363-3184, 783-7337, (920) 204-6773. 7 Krasok has about 20 sites throughout the city. General tel. 925-5177. www.7kpacok.ru
Staying Fit
During the Slow Season

PLACES FOR SKATING, DOWNHILL SKIING AND CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING ARE ALL WITHIN REACH OF MOSCOW DWELLERS. FIND OUT WHERE.

By VLADIMIR TYURIN and RACHEL NIELSEN

Keeping in shape during Moscow’s winter is no easy task for those who like to get their exercise outside. In fact, just walking to and from the subway can be a challenge, as ice, snow and slush coat every centimeter of sidewalk for five months of the year.

But for those wanting a vigorous workout, the good news is that Moscow embraces winter sports. Both the capital and its suburbs have ski slopes, cross-country ski trails, ice-skating rinks and spots for snowboarding, and you will have the company of many other winter-lovers. You might even meet them on the way: On winter weekends, Moscow’s subway trains are full of ski- and snowboard-toting passengers.

If you are trying out skiing (or a Russian winter) for the first time, there are some basics that you should learn. To exercise in low temperatures, preparation is a must. Dress in layers of clothing, and if you’re planning a real workout, avoid cotton and go for materials that wick sweat from the skin. If you expect to do cross-country skiing at a fast pace — which is an aerobic workout — use lightweight layers.

Reliable protection from the cold is important. Wear a hat, gloves, socks and boots that stand up to sub-zero temperatures. Also, stick with daylight hours if you’ll be on the slopes or remote trails, and if you’re taking off alone, tell someone where you’ll be.

It’s a good idea to bring bottled water or a thermos with tea when working out in the middle of a park, far from food vendors, but you can get the basics at ski venues: Most sell drinks and snacks, provide changing rooms, and rent out skis, helmets, boots and other gear.

Suited up? Then head out!
ICE SKATING

Putting on skates is one of the cheapest — and healthiest — ways to get moving in the winter. Skates can be rented; call ahead to check on fees and hours.

• Gorky Park. The Soviet-era park has been revamped, and on Dec. 1, its operators opened a new rink that might be Europe’s biggest outdoor rink. It operates from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Instead of separate rental fees, a higher price ranges from 5 kilometers to 45 kilometers. A thick forest shields skiers from the wind, and specialists control the condition of the snow cover. This location has showers and restrooms.

• Volen Sport Park. It’s a skiing center in the town of Yakhroma in the Moscow region. Go to the Alufytevo metro stop, take Bus 401 to Yakhroma. The resort is at 1 Troitskaya St. Tel. 961-0050. www.volen.ru

Volen has both skiing and snowboarding. It is actually a health resort, and you can stay in a hotel, eat in a restaurant and even visit the banya. On weekdays, ski rentals are 400-500 rubles an hour for adults and 200-250 rubles for children 12 and under, while ski boots rent for 250-300 rubles an hour for adults and 125-150 rubles per hour for children 12 and under. Rental costs go up on weekends.

• Sorochany. This sports center is in the town of Kurovo in the Moscow region. Take the metro to Alufytevo, then ride a marshrutka to the resort. Tel. 788-8544. www.sorochany.ru

Sorochany is also a health resort. It has slopes, a restaurant and a cafe. It offers a checkroom for equipment. Adult ski rentals are 130-270 rubles an hour and children’s are 140 rubles an hour. Adult boots rent for 130-200 rubles an hour and children’s for 100 rubles an hour. Prices rise on weekends.


This complex boasts that it has the longest ski slopes in the Moscow area. There’s also a snow park with hills, turns and jumps for snowboarders. Rentals and lessons for are available for both sports.

SKATING IS A FUN PASTIME HERE, BUT HITTING THE SLOPES WITH A SNOWBOARD OR SKIS ISN’T BAD, EITHER.

• Zorky Stadium. Located in the Moscow region city of Krasnogorsk at 37 Rechnaya Street. Take the electric tram from the Alufytevo metro station to the Pavshino stop, then Bus 503 or Bus 533 to the Plotina bus stop.

The stadium offers a variety of ski courses ranging from 5 kilometers to 45 kilometers. A thick forest shields skiers from the wind, and specialists control the condition of the snow cover. This location has showers and restrooms.

• Bittsa Sport Club. Located in southwestern Moscow. Metro stations Chyortanovskaya, Yasenevo, Yuzhnaya, Prazhskaya, Belyayevo or Konkova.

The sprawling park has several ski trails. The Alpha-Bittsa Sport Club is situated inside the park and offers skiing lessons. To reach the club, go to the Yasenevo metro station, then take Bus 101, 202, 165 or 710 to the Zona Oddilka Bittsa stop. By car, it’s at 36 Kilometer, MKAD.

Tel. (926) 216-1277, (926) 207-5639. www.bitza-sport.ru

DOWNHILL SKIING

Sometimes it is a good thing when life goes downhill. Alpine skiing can be had at a number of places in the Moscow area. Typically, a deposit is required for renting skis, helmets, sportswear and the like. • Kant Sport Club. Also known as Nagornaya, this skiing spot is next-door to the Nagornaya metro stop. Tel. (499) 317-8533, 8 (499) 317-4833. www.kant.ru

Kant has slopes for downhill skiing and snowboarding. Call ahead to make sure the ski runs are open given this year’s warm weather. Besides the ski options, Kant has a gym and ice skating.

• Snezhkom. Located in Krasnogorsk. Go to the Tushenskaya metro station, then take Bus 541, 542, 549 or 568 to the ski resort. Tel. 225-2233. www.snej.com

Both downhill skiing and snowboarding are on offer, and there is ice skating and laser paintball. Skis and snowboards rent for 230 rubles an hour for adults and 170 rubles an hour for children 14 and younger. Ski boots go for 170 rubles an hour for adults and 120 rubles an hour for children 14 and younger.

• Volen Sports Park. It’s a skiing center in the town of Yakhroma in the Moscow region. Go to the Alufytevo metro stop, then take Bus 401 to Yakhroma. The resort is at 1 Troitskaya St. Tel. 961-0050. www.volen.ru

Volen has both skiing and snowboarding. It is actually a health resort, and you can stay in a hotel, eat in a restaurant and even visit the banya. On weekdays, ski rentals are 400-500 rubles an hour for adults and 200-250 rubles for children 12 and under, while ski boots rent for 250-300 rubles an hour for adults and 125-150 rubles per hour for children 12 and under. Rental costs go up on weekends.

• Sorochany. This sports center is in the town of Kurovo in the Moscow region. Take the metro to Alufytevo, then ride a marshrutka to the resort. Tel. 788-8544. www.sorochany.ru

Sorochany is also a health resort. It has slopes, a restaurant and a cafe. It offers a checkroom for equipment. Adult ski rentals are 130-270 rubles an hour and children’s are 140 rubles an hour. Adult boots rent for 130-200 rubles an hour and children’s for 100 rubles an hour. Prices rise on weekends.


This complex boasts that it has the longest ski slopes in the Moscow area. There’s also a snow park with hills, turns and jumps for snowboarders. Rentals and lessons for are available for both sports.

Both downhill skiing and snowboarding are on offer, and there is ice skating and laser paintball. Skis and snowboards rent for 230 rubles an hour for adults and 170 rubles an hour for children 14 and younger. Ski boots go for 170 rubles an hour for adults and 120 rubles an hour for children 14 and younger.

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Near and Far: Travels for Your Time Limits

CENTURY-OLD SIGHTS, GREAT ART AND ROYAL ESTATES ABOUND IN WESTERN RUSSIA. NO MATTER WHAT YOUR SCHEDULE, THERE IS A DESTINATION THAT FITS.

By ALEC LUHN

It is an irony of Russian winter that the season gives people time for travel just as plummeting temperatures make travel difficult. Though many people receive up to a week and a half of vacation for New Year’s and Orthodox Christmas, the shrunken mercury in the thermometer can make just about anyone think twice about setting out on a trip. In fact, winter is a great time to check out destinations known for their history and culture. The European part of Russia is short on neither of these. Admiring paintings made by Russian masters and decorative arts carved by ancient hands seem even more fitting when Russian snows lie just outside the window, and a cup of mulled wine is even more satisfying when icy winds howl on the other side of the wall. Outside, the winter weather casts everything — from centuries-old kremlins and churches to timeless rivers and lakes — in a cold, stark beauty. If those reasons weren’t enough to convince you to travel via the subway system. Perhaps the most famous of these estates is Tsaritsyno, the still-unfinished 18th-century palace of Catherine the Great that was restored in 2007. The museum and the park, which takes up more than 700 hectares and is located between the Tsaritsyno and Orekhovo metro stations, includes palaces and service buildings, a greenhouse, a church, ponds and several ancient ruins and grave sites. Although no one will start at the entrances near Shipilovskiy Vorota and Ulitsa Tyurina. Finally, kids will enjoy the ice slides at the visitors’ center and the No. 7 entrance. Tsaritsyno also hosts New Year’s events for children.

The museum offers all of its excursions in foreign languages, although those cost more. The Palace of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in Kolomenskoye

As Russia’s historical capital city, Moscow has plenty of royal palaces and estates to offer the person who wants to travel via the subway system. Perhaps the most famous of these estates is Tsaritsyno, the still-unfinished 18th-century palace of Catherine the Great that was restored in 2007. The museum and the park, which takes up more than 700 hectares and is located between the Tsaritsyno and Orekhovo metro stations, includes palaces and service buildings, a greenhouse, a church, ponds and several ancient ruins and grave sites. Although no one will be boating or picnicking in the winter months, a number of entertainments still await, such as exhibits in the Large Palace and the Bread House.

In addition, a number of cold-weather attractions operate in the park during the winter. Tsaritsyno has two skating rinks, one on the western edge of the park and one near the Orekhovo metro station. In addition, the park opens skiing trails that start at the entrances near Shipilovskiy Vorota and Ulitsa Tyurina. Finally, kids will enjoy the ice slides at the visitors’ center and the No. 7 entrance. Tsaritsyno also hosts New Year’s events for children. The museum offers all of its excursions in foreign languages, although those cost more.

The Palace of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in Kolomenskoye

The museum and Nature Reserve

1 Ulitsa Dolskaya, Moscow

How to get there: Metro stations Tsaritsyno, Orekhovo

(499) 725-7248, tsaritsyno-museum.ru

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The Palace of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in Kolomenskoye

29 Prospekt Andropova, Moscow

How to get there: Metro stations Kolomenskaya, Kashirskaya

(499) 612-5217, (499) 615-27-68 (to order a tour), mgomz.ru

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tent-roofed church in Russia and greatly influenced the development of church architecture in Russia. The church was restored in 2007 and is open to visitors.

FOUR HOURS FROM MOSCOW

Yasnya Polyana Museum and Estate of Leo Tolstoy
Orlovske Shosse, Shchyolkovskiy dis-
trict, Tula region

How to get there: Bus from metro sta-
tions Domodedovskaya, Prazhskaya
or Ulitsa Akademika Vangelova to the
Vystavnoy Pervomaiskaya, or elek-
trichka from Kursky Vokzal. (487) 239-
3599, (487) 517-6125 (to order a tour).
www.yasnayapolyana.ru

Many Russian authors had estates to which
they retreated to work and rest, but few
are as closely associated with an author
as the Yasnya Polyana estate in the Tula
region. Leo Tolstoy was born and buried at
the estate and wrote his masterpieces “War
and Peace” and “Anna Karenina” there.
Today, the estate is overseen by one of
Tolstoy’s descendants, and visitors can see
many of the ponds, gardens and buildings
that existed in Tolstoy’s time. The interior
of the manor house is kept as it was when
Tolstoy died in 1910.

The museum offers various tours of the
buildings in English, German and French, as well as horseback and
sleigh rides. Holiday tours and multi-
day tours are also available. In addition, the
estate celebrates many holidays with
visitors, offering sleigh rides on Russian
Christmas Day (Jan. 7) and the burning of
a Shrovetide scarecrow on Shrove
Tuesday (Feb. 21).

Suzdal
On the M-10 highway, Vladimir region
How to get there: Bus from
Shchyolkovskaya bus station in Moscow
or bus from Vladimir
suzdal-city.ru

Some of the most picturesque places in
Russia at any time of year are the historic
cities of the Golden Ring, and Suzdal stands
out among them as particularly photoge-
nic and unspoiled. The city is about 1,000
years old and was the capital of several
principalities. In the Soviet era, the city
was made into an open-air museum, and
to this day new construction is minimal.
The city’s main attraction is the sprawl-
ing Spaso-Yevfiniyev Monastery, which
contains several churches and museums
and served as a prison in tsarist and Soviet
times. The monastery is now a UNESCO
World Heritage site. Listen for the chorus
of church bells tolling from the monastery
several times a day.

Next to the monastery winds the
Kamenka River, which fills up with sleighs
and ice fishermen once it has frozen over
for the winter. Walk along the river to
take in the sights (the city is not large), or
hire your own sleigh on any of the central
streets. Make sure to negotiate, however,
since the first price the driver gives you is
likely to be inflated.

While you’re in Suzdal, be sure to
sample the local cuisine. Warm up with
some medovucha, a honey-based alco-
holic drink similar to mead.

Two other places in the Golden Ring
well worth the time are Vladimir, which is
near Suzdal, and Sergiyev Posad, which is
much closer to Moscow. Vladimir’s 12th-
century attractions include the white-
walled, cube-shaped Cathedral of St.
Demetrius. Sergiyev Posad is renowned
for its startlingly beautiful Trinity Lavra
monastery, which dates to the 1400s.

Both cities can be easily tacked onto
a trip to Suzdal, making for a multi-
day excursion to cities and towns in the
Golden Ring.

EIGHT HOURS FROM MOSCOW

Novgorod (Veliky Novgorod)
On the M-10 highway, Novgorod region
Public transportation: Train from
Leningradsky Vokzal in Moscow
visitnovgorod.com

As far as historical cities go, Novgorod
called Veliky Novgorod in Russian) is per-
haps the most important. One of the oldest
cities in Russia, Novgorod dates to the end
of the 10th century, if not earlier. It was
the northern center of power in Kiev
Rus and an economic center of Muscovy.

Many of the most interesting and for-
mative moments in early Russian history
took place here. The Viking chieftain Burik
traditionally recognized as the founder of
the Rurikid dynasty that ruled Kiev,
Muscovy and then the Russian tsar-
dom until the 17th century, was allegedly
invited by quarrelsome Slavic tribes in the
area of Novgorod to establish peace and
rule over them. Besides Burik, many early
Russian leaders presided from Novgorod,
including Prince Oleg (who moved his
capital to Kiev to found Kiev Rus),
Prince Yaroslav the Wise and Alexander
Nevyshy. The Russian folktales hero Sadko is
also from Novgorod.

Along with this royal history, the city
is reputed to be the only precedent for
Russian democracy: Beginning in the 13th
century, the veche, or popular assembly,
became a dominant force in the political
structure of Novgorod and its lands. The
Novgorod Republic ended when Ivan the
Great, ruler of Muscovy, took it over in
1478 as he established the Russian tsar-
dom. The city nonetheless remained an
important trading center.

Today, visitors can see many of the
remnants of this rich history. Indeed, the
city claims some 50 examples of ancient
architecture, foremost of which is the
oldest existing kremlin in Russia, replete
with nine towers. Likewise, the Cathedral
of Saint Sophia is one of the oldest stone
structures in the nation. Inside the church,
visitors can admire ancient frescoes and
the graves of prominent Novgorod deni-
zens. Other attractions include a clock-
tower, a handful of monasteries and the
Russia’s Millennium monument.

The city’s many museums offer
impressive collections of art and arti-
facts. For instance, the Novgorod Unified
State Museum and Nature Preserve dis-
plays centuries-old icons and examples of
Russian woodcarving, and the Museum of
Fine Arts houses works by Russian mas-
ters such as Ilya Repin and Ivan Shishkin.

Novgorod’s tourism industry is fairly
developed, and there are two branches of
the city-sponsored Krasnaya Isha tour-
ist information center, at 5 Ploschad
Sennaya and at 2A Ulitsa Studencheskaya
inside the Park Inn hotel. The tourist cen-
ter can provide information on New Year’s
tour packages run by various operators
and can be contacted via visitnovgorod.ru
or at (816) 277-3074 or (816) 299-8666.
A Moscow That Isn’t There

GETTING TO KNOW THE CAPITAL’S HIDDEN CORNERS ISN’T AN EASY TASK, BUT A HISTORICAL TOUR CAN UNCOVER ITS HISTORY AND THEN SOME.

By ALEC LUHN

When Leonid Vidgof looks at historic buildings in Moscow, he can see things others can’t. He knows, for instance, that the two-story strip of concrete material in the wall of the building at 6 Naschokinsky pereulok is leftover from the residence where novelist Mikhail Bulgakov died and where poet Osip Mandelstam was first arrested. Or that the building where novelist Mikhail Lermontov lived with his grandmother (now a Lermontov museum) is a pre-Soviet example of mass construction built after Napoleon burned Moscow.

On a recent Saturday, Vidgof was telling a group of 50 people at Patriarch’s Ponds that they were standing at the side of the pond where the character Dusya, a couple that sang and played the balalaika, a pig and a rooster. Likewise, they saw the house where Josef Stalin called Bulgakov on the phone after the writer had fallen out of favor.

Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet holds indoor lectures and meetings during the winter, then switches to walking excursions in the warmer months. It also offers bus excursions, with participants in the warmth of a coach bus listening to the tour guide talk about sites between stops in various neighborhoods. In a broader sense, the Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet excursions aim to not only convey interesting tidbits about the capital, but also to foster a love for the city to counter the “barbaric attitude toward the history of Moscow” displayed by local authorities, Vidgof said. Many historic buildings have been destroyed in recent years to make way for new development, including the Cathedral Mosque, which dated to 1904 and was torn down Sept. 11, and a mansion at 25 Bolshoi Kozikhinsky Pereulok that dated to the 19th century and was torn down Aug. 8.

“Thanks to the books and excursions [done by our group], the attention of society is directed to this issue,” Vidgof said. “It facilitates a relationship to the city that’s not indifferent, but rather sympathetic.”

Vidgof, who has been working as a tour guide in Moscow for more than 30 years, specializes in literary history tours and has led excursions for Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet on authors and poets including Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Tютчев, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. He has also led excursions for the organization to estates outside of Moscow.

Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet, which means “the Moscow that isn’t,” is actually an Internet community centered on a web site of the same name (moskva.kotoroy.net). The site includes histories of almost 100 local buildings, old maps, information about the group’s publications and exhibits, a blog by the site’s authors and hundreds of historical photographs, panoramic photographs and paintings of the city. It also holds forums for discussing interesting places in the city, identifying places in historical photographs, and conversing about architec-
The organization has participated in protests against the destruction of historic buildings. It even spun off the well-known preservation group Arkhnadzor, which was formed by several online communities following a protest Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet helped organize in 2009. Historical preservation remains at the core of the organization’s activities, including its excursions, Mezentsova said.

BESIDES ITS TOURS, MOSKVA, KOTOROY NYET IS INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO PRESERVE HISTORICAL BUILDINGS.

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“Secondly, it’s a site about the Moscow that needs to be saved.”

Mezentsova and other organizers started the web site in September 2003 and held their first event in defense of old Moscow in 2004. In 2007, they began organizing walking excursions, but information about the walks was available only to those registered to use the site. The excursions were opened to the public in 2008, although readers still must register on the site to sign up for them.

In addition to Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet, a number of other organizations and companies offer tours of historical sites in the capital. Those include Capital Tours, Hop On Hop Off and Patriarchy Dom Tours, which have English-language guides and group tours.

When you show the city [to someone], that person starts to love it,” she explained. “If you love something, you’re going to protect it.”

Although historical Moscow buildings continue to decay or be knocked down, the group has had its victories, most notable of which was the restoration of the Polivanov mansion near Old Arbat. The building was erected in 1823 and had been under government protection since 1960. The house suffered two fires, however, and was falling apart by the time Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet gathered people for a protest in 2004. Volunteers stood outside the house for four days and told passersby about its history and value. In the end, the mansion was eventually renovated.

Readers of the group’s web site also protested to prevent workers from demolishing an ancient church wall that has historically significant buildings currently under threat.

According to an organizer, the group has often been asked about its name, which is meant to suggest both the historical architecture that is being lost and a city history that people see every day but don’t know.

“It’s a site about the side of Moscow that you don’t see,” said Yulia Mezentsova, the director of Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet. “Secondly, it’s a site about the Moscow that needs to be saved.”

Moskva, Kotoroy Nyet is holding winter gatherings. Tickets cost 300 rubles. Planned topics and dates:

- Life in Moscow in 1912 (Dec. 17)
- Moscow journalism in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dec. 21)
- The French diaspora in Moscow (Dec. 25)
- New Year’s gathering on the topic of Soviet resort towns on the Black Sea (Dec. 28)

Occasional bus excursions also take place during winter. Tickets cost 500 rubles. Events are announced on: moskva.kotoroy.net/zapis_progulki

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On Thursday, Dec. 15, United Way of Russia will hold its Fourth Annual Charitable Christmas Bazaar at Ducat Place III. The event will be supported by Cherkizovo, Citi, Clifford Chance CIS Limited, ConocoPhillips Russia Inc., Cushman & Wakefield, Hines International Inc., Kinross Gold Corporation and Latham & Watkins LLP.

Twenty-three charity organizations will be invited to participate in the Christmas Bazaar. Among them: the Center for Curative Pedagogics, the Center of Lifelong Education named after St. George the Victorious, Children, Doroga v Mir, Hesed Hama, the Humanitarian Programs Support Fund, Kidsave, Krug, Maria’s Children, My Vmeste (Kostroma), Nadezhda (Vladimir), Nelshnye Deti, Otkazniki, Preodoleniye-L, Rodnik, Russian House, Sofia, St. George School, the Taganka Children’s Fund, Turmalin and Vuima.

There will be craftworks made by orphans, children deprived of parental care and disabled kids (Bilibino, Chukotka) and by pupils of the Regional School for the Arts (Anadyr, Chukotka). Many people will attend the event, where ceramic and batik craftworks, paintings, Christmas decorations, toys and many other charming and useful things made by children and disabled people will be for sale. This year, the bazaar will pleased to be able to offer for the first time craftworks typical of the Russian north and far east.

All the money raised at the Christmas Bazaar will be transferred to the participating organizations for further charity projects. “At this Christmas Bazaar, we want to raise more money than last year,” said Tatyana Zadirako, executive director of United Way of Russia. “We can’t express how grateful we are to our sponsors for their help in arranging this bazaar. We are also thankful for all the assistance we received from the participants and guests of the bazaar. With the funds raised, we will be able to finance charity projects for the participating organizations. Thank you very much! It is our hope that your generosity will help us do more in the future. We look forward to seeing you all at our Christmas Bazaar on Dec. 15. Join us.”