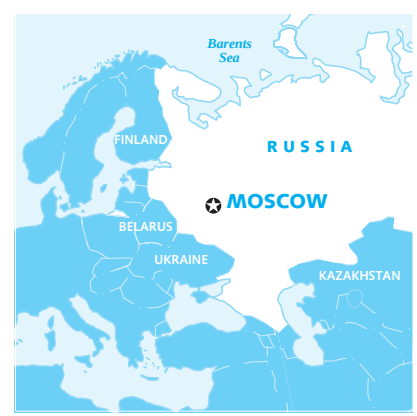
Introducing Moscow

Sunlight glints off the golden domes and catches your eye. The ancient, patchwork-patterned church is right in front of you, but you almost miss it because you are walking with your head down, shielding your face from the wind and employing all efforts to avoid slipping on hidden patches of ice. A steely-eyed babushka, laden with a heavy fur coat and an oversized shopping bag, still manages to negotiate the precarious pathway faster than your inexperienced feet.

You navigate around a pair of young lovers who have stopped to admire the lacy lingerie in a shop window. You stare, only for a moment, as a blonde – devastatingly gorgeous with impossibly long legs – emerges from a sleek, black sedan.

You resist the temptation to duck into a cosy café, where the din of casual conversation and clinking coffee cups invites you to warm your chilled bones. Instead, you follow the babushka inside the church. The heavy door closes behind you, blocking out the cacophony of honking horns and screaming sirens. Inside, the only sound is the whisper of prayers. As your eyes adjust to the darkness of the candlelit interior, you make out the familiar characters on the age-old icons, which adorn the whitewashed walls. You find yourself transported from the hustling, bustling modern capital across centuries to medieval Moscow, the mighty fortress and centre of Orthodoxy, where ancient Rus grew up.



Russia's earliest roots are in Moscow: the Kremlin still shows off the splendour of Muscovy's grand princes and St Basil's Cathedral still recounts the defeat of the Tatars. Moscow also recalls Russia's more recent past, still fresh in our memories. On Red Square, the founder of the Soviet state lies embalmed. And only a few kilometres

away, a future leader rallied outside the White House, leading to the demise of the same state.

Moscow continues to make history. It is unfolding on every street corner, as Muscovites move into the 21st century, embracing the global culture of the modern era. With the same purposeful optimism that their predecessors looked 'forward to communism!', Muscovites today are looking forward to the opportunities promised by the New Russia. They are breaking down the barriers of generations past – political boundaries, cultural taboos and ideological stricture – and exploring the possibilities of consumerism, creativity and career.

LOWDOWN

Population 10,381,000
Time zone GMT/UTC + 3hr
Three-star double room R3000-4000
Coffee R60
Half a litre of beer R120
Metro fare R13
Don't Sit down on the metro escalator
Do Kiss on the metro escalator

Moscow is the epicentre of New Russia and everything that it represents. It boasts commerce and culture that most provincial Russians can only dream about. Plagued by soaring prices and riddled with corruption, it also epitomises the seamier side of postcommunist Russia. Nowhere are Russia's contrasts more apparent than in Moscow: ancient monasteries and ultramodern monoliths stand side by side, and New Russian millionaires and poverty-stricken pensioners walk the same streets.

The city is magnificent in late spring (May or June) and early autumn (September or October), when the city's parks are filled with flowering trees or colourful leaves. Moscow is spruced up for the May holidays and City Day, both festive times in the capital. But if you want to delve deep into the Russian soul, come in winter, when snow, cold and darkness muffle the modern noise.

Any time of year, Moscow evokes wonder. Even today, you will appreciate the words penned by Pushkin almost 200 years ago in *Eugene (Yevgeny) Onegin*: 'Already gleaming/ before their eyes they see unfold/the towers of whitestone Moscow beaming/with fire from every cross of gold./Friends, how my heart would leap with pleasure/when suddenly I saw this treasure/of spires and belfries, in a cup/with parks and mansions, open up.'

City Life

City Life

MOSCOW TODAY

The word of the day in Moscow is 'exclusive'. The hottest clubs have the most expensive drinks and the tightest 'face control'. Travelling by private car – preferably a big, black one – is way cooler than hoofing it or going by metro. Designer labels fly off the racks at pricey boutiques. Muscovites have taken to feasting on sushi instead of herring, and drinking French champagne instead of *Sovietskoe shampanskoe*. There is even a new brand of 'elite' tea, *Elitny Chai*, trying to cash in on this preoccupation with prestige.

For all of its status-consciousness, Moscow is a bourgeois city. Driving Hummers and dressing in Armani are privileges reserved for a small – albeit visible – elite. Nevertheless, most Muscovites are now also enjoying a disposable income that they never had before.

In 2005 over three million cars clogged Moscow's streets – a number that increases by 200,000 every year. There are plenty of Mercedes, but also Hondas, Citroens and good old-fashioned Ladas. New restaurants include cosy cafés and bohemian bars, not just overpriced, upscale eateries. Many nightclubs are branded 'exclusive', but others are considered 'democratic' and open to all. Even eating raw fish has become a populist experience, with the proliferation of all-you-can-eat sushi bars.

Perhaps this prosperity explains Moscow's apolitical attitude. While Rose and Orange Revolutions are taking place just next door, Russians stand by quietly and watch President Putin censor their press and eliminate their right to elect governors (see p20); Muscovites appear to be more concerned with the latest restaurant opening than the latest legislative debates. The exception is when their own comfort levels are threatened – as they were in 2005, when the proposed monetisation of pension benefits provoked thousands of pensioners to take to the streets in protest.

HOT CONVERSATION TOPICS

Here is what you might overhear while sipping your cappuccino in a Moscow café:

- How long did it take you to get through the traffic jam on the Garden Ring?
- Does the new Hotel Moskva really look better than the old Hotel Moskva?
- Which 'oligarch' will be arrested next?
- Which celebrities will shag on *Dom Tri*?
- Have you tried the new sushi/steak/seafood restaurant around the corner?

One issue that cannot be ignored is the ongoing war in Chechnya. Muscovites have been forced to face the bleak reality of the conflict, as bombs have exploded on their own streets. The terrorist attacks of recent years affected the nation's capital in an infinite number of ways; some are obscure while others are in-your-face, such as the metal detectors in the Bolshoi Theatre and the ubiquitous document-checking police in front of every metro station.

Nonetheless, the capital remains upbeat. The optimism is pervasive. It is evident in the construction of skyscrapers, shopping malls, theme parks and theatres; in the 'world premiers' and 'grand openings'; and on the faces of shoppers, strollers, diners and drinkers on the crowded Moscow streets. Indeed (to borrow a communist slogan), 'the future is bright!'

CITY CALENDAR

Standout seasons to visit Moscow are late spring (May or June) and early autumn (September or October), when the city's parks are filled with flowering trees or colourful leaves. The city is spruced up for the May holidays and September's City Day, both festive times in the capital. It also gets fired up to ring in the New Year, when Muscovites emerge from their warm homes into the winter night for free concerts and fireworks.

Cultural festivals and special exhibits occur throughout the year for lovers of art, music, theatre and film. For additional information on events in Moscow, refer to the *Moscow Times* or *element* (see p222). For details on public holidays, see p220.

JANUARY

Though January represents the deepest, darkest days of winter, it is a festive month, kicked off by New Year's celebrations in the grandest tradition (see p11). The Orthodox Christmas, or Rozhdestvo, is celebrated on 6 January. Many offices and services are closed during the first week of January.

WINTER FESTIVAL

It's an outdoor funfest for those with antifreeze in their veins (and you can bet plenty of people use vodka for this purpose). Teams compete to build elaborate ice sculptures in front of the Pushkin Fine Arts Museum and on Red Square. But the real nutters (or those who have *far* too much antifreeze in their veins) can be found punching holes in the ice on the Moscow River and plunging in for a dip. Do this and you're a member of the 'Walrus Club'.

FEBRUARY

Maslenitsa marks the end of winter, but it does seem premature. Temperatures continue to be cold, hovering around -10°C for weeks. Occasional southerly winds can raise temperatures briefly to a balmy 0°C. The city continues to sparkle with snow, and sledders and skiers are in seventh heaven.

MOSCOW BIENNALE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

www.moscowbiennale.ru/en/

This month-long festival is organised and partly funded by Russia's Ministry of Culture, with the aim of establishing the capital as an international centre for contemporary art. Venues around the city exhibit works by artists from around the world. In 2005 many of the exhibits were held at the former Central Lenin Museum (p65), offering a rare glimpse inside this old Soviet building, as well as an invigorating artistic display.

DEFENDER OF THE MOTHERLAND DAY

Celebrated on 23 February, this unofficial holiday traditionally honours veterans and soldiers. It has become a sort of counterpart to International Women's Day and is now better known as 'Men's Day'. Women are supposed to do nice things for the men in their lives, but the extent of the celebration is limited.

MASLENITSA

www.maslenitsa.com

Akin to Mardi Gras, this fête celebrates the end of winter and kicks off Orthodox

TOP FIVE CULTURAL EVENTS

- December Nights Festival (p11)
- Golden Mask Festival (p10)
- Interfest (p10)
- Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (right)
- Moscow Forum (p10)

Lent. 'Maslenitsa' comes from the Russian word for butter, which is a key ingredient in the festive treat, *bliny* (crepes). Besides bingeing on Russian crepes, the week-long festival features horse-drawn sledges, story-telling clowns and beer-drinking bears. The festival culminates with the burning of a scarecrow to welcome spring. Exact dates depend on the dates of Orthodox Easter, but it is usually in February or early March. Look out for events at Kolomenskoe (p104) and special *bliny* menus at local restaurants.

MARCH & APRIL

During the spring thaw – in late March and early April – everything turns to mud and slush.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Russia's favourite holiday was founded to honour the women's movement. These days, on 8 March, men buy champagne, flowers and chocolates for their better halves – and for all the women in their lives.

GOLDEN MASK FESTIVAL

www.goldenmask.ru

It involves two weeks of performances by Russia's premier drama, opera, dance and musical performers, culminating in a prestigious awards ceremony. The festival brightens up otherwise dreary March and April.

EASTER

The main holiday of the Orthodox Church is Easter, or Paskha. The date varies, but it is usually in April or early May – often a different date than its Western counterpart. Forty days of fasting, known as Veliky Post, lead up to the religious holiday. Easter Sunday kicks off with celebratory midnight services, after which people eat *kulichy* (special dome-shaped cakes) and *paskha* (curd-cakes), and they may exchange painted wooden Easter eggs. Many banks, offices and museums are closed on Easter Monday.

MOSCOW FORUM

www.ccmm.ru

This is a contemporary music festival held every year since 1994. It features avant-garde musicians from Russia and Europe, who perform at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory (p145).

MAY

Spring arrives in the capital! Many services, offices and museums have limited hours during the first half of May, due to the run of public holidays. Nonetheless, it is a festive time, as the parks are finally green and blooming with flowers, and the streets are filled with people celebrating. Victory Day, on 9 May, hosts parades on Tverskaya ulitsa and other events at Victory Park (p106).

JUNE

June is Moscow's most welcoming month. Temperatures are mild, and days are long and sunny. Little girls wear giant white bows in their hair to celebrate the end of the school year.

INTERFEST

www.miff.ru

Interfest is short for the Moscow International Film Festival. This week-long event attracts filmmakers from the US and Europe, as well as the most promising Russian artists. Films are shown at theatres around the city, including Illuzion (p150) and Rolan Cinema (p150).

FASHION WEEK IN MOSCOW

www.rfw.ru

In recent years, Moscow's major fashion event has attracted as many as 60 designers from Russia and around the world. See innovative styles on display on catwalks around the city.

JULY & AUGUST

Many Muscovites retreat to their dachas (see boxed text, p186) to escape summer in the city, and the cultural calendar is quiet. Maximum temperatures are usually between 25°C and 35°C, although the humidity makes it seem hotter. July and August are also the rainiest months, although showers tend to be brief. While residents make themselves scarce, tourists flood the capital during this season. Train tickets and accommodation can be more difficult to secure, and attractions around Moscow tend to be overrun with visitors.

Summer is the time for outdoor music festivals, including huge rock events such as Krylya and Nashestviye, which take place out of the city. For more information, see p26.

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER

Early autumn is another standout time to be in the capital. The heat subsides and the foliage turns the city splendid oranges, reds and yellows. October usually sees the first snow of the season.

CITY DAY

City Day, or *den goroda* in Russian, celebrates Moscow's birthday every year on the first weekend in September. The day kicks off with a festive parade, followed by live music on Red Square and plenty of food, fireworks and fun.

KREMLIN CUP

www.kremlincup.ru

This international tennis tournament is held every October at the Olympic Stadium, near the Renaissance Moscow Hotel (p167). Not surprisingly, Russian players have dominated this tournament in recent years.

NOVEMBER

Winter sets in. The days are noticeably short and temperatures are low. By now, the city is covered in a blanket of snow, which reflects the city lights and lends a magical air.

DAY OF RECONCILIATION & ACCORD

The former October Revolution day – 7 November – is still an official holiday, though it is hardly acknowledged. It still is, however, a big day for flag-waving and protesting by old-school Communist Party members, especially in front of the former Central Lenin Museum (p65) and on Tverskaya ulitsa. It makes for a great photo-op.

DECEMBER

Short days and long nights keep most people inside for most of the month. On 12 December, Constitution Day marks the adoption of the new constitution in 1993. But political holidays are not what they used to be, and no-one pays much attention.

DECEMBER NIGHTS FESTIVAL

It is held at the main performance halls, theatres and museums from mid-December to early January. Classical music at its best is performed in classy surroundings by the best Russian and foreign talent.

NEW YEAR

This event lures Muscovites out of their warm homes to watch fireworks over Red Square and warm their bones with vodka toasts to the coming year.

CULTURE

IDENTITY

While Moscow feels like a cosmopolitan European capital, it is conspicuously homogenous. Over 80% of the population is Russian: light-skinned, Slavic-looking, Russian-speaking people. Small numbers of Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Tatars mix it up a little, but these ethnic groups each represent only about 3% of the population. People from the southern republics, such as Georgia, Kazakhstan and Armenia, each account for about 1%.

Among this Russian-dominant population the religion of choice is of course Russian Orthodoxy. After decades of church closure, confiscation of property and harassment of believers under the Soviet regime, the Russian Orthodox Church (Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov) is enjoying a remarkable revival. By 1991 it already had an estimated 50 million members, and that number has continued to grow. Today, closed and neglected churches are being restored all over the country and especially in Moscow. There are approximately 23,000 active churches in the country, up from 7000 in 1988. This

ESSENTIAL MOSCOW

- Dorogomilovsky Market (p122) Colourful produce and colourful people.
- Patriarch's Ponds (p84) A quiet corner of literary Moscow.
- Pushkin Fine Arts Museum (p91) Fabulous collection of impressionist and postimpressionist paintings.
- Sculpture Park (p100) Art and history come together in a moody, magical way.
- Tiflis (p136) A perfect place for a Georgian feast.

seems like an impressive comeback, but it still represents less than half of the churches that were operating in Russia in 1917.

These days, 90% of ethnic Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, though many are not practicing. The increase in self-ascribed believers has been linked to the growth of Russian nationalism, as Orthodoxy is often considered an intimate part of what it means to be Russian.

While the renovation of churches seems like a positive development, Russian nationalism does have its ugly side. Neo-Nazi movements and violence against minorities are on the rise in big cities such as Moscow. Sadly, many of these acts often go unpunished. More common, but equally damaging, is the relentless harassment of non-Russians by police, who are always on hand to verify the documents of passers-by, especially those with darker skin tones.

Thousands of people, especially from ethnic minorities, live in Moscow without proper residency permits. It is the primary reason why official population figures for the capital are dubious – many estimates put the real total closer to 12 million. The capital's advantageous economic conditions prompt permitless Muscovites to tolerate frequent police document inspections and pocket-emptying bribes.

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO NEW RUSSIA

The reality of most Moscow lifestyles is a far cry from the images of free-spending *Novy Russkie* (New Russians) that dominate the media. Sure, the capital is home to 26 billionaires, but it is also home to some 10 million people who have considerably less money than that. Understandably, the conspicuous consumption of the upper echelons sparks a fair amount of curiosity – and envy – among middle-class Muscovites.

The autobiographical novel *Casual*, written by Moscow elite insider Oksana Robsky, became an instant bestseller when it was published in 2005. It provided a rare glimpse inside a world of gated mansions, bodyguards, luxury spas, chauffeured cars and all-night parties. It's a world that everybody sees – in the form of lanky lasses decked out in designer labels and sleek cars parked in front of fancy restaurants – but few people actually experience.

LIFESTYLE

Soviet workers used to joke that 'we pretend to work and they pretend to pay us'. It was funny because it was all too true. New Russia has a new work ethic, and nowhere is it more evident than Moscow. Eager young Muscovites are working long hours, so they too can partake of the good life they see going on around them. They are fighting traffic, working weekends, talking on mobile phones and breaking for a 'business lunch', just like their London and New York counterparts.

And it is worth it: Moscow restaurants are packed with merrymakers, charter flights to Turkey and Greece are filled with holidaymakers, and supermarkets are crowded with homemakers. Muscovites are working hard and enjoying the fruits of their labour.

However, they are also – often – supporting several generations in the one household. Older people are increasingly dependent on family members, as their pensions have become near worthless. Grandmothers (who live on average 14 years longer than their male counterparts) often live with their children, which turns out to be an effective system of childcare in this country where upwards of 90% of women of working age work outside the home.

In Russia, small families are the norm, multiple generations aside. This is especially so in Moscow where expensive real estate necessitates small flats. Most families have only one child (Russian families averaged 1.25 children in 2000); but still, living quarters are tight. Personal space overlaps with public space: living rooms convert into dining rooms each evening, and then into bedrooms come nightfall. It explains why you see so many young couples kissing on park benches – they probably have very little privacy at home.

It also explains why the average age at marriage continues to be relatively low, as young Russians are anxious to move out of their crowded homes. Early marriage and lack of social repercussions result in one of the world's highest divorce rates. According to *Divorce Magazine*, 65% of Russian marriages end in divorce.

JUDAISM IN MOSCOW

Lenin once said 'scratch a Bolshevik and you'll find a Russian chauvinist'. While the revolution provided a period of opportunity for individual Jews, the socialist regime was not tolerant toward Jewish language and customs. In 1930, Lazar Kaganovich, an ethnic Jew and Stalin crony, was made mayor of Moscow. He pleaded against the destruction of the Christ the Saviour Cathedral out of fear that he would be personally blamed and it would provoke popular anti-Semitism (both of which happened).

Anti-Semitism became official policy in the late Stalinist period. The Jewish quarter in the Dorogomilova neighbourhood was levelled for new building projects. Two huge apartment houses were constructed for the communist elite, at 24 and 26 Kutuzovsky prospekt, on top of the city's old Jewish cemetery. Systematic discrimination finally prompted the rise of a dissident movement, which battled Soviet officialdom for the right to leave the country.

In 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev announced that refusnik Anatoly Scharansky was permitted to emigrate, signalling a more relaxed official stance. Between 1987 and 1991, 500,000 Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel, and another 150,000 to the USA. Moscow's Jewish community fragmented as a result.

Today, Judaism in Moscow is enjoying a modest revival, as believers reconnect with their ancestry and traditions. As many as 57,000 Jews have returned to Moscow from Israel and the USA in the post-Soviet period. Jewish communities are flourishing, providing kosher restaurants and Hebrew-speaking service providers for the newcomers.

As in earlier times, the opportunities for Jews that have arisen in postcommunist Russia have also stirred anti-Semitic incidents and rhetoric. High-profile Jewish businessmen, such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky (see p37), have attracted resentment and very public political rants. Anti-Semitic graffiti, nationalist rallies and even violence against Jews have occurred on the streets of Moscow. Such harassment is negligible compared to the strife they endured in the old Soviet Union, though.

As Russian Jews return to Moscow, synagogues are slowly repaired and re-opened, and the community that has survived here for hundreds of years rebuilds itself.

FOOD

Seventy years of mistreatment by the Soviets has given Russian cuisine a bad rap. Now, many restaurants in Moscow allow the diner to experience Russian food as it is meant to be – exquisite *haute-russe* masterpieces once served at banquets and balls, as well as tasty and filling meals that have for centuries been prepared in peasant kitchens with garden ingredients.

Options for dining out during the Soviet period were so limited that Russians hardly ever did it. They might have taken lunch at the local *stolovaya* (cafeteria), but otherwise, they cooked, ate and drank at home; home-cooked meals tasted far better than the slab of meat and lump of potatoes served in most restaurants.

The past decade has done wonders for dining in Moscow. Now the options seem limitless, not only for traditional Russian fare, but also for sushi, pasta, coffee etc. Clever restaurateurs are inventing newer, more interesting ways to present food (see the boxed text, p131). Likewise, Muscovites are changing the way they eat. They may still take lunch at the *stolovaya*, but it is a modern *stolovaya* with a funky theme or an all-you-can-eat buffet. They go out for business lunches, for after-work drinks, for celebratory occasions and even just for dinner.

This does not mean that Muscovites no longer entertain at home; Russian hospitality has deep roots. If you visit a Muscovite at home, you can expect to be regaled with stories, drowned in vodka, receive many toasts and to offer a few yourself. You can also expect to eat an enormous amount of food off a tiny plate. Once the festivities begin, it is difficult to refuse any food or drink – you will go home stuffed, drunk and happy.

Should you be lucky enough to be invited to a Muscovite's home, bring a gift. Wine, confectionery and cake are all appropriate. Keep in mind that food items are a matter of national pride, so unless you bring something really exotic (eg all the way from home), a Russian brand will be appreciated more. Flowers are also popular, but make certain there's an odd number because even numbers are for funerals.

Staples & Specialities

Breakfast *(zavtrak)* in hotels can range from a large help-yourself buffet to a few pieces of bread with jam and tea. Traditional Russian breakfast favourites include *bliny* and *kasha*

TABLE SCRAPS FROM HEAVEN

According to Georgian legend, God took a supper break while creating the world. He became so involved with his meal that he inadvertently tripped over the high peaks of the Caucasus, spilling his food onto the land below. The land blessed by Heaven's table scraps was Georgia.

Darra Goldstein, from The Georgian Feast

Georgian Food

Moscow is the best place outside the Caucasus to sample the rich, spicy cuisine of Georgia. This fertile region – wedged between East and West – has long been the beneficiary (and victim) of passing merchants and raiders. These influences are evident in Georgian cooking, which shows glimpses of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavours.

The truly Georgian elements – the differences – are what make this cuisine so delectable. Most notably, many meat and vegetable dishes use ground walnuts or walnut oil as an integral ingredient, yielding a distinctive rich, nutty flavour. Also characteristic is the mix of spices, *khmeli-suneli*, which combines coriander, garlic, chillies, pepper and savoury with a saffron substitute made from dried marigold petals.

Georgian chefs love to prepare their food over an open flame, and grilled meat is certainly among the most beloved items on any Georgian menu. Traditionally, however, meat was reserved for special occasions, and daily meals revolved around vegetables and greens. The fertile Georgian soil yields green beans, tomatoes, eggplants, mushrooms and garlic, all of which make their delicious way to the table. Herbs such as coriander, dill, parsley and green onions are often served fresh, with no preparation or sauce – a palate-cleansing counterpoint to the other rich dishes. Fruits such as grapes and pomegranates show up not only as dessert, but also as tart complements to roasted meats.

Here are a few tried-and-true Georgian favourites to get you started when faced with an incomprehensible menu:

Basturma Marinated, grilled meat, usually beef or lamb.

Buglama Beef or veal stew with tomatoes, dill and garlic.

Chakhokhbili Slow-cooked chicken with herbs and vegetables.

Chikhirtmi Lemony, chicken soup.

Khachi puri Rich, cheesy bread, made with sour or salty cheese and served hot.

Kharcho Thick, spicy beef soup made from stale bread soaked in yogurt.

Khinkali Dumplings stuffed with lamb or a mixture of beef and pork.

Lavash Flat bread used to wrap cheese, tomatoes, herbs or meat.

Mkhali A vegetable puree with herbs and walnuts, most often made with beets or spinach.

Pakhlava A walnut pastry similar to baklava, but made with sour-cream dough.

Shilaplavi Rice pilaf, often with potatoes.

Tolmas Vegetables (often tomatoes, eggplant or grape leaves) stuffed with beef.

Georgian Wines

Wine is an essential part of any Georgian meal. At all but the most informal occasions, Georgians call on a *tamada*, or toastmaster, to ensure that glasses are raised and drinks topped up throughout the meal.

Georgian vintners utilise a process that is different from their European and New World counterparts. The grapes are fermented together with skins and stems, then stored in clay jugs, resulting in a flavour specific to the Caucasus. Noteworthy Georgian wines:

Kindzmarauli A sickeningly sweet, blood-red wine which, appropriately enough, was the favourite of Stalin.

Mukuzani A rather tannic red; it is the best known and oldest Georgian wine.

Saperavi A dark, full-bodied red produced from grapes of the same name.

Tsinandali Pale and fruity, the most popular Georgian white.

(porridge). Sunday brunch is an institution for many expats and wealthy Russians (see p136 for some of the best brunch options).

Russians prefer to have a fairly heavy early afternoon meal *(obed)* and a lighter evening meal *(uzhin)*. Meals (and menus) are divided into various courses such as *zakuski* (appetisers, often grouped into either hot or cold dishes); first courses (usually soups); second courses (or mains), also called hot courses; and desserts.

APPETISERS

A typical Russian meal starts with a few *zakuski*, which are often the most interesting items on the menu. The fancier *zakuski* rival main courses for price.

Russia is famous for its caviar *(ikra)*: the snack of tsars and New Russians. Caviar is no longer the bargain it once was due to declining sturgeon populations and the good old market economy. The best caviar is black (sturgeon) caviar *(ikra chyornaya* or *zirnistaya)*, and the much cheaper and saltier option is red (salmon) caviar *(ikra krasnaya* or *ketovaya)*. Russians spread it on buttered bread or *bliny* and wash it down with a slug of vodka or a toast of champagne. Vegetarians can try ersatz caviar made entirely from eggplant or other vegetables.

Most restaurant menus offer a truly mind-boggling array of salads *(salat)*, including standards such as *ovoshnoy salat* (vegetable salad, which contains tomatoes and cucumbers) and also *stolichny salat* (capital salad, which contains beef, potatoes and eggs in mayonnaise). Even if you read Russian, the salads are usually not identifiable by their often nonsensical names.

TOP FIVE UNDERRATED RUSSIAN FOODS

- **Beets** Try the classic Russian salad *seld pod shuby*, or 'herring in a fur coat', a colourful conglomeration of herring, beets and carrots.
- **Kasha** There are dozens of kinds of *kasha* (porridge), but they are all delicious when they are drowned in butter and brown sugar.
- **Kefir** A sour yogurt drink, often served for breakfast. To adapt the wise words of Mary Poppins – just a spoonful of sugar helps the *kefir* go down.
- **Pelmeni** Russian comfort food: dumplings stuffed with ground beef and topped with a dollop of sour cream.
- **Soup** Hot and hearty, nothing beats a steaming bowl of goodness on a cold winter day.

COURSES

Rich soups, offered as a first course, may well be the pinnacle of Slavic cooking. There are dozens of varieties, often served with a dollop of sour cream. Most are made using meat stock. The most common soups include borscht, *shchi* (cabbage soup), *okroskha* (cucumber soup with a *kvas* – a beer-like drink – base), and *solyanka* (a tasty meat soup with salty vegetables and hint of lemon).

The second course can be poultry *(ptitsa)*, meat *(myaso)* or fish *(ryba)*, which might be prepared in a few different ways (see p233). Russian dumplings *(pelmeni)* are usually filled with meat. However, they may also come with potatoes, cabbage or mushrooms. Often you must order a *garnir* (side dish) or you will just get a hunk of meat on your plate. Options here are usually potatoes *(kartoshki)*, rice *(ris)* or undefined vegetables *(ovoshchi)*. Bread is served with every meal. The Russian black bread (a vitamin-rich sour rye) is delicious and uniquely Russian.

Perhaps most Russians are exhausted or drunk by dessert time, because this is the least imaginative course. The most common options are ice cream *(morozhenoye)*, super sweet cake *(tort)* or chocolate *(shokolat)*.

DRINKS

'Drinking is the joy of the Rus. We cannot live without it.' With these words Vladimir of Kiev, father of the Russian state, is said to have rejected abstinent Islam on his people's behalf in the 10th century.

The word 'vodka' is the diminutive of the Russian word for water, *voda*, so it means something like 'a wee drop'. Russians sometimes drink vodka in moderation, but more often they tip it down in swift shots, followed by a pickle.

In Moscow, the Kristall distillery is considered to produce the finest vodka. Yuri Dolgoruki is the top of the line, while Zolotoe Koltso (Golden Ring) and Moskovskaya are also high-quality vodkas. Another favourite of the 'Vodkaphiles' Club' is Klassik. Its unique bottle is an authentic replica of a 300-year-old traditional style. Another brand gaining popularity is Smirnovskaya vodka, distilled in Chernogolovka, a small town not far from Moscow.

Beer has recently overtaken vodka as Russia's most popular alcoholic drink. The market leader is Baltika, a Scandinavian joint-venture with Russian management, based in St Petersburg. Baltika makes no less than nine excellent brews, fittingly labelled '1' to '9'. Tinkoff (see p135) is a national chain of microbreweries that has begun bottling its potent brews for sale in shops.

Russians drink sparkling wine, or *Sovietskoe shampanskoe*, to toast special occasions and to sip during intermission at the theatre. It tends to be sickeningly sweet, so look for the label that says *sukhoe* (dry).

Kvas is a mildly alcoholic, fermented, rye-bread water. Cool and refreshing, it is a popular summer drink that tastes something like ginger beer. In the olden days it was dispensed on the street from big, wheeled tanks. Patrons would bring their own bottles or plastic bags and fill up. The *kvas* truck is a rare sight these days, but this cool, tasty treat is still available from Russian restaurants.

TOP FIVE COOKBOOKS

- *Please, To the Table* (Anya Von Bremzen) is a tried and true authority on Russian cooking. Learn to make *bliny* (and just about every other Russian dish) like the babushkas.
- *Tastes and Tales from Russia* (Alla Danishevsky) presents each recipe accompanied by a folktale – a great way to introduce children to Russian cooking.
- *The Georgian Feast* (Darra Goldstein) is one of the few English-language cookbooks focusing on this spicy Caucasian cuisine.
- *A Year of Russian Feasts* (Catherine Cheremeteff Jones), part cookbook and part travelogue, describes the author's experiences with Russian traditions and customs, culinary celebrations and day-to-day life.
- *Classic Russian Cooking: A Gift to Young Housewives* (Elena Molokhevets) is more of a history lesson than a recipe book; this tome is based on the most popular cookbook from the 19th century.

FASHION

On first impression, conspicuous consumption seems to be the theme of Russian fashionistas (see the boxed text, opposite). Connoisseurs argue, however, that *la mode* in Moscow is becoming more sophisticated, creatively mixing well-known Western brands with up-and-coming local designers.

Russian models have certainly taken the fashion world by storm, with beauties such as Natalya Vodianova and Evgenia Volodina dominating the pages of *Vogue* and *Elle*. Moscow designers are also attracting increasing attention, both at home and abroad. Names to look out for include the controversial Yegor Zaitsev, son of the famed Slava Zaitsev and celebrated designer in his own rite. Igor Chapurin has earned international recognition, as well as winning the award for best women's-wear designer at the First Russian and Fashion Style Awards in 2005.

Since 2002, Moscow has hosted two major fashion events: Russian Fashion Week (see p10) and the smaller Fashion Week in Moscow, held in October.

Such high fashion is not so interesting to the average Ivan or Tatiana on the street, though. These days, most Russians shop at the same stores and wear the same clothes as their counterparts in the West: blue jeans, business suits, or anything in between. Moscow's many shopping centres are filled with the same stores that you might find anywhere in Europe.

Only winter differentiates Russian style, bringing out the best or the worst of it, depending on your perspective. Fur is still the most effective and most coveted way to stay warm. Some advice from a local fashion connoisseur: 'your protests that fur is cruel are likely to be met by blank stares and an uncomfortable shifting of feet. Don't come in winter if this offends you.'

PEDICURES, PANTIES & POODLES *Alan & Julia Thompson*

Olga and Masha, two New Russian women, meet at a party, clutching identical Prada handbags.

'Paris, US$300,' Olga confidently reports.

'Moscow, US$500!' Masha trumps.

This popular anecdote chides the perversely status-conscious New Russians, whose social world is awash with exclusive designer labels and conspicuous price tags. Russia's newly rich have abandoned the austerity of the old Soviet regime and become adoring patrons of Europe's fashion houses. So now Moscow boasts boutiques for Louis Vuitton, Jimmy Choo, Hermes, Cartier, Dior, Tiffany and more. In fact, Moscow's Armani store does more business than any other in the world, apart from Tokyo.

To view Moscow's show ponies in their natural habitat, check out Tretyakovsky proezd (p155). Here, the high fashionistas gather in full regalia. It is not always a pretty sight. The desire to coordinate often goes to extremes, even if it means head-to-toe Burberry plaid. Manicures, pedicures and lipstick, brassiers, panties and high heels, are all made to match as if by Milan-mandate. Keeping up with the Hiltons, temperamental lapdogs – sometimes supporting designer poodle-wear – have become an accessory essential.

And what of the New Russian man? He still lags somewhat behind his girlfriend. Taking his fashion cues from AC/DC, the New Russian man is 'Back in Black': black suit, black shoes, black Hermes tie, black belt, black sunglasses. Look for the Cartier watch to distinguish the New Russian man from ordinary security guards and doorman, for whom black is also the colour of choice.

SPORT

Russia's international reputation in sport is well founded, with athletes earning international fame and glory for their success in ice hockey, basketball, gymnastics and figure skating.

Anna Kournikova attracted the world's attention to Russian tennis, even though she became better known for her photogenic legs than her ripping backhand. More recently, Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova leads a cohort of young Russians who currently figure highly in the women's game. Wimbledon champ Marat Safin remains one of the most explosive stars on the men's circuit. The Kremlin Cup is an international tennis tournament held in Moscow every year (see p11). The lesser-known women's tournament, the Federation Cup, attracted big names such as Venus Williams and Anastasia Myskina in 2005.

The most popular spectator sport in Russia is football (soccer), and five Moscow teams play in Russia's premier league (Vysshaya Liga). Currently, football is enjoying a boom pumped up by large sponsorship deals with Russian big business. Lukoil has thrown its considerable financial weight behind Russia's most successful club, Spartak, a Moscow team that has won the Russian premier league every year since 1996. Other teams in the 16-strong league to watch out for are the Moscow-based Lokomotiv, TsSKA (2005 UEFA Cup winners), Torpedo and Dinamo. These days, though, Russia's most famous football club is 'Chel-sky', billionaire Roman Abramovich's highly successful entry in the English premier league.

Despite (or maybe because of) its popularity, running a soccer club in Russia has become a risky business – in the post Soviet-era, seven soccer officials have been the targets of assassination attempts. Corruption is believed to be rife in the clubs with match fixing a particular problem.

Popular winter sports include ice hockey and basketball. Both of these sports lose many of their best players to the American professional leagues. Nonetheless, the top Moscow basketball team, TsSKA, is champion of the Russian league and it also does well in the European league.

In 2005 the National Hockey League (in North America) cancelled its season when players and management were unable to resolve a labour dispute. As a result, 72 players (many of them Russian) came to play in the Russian *super liga* – a windfall to have so many of the world's best ice-hockey players. Moscow hosts three teams, including champions Dinamo and their archrivals Spartak.

MEDIA

Newspapers

Though a far cry from the one-note news days of the Soviet era, most of Russia's biggest papers are, to some degree, mouthpieces for the various powerful bodies that own them, be they political parties or rich businessmen. The public, long used to reading between the lines, know how to take a bit from here, a bit from there, and construct a truth that's somewhere in between.

The most popular Russian dailies are *Izvestia*, *Kommersant* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The government's official newspaper is the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, while the tabloids are represented by *Moskovsky Komsomolets Versiya* and *Sovershenno Sekretno*.

The weekly *Argumenty I Fakty* is one of the most popular papers in the country, selling over 30 million copies a week. Reputed to be relatively free from outside influences, it covers politics, economics and the social scene.

Novaya Gazeta is a liberal rag, well known for its column by Russia's most famous investigative reporter, Anna Politkovskaya. She gained notoriety after playing an active role in negotiations with Chechen rebels during the 2002 Nord-Ost crisis in Moscow (see p36). She claims that later attempts to act as a neutral go-between got her poisoned by Kremlin thugs. Her controversial book, *Putin's Russia*, was published in the UK in 2004.

Television

He who controls the TV, controls the country – and no-one understands this better than President Putin. In 2000 his administration conducted a heavy-handed legal attack on the owners of NTV, a channel that came closer than others to matching the professional, unbiased news standards more associated with the West (see the boxed text, below). Now, in terms of independent journalism, there's little to distinguish NTV from the state-owned channels.

Not that Russian TV is managed by some Soviet-styled spooks. In fact the heads of the main state channels – Channel 1 and Rossiya – were among those young journalists who gave Russian audiences a taste of editorial freedom in the 1990s. Many faces on the screen are still the same, but news and analysis are increasingly transforming into ideological brainwashing. Only RenTV, a channel owned by the state power grid, has coverage that somewhat deviates from the party line.

THE VOICE OF MOSCOW *Leonid Ragozin*

A Soviet verse says that the quiet light of the Kremlin's ruby stars can reach the furthest corners of the country – a metaphor that is sweet for some Russians and horrible for others. But there is another tower in Moscow whose emanations reach almost every Russian home – very literally – via a complicated network of terrestrial installations and satellites. It is the Ostankino TV tower.

Putin's unexpected accession to the highest post in Russia was accompanied by a dramatic TV war. The country's most-watched channel, ORT, then controlled by oligarch Boris Berezovsky, pounded Putin's potential competitors with accusations of corruption and incompetence. The main evening news bulletin was followed by a 10-minute comment by notorious journalist Mikhail Leontyev, whose wicked irony crossed all conceivable ethical borders.

The NTV channel owned by another oligarch, Vladimir Gusinsky, answered with unfounded allegations that Putin's security forces might be behind terrorist attacks in Moscow and offered no less jaw-dropping satire. One political puppet show restaged Ernst Hoffmann's fairy tale *Klein Zaches*, in which a fairy takes pity on a boy born a freak, physically and mentally. She makes the whole town believe that the boy is a genius of staggering beauty and infinite talents. The Zaches puppet looked very much like Putin, and the fairy closely resembled Berezovsky.

Soon after Putin became the president, NTV's main creditor, the state-owned gas monopoly Gazprom, launched a legal crusade against the channel culminating in its full takeover and a change of management. Gusinsky was forced into exile. Half of NTV's journalists left the channel and were taken on board by TVS. This new channel was run by none other than Berezovsky – a fairy now rather disenchanted with and unloved by the product of his own magic.

But now the magic wand was in someone else's hands. Very soon the oil giant Lukoil came up with a rather dubious legal suit and – surprise, surprise – forced TVS into oblivion. Berezovsky turned into another fugitive-oligarch.

So what are the Ostankino emanations telling people now? They say there is no worse evil than an orange revolution, that human rights and freedom of speech are nice words with little meaning, that Russia is regaining its former strength, but those (unnamed, but certainly westward) forces who don't want to reckon with it, are waging a campaign of political sabotage.

LANGUAGE

In prerevolutionary Russia, France was considered the epitome of high culture, and this was reflected in cuisine, music and language. Indeed, among the well-educated upper classes, French was spoken more commonly than Russian.

All this changed in the 20th century, when the language of the people – solid, working-class Russians – became the language of the state. Western influences were generally frowned upon, in any case, and French in particular was derided for its classist pretences. In Russia, one spoke Russian. Indeed, in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia etc, one also spoke Russian. Muscovites could travel far and wide from their capital, and never leave the boundaries of their Russian-speaking region.

TOP FIVE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER 'CHUT-CHUT'

If you learn only one phrase in Russian, let it be *chut-chut* (pronounced 'choot-choot'), meaning 'a little bit'. Here are just a few questions you are sure to field, and you will be grateful you know the appropriate response:

- *Vy gavariti pa-russky?* Do you speak Russian?
- *Vam nravitsa svyokla?* Do you like beets?
- *Skol'ka u vas stoit kvartira/mashina/visshe abrazavanie?* How much does a flat/car/higher education cost?
- *Nu, tam luchshe?* So, is it better 'over there' (meaning wherever you are from)?
- *Davai vypim vodku!* Let's drink vodka!

The legacy of this is that today everyone in Moscow speaks Russian. You can expect English to be spoken only at the finest hotels and restaurants and at a few hostels and agencies that cater to international backpacker types. The city is becoming a bit more foreigner-friendly, with some signs in Roman script and menus and maps in English at major tourist attractions. But you are advised to learn – at least – the Cyrillic alphabet and a few friendly phrases, before setting out on your own (see p230).

ECONOMY & COSTS

Experts estimate that the average Muscovite earns about R16,800 a month, far in excess of the average of R6020 earned elsewhere in the country. However, this figure is misleading, as 70% of the population earns less than the average. Large portions of people are on fixed wages and pensions that may not top R5000 a month.

Moscow is one of the most expensive cities in the world, up there with London and Hong Kong. Expect to pay at least R600 a head for a meal in a restaurant. If you self-cater or dine at cafeterias, you can probably get by on R500 a day for meals.

Prices for lodging are also high, as the city has a shortage of comfortable, cheap hotels. With a few exceptions, the cheapest accommodation is usually not less than R1200 per day. Expect to pay at least R3000 for a double room in a decent three-star hotel (for suggestions see p164). Prices for top-end hotels start at R5000 and go all the way up.

Although dual pricing for hotels and transport tickets no longer exits, as a foreigner in Russia you'll still often find yourself paying more than a Russian for museums. The mark-up for foreigners is extreme – often as much as 10 times the price that Russians pay (although you may be able to avoid it if you have student identification). Take heart that the extra money you shell out is desperately needed to protect the very works of art and artefacts you've come to see.

HOW MUCH?

Admission to the Kremlin R350
All-you-can-eat sushi R600
Bottle of Baltika beer R30
Cappuccino R60
Hard Rock Cafe Moscow T-shirt R570
Litre of bottled water R15-30
Litre of petrol R16-18
One hour online R60
Souvenir matryoshka doll R500
Take-away bliny R20
Two-room flat (one month) US$1200

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

In December 1993, two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia finally adopted a new constitution. The circumstances of its enactment were less than desirable. Russia's early transition away from Communist Party rule was marked by power conflicts between the president, Boris Yeltsin, and parliament, as well as between central and regional governments.

In the autumn of 1993, the contest turned violent, when Boris Yeltsin ordered the defiant parliament to be shut down. Under siege in their offices in Russia's White House (p86), Yeltsin's left-wing opponents issued a nationwide summons for people to take to the streets in protest. But their call to arms went unheeded, and their resistance was bombarded into submission. The president had prevailed.

The resultant 1993 Constitution created a strong executive system. The president is charged with selecting the prime minister and forming the government, and he is entitled to bypass the legislature and rule by executive decree if deemed necessary. Moreover, the president possesses access to a wide array of bureaucratic, economic and coercive resources with few restraints. President Yeltsin's leadership style was to broker deals with his political rivals, using force only in exceptional cases. President Putin, on the other hand, has been more willing to use the coercive powers inherent in the office to cower his would-be opponents.

The parliament, or Federal Assembly, contains a lower house, or Duma (p65), based on popular representation, and an upper house, or Senate (p55), based on regional representation. Despite its limited powers, the parliament does not act as a mere rubber stamp. Under the polarising and unpredictable Yeltsin, the Duma made the most of its mandate, opposing the president's policies and organising impeachment inquiries. But under the popular and determined Putin, the legislature has become a more compliant branch, passing the president's initiatives while fearing his retribution.

The Constitution also established a federal system composed of 89 territorial subjects, including the city of Moscow. During Yeltsin's tenure, Russia's regions enjoyed greater autonomy over local political and economic affairs. But this trend was reversed under Putin; after a brief experiment with direct elections, the president has reassumed the right to appoint and dismiss regional governors.

The 1993 Constitution created the institutional framework of a democratic system, but it also contained the seeds of creeping authoritarianism. Since the constitution's inception, the unchecked powers of the executive have been increasingly deployed to the detriment of Russian democracy. Press freedoms, civil society and electoral competition have all been significantly constrained. Meanwhile, corruption, coercion and incompetence contaminate the public sector. As a result, Russia has evolved into a kind of illiberal democracy.

Moscow reflects these larger developments of Russian politics. The capital has known but one boss since 1992, Yury Luzhkov. The sometimes populist, sometimes nationalist, but always opportunist mayor has built a juggernaut political machine that exemplifies the marriage of power and money in the New Russia. Luzhkov's fiefdom includes a vast army of regulators, tax collectors, prosecutors, litigators, realtors and PR specialists, who make sure that nobody takes a slice of the Moscow pie without paying for it.

TOP FIVE BARGAINS

For the thrifty, a few bargains remain in Moscow. Also see the boxed text, p63.

- Business lunch (p120) Three filling courses usually cost around R200.
- Classical performing arts (p145) The cheapest tickets are often as little as R100, even at major venues such as the Bolshoi.
- Moscow Times (p223) A daily dose of news, plus a weekly entertainment section that's chock full of fun, all for free.
- Free Internet access (p221) With purchase of food or drink at the stylish Phlegmatic Dog.
- Transport (p214) Ride the metro for a mere R13, or take a taxi across town for R150 or less.

ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE

Moscow's continental climate enjoys five seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter – and Russian winter. The deepest, darkest part of winter is undeniably cold, but if you are prepared, it can be an adventure. Furs and vodka keep people warm, and snow-covered landscapes are picturesque. A solid snow pack covers the ground from November to March. The lowest recorded temperature is -42°C, although it's normally more like -10°C for weeks on end. Occasional southerly winds can raise the temperature briefly to a balmy 0°C. Daylight hours during winter are very few.

During the spring thaw – late March and early April – everything turns to mud and slush. Summer comes fast in June, and temperatures are comfortable until well into September. The highest recorded temperature is 39°C, although on a humid August day you'll swear it's hotter than that. July and August are the warmest, wettest months.

GREEN MOSCOW

'Green Moscow' is taken very literally in the Russian capital, where parks, forests and gardens cover almost one third of the area. This translates into 18 sq metres of green space per person – impressive, compared to the average of 7 sq metres in other same-sized capitals.

Moscow's major environmental problem is air and noise pollution from industrial and private sources. The increase in road traffic exacerbates both problems, and air quality also suffers from the widespread use of leaded fuels and uncontrolled emissions by vehicles.

In 1994 Moscow implemented the Ecological Improvement Plan, which included measures such as automobile inspections and industrial regulations. The city administration claims that a steady decrease in air pollution has resulted, although concrete figures are not available. Since 1999, the city has converted 1000 buses and other municipal vehicles to alternative, low-emission energy sources. In 2002 the city introduced a plan for more stringent requirements for petrol and diesel emissions (meeting EU standards by 2010). A related measure is to replace the entire fleet of city vehicles in the next 10 to 15 years. The estimated benefit is a 50% reduction in emissions!

In preparation for its bid for the 2012 Olympics, Moscow added some additional, rather vague plans to its list of environmental priorities. They involved introducing industrial regulations to reduce airborne contaminants and to improve waste management. That the city administration recognises the importance of these measures is encouraging. How this plan will be implemented – in light of the unsuccessful Olympic bid – remains to be seen.

URBAN PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Post-Soviet Moscow has been a hotbed of development. Skyscrapers and steeples are changing the city skyline; the metro is expanding in all directions; and office buildings, luxury hotels and shopping centres are going up all over the city. Entire neighbourhoods – once dominated by nondescript Soviet blocks – are now bustling urban centres with their own markets, shops and characters.

The latest target for intensive urban development is the area around Krasnaya Presnya Park and the World Trade Centre (see p84 for details). Mayor Luzhkov has dubbed this neighbourhood 'Moscow City' and slated it as the future location of the city administration. A new mini metro line is in the works, with stops at the World Trade Centre (Mezhdunarodnaya) and in the heart of the new development (Delovoy Tsentr). Developers have followed suit, building shiny glass and metal buildings on either side of the Moscow River and a cool pedestrian bridge connecting them. The skyscrapers are hardly even built, but they are already being claimed by multinational corporations and Russian enterprises for their offices.

Such development is an exciting sign of the city's sense of prosperity and possibility. It is also a source of contention among architects, historians and other critics, who claim that Moscow is losing its architectural heritage.

The nonprofit group, Moscow Architectural Preservation Society (MAPS), estimates that more than 400 buildings have been razed in the past decade, including as many as 60 buildings of historical interest. The latter are supposed to be protected by federal law, but critics claim that the laws are useless in the face of corruption and cash.

Activists go so far as to compare Luzhkov to Stalin, when it comes to development, claiming that the city has lost more buildings during the contemporary period than any time since the 1930s. That the mayor's wife is a prominent developer who has made millions from city contracts only adds fuel to their fire.

Architects and historians are most distressed about the city's tendency to tear down and rebuild, instead of preserve. Many buildings might look old, but they are mere replicas, as for example along ulitsa Arbat (see p87). Or, developers maintain the historic façade, but destroy the building behind it, such as the Rimsky-Korsakov complex where Café Pushkin is located. As one critic observed, 'It is…like the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, but at least they had an ideal for the city.'

TOP FIVE CONTROVERSIAL RECONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

- **Detsky Mir** (p155) Spared in the 1990s, but now slated for 'renovation' in honour of its upcoming jubilee.
- **Hotel Moskva** (p66) Critics wonder why it's necessary to destroy a historic building with architectural quirks to create a brand new building with the same architectural quirks.
- **Krasny Oktyabr** (p112) Soon to become luxury condominiums.
- **Manezh Exhibition Centre** (p65) Recent reconstruction was prompted by a fire – widely believed to be arson.
- **Rimsky-Korsakov complex** (p112) A mere façade of the historic building it once was.