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Summer in the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg may seem a bit grim this year. News on the political and economic fronts is depressing, and the poor exchange rates have kept many people from taking vacations abroad. In fact, a lot of people are too stressed, or too worried about money, to even take a vacation in Russia.

But here at The Moscow Times, we say: Come on, stop whining! Summer in Russia is just three months! Just three short months of gre en lawns, comfortable sandals, locally grown fruits and vegetables... just 90 days of outdoor concerts and film festivals and bike rides... just one fourth of the year for playing outdoors with your kids!

To help you make the best of it, we’ve gathered together recommendations for summer dining, frolicking in parks, entertaining your kids, and taking some “me” time in the country’s spas and wellness centers.

We checked out hotels, especially some new ones, and came away with the conviction that Moscow and St. Petersburg are second to none in the variety, level of service, and sheer beauty of their hotels. We also apply realized that since not many people have figured this out, hotels have dropped their prices to bring in new clientele. That means: weekend getaways! Check out the summer promotions and book a reservation in one of the capital cities.

Despite the various sanctions on food imports, the summer menus at our favorite restaurants and cafes seem to have only gotten better. If anyone’s offering buckwheat groats, they’re stuffed in roasted ducks or turned into a favorite restaurants and cafes seem to have only gotten better. If anyone’s offering buckwheat groats, they’re stuffed in roasted ducks or turned into a delectable risotto. Summer dining is light, fresh and creative – and comes with treatments and techniques from all over the world. And since summer is a good time for tune-ups of any kind, we’ve also given some tips on wellness centers.

If you need more pampering, we have put together our list of favorite spas — for this year, anyway — which range from modest to sublime, and include treatments and techniques from all over the world. And since summer is a good time for tune-ups of any kind, we’ve also given some tips on wellness centers.

If there is one aspect of life that is getting better in the two capital cities, it’s the parks. They are cleaner, better cared for, greener and busher. Most of the old honky-tonk has been torn down and replaced with ...nothing — just grass and fields and trees. These peaceful settings now host dozens of events, classes, festivals, and activities both healthy and cultural. Best of all — many of them are free! Get our your sunscreen and hit the beach!

This year parents won’t be eager to send their kids out of the city to summer camps and dachas. Parks, museums, cafes, theaters, concert halls and festivals are all rolling out the red carpet for little visitors. There are dozens of activities that expand the minds and bodies of little people, serving up knowledge and skills with a big dollop of fun. Check out our suggestions and follow the links to online resources for up-to-date calendar information.

So dig in! Take a break from your everyday lives and enjoy the summer riches of Moscow and St. Petersburg. They won’t last long!

Michele A. Berdy
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VIRTUALLY EVERY DAY OF SUMMER IN ST. PETERSBURG IS A HOLIDAY. THE WHITE NIGHTS IN THE NORTHERN CAPITAL ARE ALMOST THREE MONTHS OF NON-STOP SUNLIGHT, BOAT RIDES, STROLLING, EATING, DRINKING AND PARTYING. IT’S AS IF EVERYONE TRIES TO SOAK UP ENOUGH LIGHT AND MERRIMENT TO CARRY THEM THROUGH THE COLD AND DARK SEASON THAT LIES AHEAD. IF WANDERING ALONG THE CANALS OF ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CITY IN THE WORLD ISN’T ENOUGH FUN, TRY TO ATTEND ONE OF THE SPECIAL EVENTS.

Scarlet Sails Festival

The highpoint of the White Nights celebrations is on the longest day of the year — June 20 to June 21. A majestic parade of boats plies the Neva, pirates launch a fierce — if mock — battle, and a tall clipper ship with scarlet sails finally appears. After the festival on the water, festivities move on land with concerts on Palace Square and Vasilievsky Island. The last bit of festivity is in the air — a light show and fireworks display. This is the greatest festival night in the city, attended by over a million people every year.

Opera For Everyone

From June 12 through 23, St. Petersburg brings opera out of the theater halls and into the streets — literally! Under the artistic leadership of Fabio Mastrangelo, several operas are performed in the open, with the city squares and parks as the set decorations. The first production will be Mikhail Glinka’s Life of the Tsar performed in Cathedral Square of the Peter and Paul Fortress on June 12.

In Moscow

Despite the great dacha exodus, vacations to the seashore, and general lethargy that descends over the Russian capital in the summer months, there are plenty of festivals and events. In addition to major arts and other festivals, many museums — especially the city house museums and former tsarist estates outside the city — have concert and lecture programs.

Chekhov International Theater Festival

This festival has been rocking the capital’s theater world since 1992, and this year is no exception. Over 19 productions from 13 countries will be performed in the main program, with dozens more in other projects of the festival. Companies from Europe, South America, and Asia will perform modern and traditional theater pieces at various venues about town from May until July 17.

Moscow International Film Festival

Every year the center of the city is clogged with traffic and hundreds of film fans line the streets, hoping to catch a glimpse of this year’s visiting foreign and Russian stars. Real film buffs skip the ceremonies and dash around town to see the year’s entries. The program will be announced in early June and the festival will run from June 19–26.
National Russian Ballet “Kostroma”

Since 2005 the National Russian Ballet “Kostroma” has celebrated summer in the city with a ballet extravaganza that conveys the entire history of Russia, with all of its many nationalities and traditions. The show is spectacular and utterly unique, with over 50 performers dancing through dozens of changes of scenery and costume to portray Russia from its first native inhabitants, through the glories and trials of the expanding Russian Empire, through revolution and war, up to the first successes in space travel and Russia today. It plays at the concert hall of the Cosmos Hotel from June to September.

Book Festival on Red Square

Over the centuries Red Square has seen just about everything, from markets to religious processions to tsars and parades. But there has never been a book fair — until 2015. From June 25-28 the square will welcome international and Russian book sellers and their wares. For more information as the festival takes shape, see the site of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communication.

Moscow Jam Fest

And for something entirely different, this summer the city promises to hold a jam fest — that is, a celebration of traditional and exotic jams, jellies and preserves. In mid-August the city will get sticky, with markets, classes, contests and other sweet and fruity activities held on the Arbat, Manege Square, along Tverskaya and in other public spaces.

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In St. Petersburg

THE VENICE OF THE NORTH, LIKE ITS NAME−SAKE IN THE SOUTH, HAS ALWAYS WEL−COMED FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC TOURISTS. IN RECENT YEARS, THE CITY HAS STRONGLY SUPPORTED TOURISM, WHICH MEANS THAT IT HAS MADE IT RELATIVELY EASY TO BUY, BUILD, RECONSTRUCT AND OPEN NEW HOTELS. THERE ARE AFFORDABLE “MINI−HOTELS” MADE FROM COMMUNAL APARTMENTS, MID−SIZED BUDGET HOTELS, AND A WIDE RANGE OF LUX−URY HOTELS IN EVERY STYLE, FROM FORMER PALACES TO HIGH−TECH WONDERS. HERE ARE SOME NEW FAVORITES.

ALEXANDER HOUSE

Inside this lovely classical mansion with warm wooden shutters built in 1826 is a warm, friendly, and eclectic family hotel. The twenty rooms are each decorated differently, in styles that range from exposed brick to Central Asian embroidered throws and romantic all−white décor. On cool nights, you can enjoy hot tea by the fireplace in the parlor; on warm nights, you can sip a summery drink on the terrace. Close to the Mariinsky Theater, it is a short walk to Nevsky prospekt.

CORINTHIA HOTEL

Right on Nevsky prospekt in the very heart of the city, two 19th century buildings were restored on the outside and transformed inside to make a 5−star luxury business hotel. The Corinthia honors the elegance of past with soaring ceilings, columns, and fine architectural detailing. But it is designed with today’s traveler in mind, with unfussy modern décor and everything a business traveler or tourist could want: comfortable rooms in soothing tones, WIFI everywhere; business center, meeting rooms, and full−service event support; a gym; and several restaurants and bars offering European cuisine.

W ST. PETERSBURG

If 19th century luxury is not your thing, the W St Petersburg Hotel is for you. This super modern, super sleek, super cool hotel with an attitude is right off St. Isaac’s Square. It has 137 rooms ranging — by their terminology — from Wonderful Room to E−Wow Suite, each is bright with clean modern Italian furniture. There is a rooftop terrace café, every kind of business amenity, a gym, a pool, a concierge service that will provide anything and everything “as long as it’s legal,” and the heavenly Bliss Spa. And the very best part? You can bring your dog or cat. Who would ever leave?

MARRIOT RENAISSANCE ST PETERSBURG BALTIQ

The Renaissance St. Petersburg Baltic Hotel is a mid−sized hotel in the city center with

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM OFFICIAL HOTEL

If you’ve ever wondered what it would have been like to actually live in the Winter Palace, this hotel is for you. The Hermitage has opened its own hotel in a restored 19th century mansion, sumptuously decorated like rooms in the palace, with doormen in uniforms reminiscent of the Winter Palace guards, and a restaurant that serves meals based on palace recipes on reproductions of tsarist china. The hotel, however, is more comfortable than the palace was, with all the modern services a traveler needs, and a spa — Mon Plaisir — that offers a full assortment of treatments, Jacuzzi, sauna and hammam. It’s a bit off the beaten track — a 30 minute walk to the city center — but there is a free shuttle to the Hermitage during the day.

In Moscow

WITH THE EXCHANGE RATES FAVORING HOLDERS OF FOREIGN CURRENCY AND HOTELS RUNNING SPECTACULAR SPECIALS TO DRAW IN GUESTS, FOR THE SUMMER WE DECIDED TO HIGHLIGHT A FEW OF MOSCOW’S MOST DELUXE AND OFTEN UNAFFORDABLE HOTELS. THERE IS A PLACE FOR EVERY TASTE, AND EVERY PLACE HAS BEAUTIFUL DESIGNS, IMPECCABLE SERVICE, AND SOMETHING SPECIAL TO MAKE A WEEKEND GET−AWAY OR A QUICK VISIT A TRULY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE.

LOTTE HOTEL MOSCOW

When the Lotte Hotel opened in Moscow in 2010, many people were skeptical that this luxury brand could bring something new to a city filled with luxury hotels. But the Lotte quickly gained a reputation for superior service and comfort — the kind of hotel you book for your most demanding relatives, or the hotel you book for yourself to celebrate a promotion. It has 300 large rooms, versatile meeting and event spaces, a full−service business center, excellent dining, a fitness center, pool and award−winning spa, the Mandara.
DOUBLETREE BY HILTON MOSCOW MARINA

The Doubletree by Hilton Moscow Marina Hotel is a bit of a mouthful to pronounce, and perhaps even a bit confusing — a marina in land-locked Moscow? That’s the fun of it — it is a small resort in the heart of the city, situated on the Moscow River, with bike paths, access to the water and yacht club. The ecologically and architecturally clean space has high ceilings, lots of natural wood, and soothing colors. The hotel is great for business travelers who need meeting and event rooms and business support. But it’s also perfect for a weekend staycation — with a luxurious pool, fitness center, sauna, hammam and spa; a terrific bar and restaurant; and easy proximity to shops and sites.

INTERCONTINENTAL MOSCOW—TVERSKAYA

Hard as it is to believe, not everyone wants a hotel with old-world elegance. Some want to stay in a hotel that is sleek and modern from top to bottom, a hotel that is cutting-edge 21st century. The Intercontinental Moscow Tverskaya fits the bill. Right on the capital’s main street, it offers a full array of business services, a fitness club and spa, a bar, and an excellent restaurant serving contemporary international fare. And you need only walk out the door to be in the center of Moscow government, business, theater and shopping districts.

ST REGIS MOSCOW NIKOLSKAYA

The St. Regis Moscow Nikolskaya is one of those amazing hotels that looks as if it were always there, but was actually constructed in the last few years. The facade of the building, first the city manor of Count Orlov-Davydov and then a commercial space for perfume and chocolates, has been meticulously restored while the interior looks like an impeccably maintained palace. The hotel has just over 200 rooms, most of them deluxe, and nearly 50 suites, all with elegant furnishings fitted out for today’s digitalized business and tourist traveler. There are all the services a business person needs, a fitness center, spa and pool, and several restaurants providing international delicacies with an emphasis on Italian cuisine.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MOSCOW

When the old Hotel Moskva was torn down in order to rebuild a modern replica, cynical Muscovites shrugged their shoulders, certain that the hotel was lost. But over time the outline of the hotel reappeared, and then the distinctive mismatched facade took shape. And now the hotel is back — only much more elegant than its predecessor. This Four Seasons hotel has almost 200 enormous rooms — even simple rooms are larger than most Moscow apartments! — decked out in a modern, relaxing style with delicate echoes of the constructivist design of the original hotel. It has everything a business traveler needs, including a pool, fitness center and spa to help unwind, and several restaurants, cafes, and bars to suit every taste and mood.

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IN THE SUMMER, ST. PETERSBURG DOESN'T SPROUT QUITE AS MANY OUTDOOR CAFES AS MOSCOW DOES; THE WEATHER IS, AFTER ALL, LESS PREDICTABLE AND THE TERRACE SEASON IS SHORTER. BUT ALL THE SAME, THE CITY HAS SOME FINE VENUES FOR OUTDOOR DINING, IN COURTYARDS OR ON ROOFTOPS, AND SOME EXCELLENT SUMMER MENUS TO BE ENJOYED INSIDE ON A RAINY DAY.

THE STRAY DOG CAFÉ

Right off Arts Square is a modest sign for a basement café. This is the Stray Dog Café, which for a few short months in 1911-1915 was the center of Russian poetry, prose, music, and theater. After being closed down and nearly forgotten for decades, the space was rediscovered, cleaned, and turned back into a café, with art exhibitions, poetry readings, and concerts. The menu includes dishes once served a century ago to the nation's best poets and artists. On the street is a pleasant little terrace, where you can watch people and enjoy the beauty of the square.

GYMNASIA

Gymnasia was created to be the dining room of a very elegant aristocratic St. Petersburg family — only now updated for the 21st century. Now it has a large summer terrace, which is really like a separate restaurant: an open wooden structure with a canvas roof and gauzy curtains, buff-colored couches and armchairs, quiet music and candlelight. The menu is European and Russian, with an emphasis of perfect presentation and elegance. The space is patrolled nightly by Gymnasia, a sweet-natured red cat.

COCOCO

CoCoCo is the St. Petersburg branch of LavkaLavka, a restaurant that serves produce from local independent farmers. The décor is simple and warm, with wooden tables and chairs. The menu changes by season, but everything is always fresh-from-the-farmer good, prepared to surprise diners expecting the same old hand-made pelmeni. Instead, try feasting on grilled cabbage with Karelian salted trout garnished with pickled smoked beets. Tempted? Stick around for dessert of halva ice cream. They also serve homemade liquors and infusions, a hearty ale, and a selection of Russian and European wines.

BUDDHA-BAR

For a change of pace from the usual, try one of St. Petersburg’s newest hang-outs — the Buddha-Bar. If the weather is cool or rainy, you can find a spot inside on one of two floors of rich, red, Eastern luxury. But if the weather is fine, head up to the summer terrace with seating for about 50 lucky souls. Enjoy views of the Neva from comfortable armchairs and couches as you sample the summer menu: light sushi rolls and salads, or refreshing summer drinks made of fruit, herbs and spices.

TERASSA

The Terassa restaurant is a Ginza project eatery, which means it is super stylish, with cutting-edge fusion cuisine that includes dishes and techniques from America to Japan via Europe and the East. It is also renowned for its scrumptious French desserts. The terrace is enormous, airy, and light, offering breath-taking views of the city center and Kazan Cathedral. Particularly fine for summer eating are the array of salads and Mediterranean inspired seafood. But if you are in a down-home Russian mood, the chef whips up delicious chicken cutlets and buckwheat groats with mushrooms.

BELLEVUE BRASSERIE

The rooftop restaurant of the St. Petersburg Kempinski Hotel Moika 22 quickly became one of the city’s legendary dining venues. The 360 degree views take in the Hermitage and Palace Square, the Neva, and St. Isaac’s Cathedral. The cuisine is largely French and the best of Russian dishes, with an emphasis on fresh seafood and signature dishes — like a Kamchatka crab salad or a dessert called “L’Hermitage,” a sphere of white-colored chocolate filled with panna cotta, raspberry jelly, biscuit and honey mouse. The wine and spirits list is one of the best in the city.
In Moscow

DURING THE SUMMER, MUSCOVITES EAT OUTDOORS. THEY SIT ON PARK BENCHES AND EAT ICE CREAM. AT MARKETS, THEY EAT GRILLED SHASHLIK OFF PAPER PLATES. THEY TAKE OVER ENTIRE STREETS, LIKE KAMERGERSKY PEREULOK, AND TURN THEM INTO ONE LONG OUTDOOR RESTAURANT THAT SELLS PIZZA AT ONE END AND CHINESE FOOD AT THE OTHER. AND THEY FILL ROOFTOPS OF OLD AND NEW BUILDINGS TO TAKE IN THE VIEWS WHILE DINING. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVORITES.

KRANZLER CAFÉ

When you venture over the Moscow River for museum hopping, sight-seeing, or shopping, be sure to stop in the Hotel Baltschug Kempinski’s outdoor café. It’s very small — less than 50 seats — very cozy, and very flowery. It offers a spectacular view of St. Basil’s Cathedral, the Kremlin and Red Square. The menu is light Russian and European fare, with especially delectable sweets and summery drinks.

SHAKHTI TERRACE

Bolotny Island in the middle of the Moscow River is quickly turning into the capital’s hottest spot for hotels, nightclubs, and restaurants. The newest addition is Shakhti Terrace, a very chic but extremely friendly eatery. The cuisine is pan-Asian. The décor is tropics-bright with clean, comfortable chairs and couches. Stop in for their affordable business lunch (under 500 rubles), or come on Thursday nights for live music.

MOSCAFE

Chef Alexei Simyonov has put together the best kind of fusion cuisine at Moscafe: taking the best of traditional Russian dishes, lightening them with a bit of Italy, and mixing in a bit of the Orient to keep everything piquant, with just the right balance of sweet, salty and savory. The décor is comfortable and warm, perfect for a lingering dinner with friends. But it’s a place that’s big on parties and celebrations: if there’s an event, they’ll host a celebration, from the annual Oscar awards to a local book fair.

ANDERSON CAFÉ

The cheerful, super family-friendly Anderson Cafes have opened four summer terraces for the season: at 39 ulitsa Gilyarovskogo, near the Sokol metro station at 74/8 Leningradsky prospect, near the zoo at 1 Kudrinskaya ploshchad, and outside the city in Zelenograd. They are all bright, comfortable, and perfect for lounging with hammocks, bean bag chairs, and comfortable chairs. The menu is international, with emphasis on freshly made pastas, salads, bruschetta — just the kind of light and healthy fare for summer. Beware: their homemade pastries are impossible to resist.

LAVKALAVKA

Support your local farmer! And do it deliciously at Moscow’s first farmer-driven, all-organic, restaurant with a nice outdoor terrace. The menu is mostly Russian, but with authentic dishes or creatively updated versions, like a fillet of Murmansk cod with a scallop and cowberry tartar sauce. Even the alcohol is domestic, from Crimean and other southern wines to polugar — vodka’s precursor — that will knock your socks off.
THE NORTHERN CAPITAL HAS PLENTY OF FITNESS CENTERS AND SPORTS HALLS, AND FAR MORE PUBLIC BATHHOUSES THAN MOSCOW. BUT LIFE IN THE FAR NORTH, WHERE THE SUN BARELY RISES FOR HALF THE YEAR AND THE DAMP COLD COMING OFF THE NEVA RIVER WREAK HAVOC ON YOUR APPEARANCE, REQUIRES SPECIAL CARE AND A BIT OF INDULGENCE. HERE ARE A FEW PLACES TO HELP YOU RESTORE YOUR HEALTH AND GOOD SPIRITS.

**BLISS SPA**

The main reason to go to the Bliss Spa in the W St. Petersburg Hotel is not the champagne and brownie you enjoy as you decompress and get ready for your treatment. And it’s not the pool or the cool, modern décor, or the Bliss Products on sale (so you don’t have to fill your suitcase with them on your next trip abroad). And it’s not even the fact that the staff makes you feel like a movie star no matter how bad your Russian is and no matter how little you look like a fashion model. The main reason to go is that the specialists do an excellent job, be it a massage, a facial, a manicure or a waxing. And you leave feeling like a billion rubles.

**CRYSTAL SPA AND LOUNGE**

In the center of St. Petersburg is the Crystal Spa and Lounge, the city’s first East-meets-West spa and wellness center. With décor that is light and luxurious with hints of 19th century Russian palaces and a bit of Morocco and the Orient in some of the treatment areas — it offers a full health assessment and an array of treatments: hydrotherapy, massage and manual therapy; a fitness room for individual use; cosmetology and hair salon; a thermal suite with a steam room and heated marble table. Unlike other spas, the lounge isn’t just a place to sit and wait for your treatment, but a restaurant where light and nourishing cuisine can be sampled. You can sign up on your own or through the concierges at the nearby Corinthia Hotel and Trezzini Palace Hotel.

**LUCEO SPA, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LION PALACE**

For an elegant spa experience that verges on decadent, consider an afternoon at the Luceo Spa in the Four Seasons Hotel. The hotel is housed in the “Lion Palace” — so called because of the stone lions guarding the entrance — built in 1820. It has been both meticulously restored and glamorously updated, with the spa area on four floors in the triangular courtyard within the palace walls. The spa is both modern, with spacious rooms and clean lines, and luxurious, with gold damask armchairs and silken throws. All the treatments are sumptuous — a gold facial, an amber body wrap — and performed impeccably. Be sure to come well before your appointment to enjoy the pool, sauna, steam room and fitness center.

**KAZACHY BANYA**

The Kazachy bathhouse is the oldest in the city — built in 1879 by a merchant on four principles: luxury, convenience, hygiene and cleanliness. These four qualities have kept this early health center in good stead to this day. The banya has six floors of steam rooms, pools, relaxation rooms, banquet halls, showers, and baths, from large public steam rooms to intimate deluxe halls for you and your close friends. You can get a massage, have your nails done, sing karaoke, get a haircut, watch TV, and even have your pants altered. If it’s healthy, useful or relaxing — you can do at the Kazachy Banya. This must-do-once place may easily become a weekly ritual.

**EUROMED CENTER**

According to locals, one of the best medical services for expats — and not only expats — in the northern capital is Euromed. Founded in 1999 by a doctor with both Russian and American education and medical licenses, it has been the city’s ever-expanding place to go for medical care for over a decade. Euromed has emergency services, a special pediatric clinic, and a 24/7 multi-purpose medical center — all operating by international standards of care and treatment. Euromed has English speakers and access to interpreters working with dozens of languages, and extensive experience dealing with insurance companies and the bureaucracy associated with a medical emergency for a business or tourist traveler.
In Moscow

NOT LONG AGO JOGGERS IN MOSCOW WERE A RARITY, BICYCLES WERE USED ONLY AT THE DACHA, AND EXERCISE WAS PERFORMED IN FACTORY OR BUSINESS-OWNED SPORTS FACILITIES ON EQUIPMENT THAT WAS MANUFACTURED WHEN MINISKIRTS WERE FIRST IN STYLE. NOW THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF MODERN FITNESS CENTERS, THOUSANDS OF TRAINED SPORTS AND FITNESS EXPERTS, BIKES FOR RENT ALL OVER THE CITY, AND LOTS OF SPACES FOR EXERCISE AND FITNESS, FROM YOGA IN THE PARKS TO PARKOUR ROUTES. WE FIGURE OUR READERS ALREADY KNOW HOW TO GET AND STAY FIT. SO HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR WHERE TO GO WHEN YOU NEED SOME EXTRA HELP, FROM THE MEDICAL TO THE METAPHYSICAL.

MANDARA SPA

Entering the Mandara Spa at the Lotte Hotel is a bit like entering a luxurious grotto: the loud and jagged city disappears in the comfort of curved stone walls, warm wood, and soft linen. The spa, which was named Best Luxury Hotel Spa in Russia by World Luxury Spa Awards for 2015, combines Asian and European traditions, mixing science with metaphysical cleansing, firm, and rejuvenate. You leave feeling like you’ve been on a very healthy, pampered vacation.

THAI PATTERA SPA

When Russian tourists discovered package tours of Thailand, they brought back with them cotton T-shirts, carved wooden elephants, and an obsession with Thai massage. Slowly but surely, Moscow became filled with Thai massage and spa specialists. Today one of the best Thai spas in the capital is the Pattera Spa, managed and staffed by Thais. It is surprisingly affordable, absolutely genuine, and offers nothing extraneous or distracting. They import or make their own products, and even ship in fresh mangoes for after-massage enjoyment.

ZHIVICA BANYA

You’re in Russia. You must go to the banya (bath house) at least once. But your friends tell you that it has to be the real thing, preferably made of rough hewn wood, with a wood-burning stove. And you need experienced attendants who know how to produce the perfect steam and which branches should be used to increase your circulation and clean out your lymphatic system without hurting your skin. If you think you need to leave the city, think again. There is a real Siberian-style banya smack in the center of the city right off one of its most expensive and elite shopping streets, Stoleshnikov Pereulok. Sessions are individual and private, lasting from about 90 minutes to over three hours.

MEDSI CLINICS

Medsi was founded in 1996 and is now the country’s largest private medical service provider, with over 20 clinics and centers in Moscow alone, including an International Clinic (formerly the American Medical Clinic) that especially caters to the city’s expat community. The clinics provide clean, modern facilities; computerized information systems; well-trained and experienced doctors, nurses and other medical staff; international-standard techniques and services; and a support staff that understands and can deal with the variety of insurance policies patients bring in the door.

KERALA CENTER

Near the Moscow University on Sparrow Hills, tucked away in a new banya and business complex is the Kerala Center for Yoga, Ayurveda and Restorative Medicine. Founded and staffed by doctors and specialists from India who have been in Moscow for nearly 15 years, the center provides very non-invasive aid that has been adapted to the Russian climate and diet. Massage, special teas, natural treatments, yoga and other techniques have helped thousands of Muscovites control and diminish the effect of chronic illnesses and psychological distress.

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What to Do with the Kids?

In St. Petersburg

During the white nights of summer, St. Petersburg’s children have a hard time getting to sleep — it’s not just the constant light, it’s the plethora of celebrations, events, and festivals. The kids will enjoy the main celebrations as much as the adults — even opera is interesting when it’s outdoors. But in addition to all the delights of the White Nights, this summer, we’re planning to expose our children to culture — the fun way. On our to-do list is:

First up is the Yusupov Palace, where we will drag the kids through the part of the tour that we adults are interested in — an aristocratic palace that was preserved almost perfectly intact since the day the Bolsheviks expropriated it in 1917 — so that at 1.45 pm we can take them to the incredibly cool, disgusting, fascinating tour “The Murder of Rasputin.” The murder took place in the basement of the palace on the night of December 16, 1916 and involved poisoning, shooting, beating, and drowning.

If your kids like the circus, take them to the original Circus on the Fontanka, which has been entertaining children and adults for 138 years. The building is great, and the acts are spectacular. This summer the show is mostly bears doing things that bears shouldn’t be able to do, with jugglers, acrobats, and other clever animals helping out.

Then we’re taking a break for some pyshki, which are the Russian equivalent of donuts only without the hole. For our pyshki, we going to the most famous pyshka-seller in all Russia. The shop at 25 Bolshaya Konyushennaya has been selling them for over half a century. Freshly made with powdered sugar, jam, or chocolate, they are guaranteed to please small people with a sweet tooth. Coffee available for accompanying adults.

One night we’ll let the kids stay up really late and take one of the boat rides around the canals. You can hop on a boat on the Moika, Fontanka, or Griboedov canal right off Nevsky prospekt. The tours take an hour or more, and are particularly fun in the early hours of the morning when the bridges begin to rise.

And at least once we’ll take the hydrofoil (from a boarding station by the Winter Palace on the Neva) out to the Gulf of Finland to spend the day at Peterhof, Peter the Great’s summer palace. Even the kids find the palace buildings interesting — especially the bathhouse, where they’ll turn on a special water feature for them — but they adore the golden cascading fountains, and the park where footsteps set off spurts of water and beautiful metal flowers water themselves.

And then because this is just too much fun, we’ll try to introduce the kids to some high culture through the summer museum programs. The Hermitage and Peter and Paul Fortress have great children’s programs — everything from art and cultural appreciation to hands-on creativity.
School is out, and your kids are bored. We’re sending our kids to the parks, swimming holes, sports facilities, summer camps and a dacha or two. But when they’re back in the city for a few days, we want to take them to a few of the special events planned for the summer. Here’s our summer to-do list:

If your kids like robots, head over to Pavilion #2 at VDNKh (the National Museum of Economic Achievements). Until August 23 the pavilion is hosting an exhibition called Robots and People: Time to Get Closer. There are almost 30 robots that do everything from mixing drinks to determining how in love you are. Be sure to bring your swimsuit so that after the exhibition you can hit the beach — a section of the park with four pools, set to open mid-June.

For a trip into the past, don’t miss the Ancient Times and Epochs celebration at the Kolomenskoye Museum June 5-7. Military reconstruction buffs will reenact battles and events from the Roman Empire and neighboring civilizations. The park will be overrun with ancient Celts, Germans, Palestinians, Turks and representatives of other great ancient nations, who will make war, celebrate religious ceremonies, cook and make crafts, and generally march about looking ferocious. Best of all — entrance is free.

What’s better than a Night at the Museum? A Night at the zoo! On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, you can take a guided tour of the zoo after closing hours. This means get ting to watch all those nocturnal animals wake up and start to have some fun. The tours begin at 21:00 and last about 90 minutes.

Since we are all concerned about our children’s development, this summer we’re also looking ahead to the school year. For preschoolers, we’re looking at the English Playschool, a friendly, professional, cheerful place that runs a variety of programs for kids as soon as they are potty-trained right up to school age. Here kids learn English as they develop all their skills — from coordination to problem solving, social skills, and communication. The school is a Russian-licensed educational institution that is a member of the British Association for Early Childhood Education.

For older kids, we recommend the British International School. This is one of the oldest schools in Moscow that provides the highest quality education in English. The school has nine facilities around the city, offering education from the nursery-school level right up through the International General Certificate in Education and the International Baccalaureate Diploma. Summer is a good time to speak with the administrators and prepare your child for the school year.

And since we have some birthday celebrations for small people during the summer, we are planning to take a break from school planning for some parties at one of the Anderson Cafes. We can take over one of the banquet rooms, let the staff help plan the event (soap bubbles will figure prominently), and order a meal that is kid-friendly and culminates in a fabulous thematic cake — this year it might be a princess. The best part? While the kids are safely occupied with games, toys, and funfood, we adults can kick back with a nice Italian dinner with good wine.

The English National Curriculum for children aged 3 to 18 years old in all subjects
- Highly qualified teachers from the UK
- Students from over 65 nationalities world wide
- 7 schools located around the City of Moscow: Voiskovskaya metro station Probesoyuznaya, Yasenevo and Novoyasenevskaya metro stations
- Internationally recognized certificates (IGSCE, A-level, IB)
- World-class examinations results
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Parks and Recreation

ONE OF THE JOYS OF LIVING IN CITIES THAT WERE ONCE TSARIST CAPITALS IS THAT THEY HAVE FAR MORE FORMER ESTATES, SUMMER RESIDENCES, AND PLEASURE PARKS THAN YOUR AVERAGE REPUBLICAN CITY. AND WHEN YOU ADD IN SOME PARKS CREATED IN THE SOVIET ERA, YOU HAVE A WIDE RANGE OF OUTDOOR SPACES TO SPEND YOUR WEEK NIGHTS AND WEEKENDS. TODAY’S PARKS HAVE SPORTS AND FITNESS CENTERS, EXHIBITIONS AND MOVIES, MASTER CLASSES IN THE ARTS, DANCING, AND ALL KINDS OF FESTIVALS. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITES OF THE SEASON.

In St. Petersburg

Some people might think that the entire historic center of the northern capital is one enormous park with buildings, squares, canals, and bridges as decorations. But for a more concentrated green space, we like the city’s most famous gardens. The Summer Garden, founded in 1704, is a miniature paradise of old-growth trees, flowers, burbling fountains, and statues—a place where you can stroll the paths or sit on a bench for hours. Amateur musicians often play classical music in the evening.

At the very end of Nevsky Prospekt is another favorite place for locals and tourists, the Alexander Garden. This garden, which stretches along the Admiralty, was created in the mid-1800s and quickly became The Place for the aristocracy to stroll and gossip, and occasionally meet a member of the royal family out for a breath of fresh air. Today it is a peaceful oasis, with fountains, benches, and a few statues of prominent writers and thinkers—a good spot to rest after a morning spent in the Hermitage.

For quiet fun, we like Kirov Park, St. Petersburg’s equivalent to Gorky Park. Now called Yelagin Park with its namesake Yelagin Palace restored to historical perfection, it is a favorite place for family relaxation, such as boating, horseback riding, and other sports. It has a rich schedule of exhibitions, festival, concerts and other events for the entire summer.

For raucous fun, we like Krestovsky Island, which, despite some housing developments, still has pristine parkland for rambling, lots of sporting facilities for tennis and other games, and the amusement park Divo Ostrov—Miracle Island that opened in 2003. It has almost 50 different rides, some family-friendly, some “extreme” — that is, for teenagers with more courage than sense. There are also restaurants, cafes and food stands on the island, making it a delightful place for a trip on a summer day.
In Moscow

In the city center, our favorite park is the Hermitage, a small space behind Tverskaya ulitsa that is packed with flowers, paths, cafes, and events. Come for free lessons — everything from yoga to English for travelers — or to see an exhibition, or to watch a performance, or to dance the night away. There are festivals and events all summer for all ages and tastes.

To get away from the urban rat race, the best place in Moscow is still the Botanical Gardens, nearly 900 acres of paths wandering through woods, gardens, and fields, over little creeks and around ponds, through almost every climatic zone. It is magnificent in any month and almost any weather, but it is particularly spectacular in June and July when the rose garden is in bloom.

This year our new favorite family park is VDNKh, the former Soviet-era Museum of Economic Achievements that recently regained its old name and got a much-needed facelift. If you are interested in Soviet monumental architecture — this is the place to go. It’s worth the trip to see the famous fountain with golden ladies representing the Soviet republics and decorated pavilions that once housed prize pigs and the wonders of ball-bearing production. Now they are filled with exhibitions, classes, dancing, book exchanges and all kinds of art. The park has set up new sports areas for ping pong, tennis and mini-soccer, and you can rent a bike or skateboard for zipping about the grounds. Film is shown in 3-D and in-the-round. And there are festivals, events, concerts, and performances — and, of course, a variety of cafes, restaurants and food stands.

Our other favorite park is Gorky Park, the most popular recreational space in the city, where a quarter of a million people enjoy the free admission policy every weekend. Join the masses for yoga and fitness classes, sunbathing on the beach, rowing on the pond, bike riding and other sports (equipment rentals available). Check out cutting-edge art at the Garage, which is debuting its new building this summer. Attend concerts, films, exhibitions and festivals. Wander along the paths and watch the fountains dance to classical music. Then next weekend: rinse and repeat.

Gorky Park

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