

Understand Moscow

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The Russian capital has become a kinder, gentler city – not to mention a lot more hip.

HISTORY 188

Travel through nearly 900 years of history, from medieval magic to imperial grandeur, from communist austerity to contemporary affluence.

PERFORMING ARTS..... 206

Moscow's stages are graced by symphony orchestras, bohemian bands, classical ballet and experimental theatre.

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Icons and onion domes, sculptures and skyscrapers: the Russian capital is something to see.

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Moscow features prominently in the Russian classics, as well as their contemporary counterparts.

Moscow Today

More than two decades into its reign as the capital of the Russian Federation, Moscow has proven itself. In this time the city has weathered economic crises and political transitions, building sprees and demolition derbies, terrorist attacks and festive celebrations. Now – with a newly prosperous middle class and a new look to boot – the city has settled into an upbeat but sustainable rhythm. What Stalin said is finally true: ‘Life has become better, comrades. Life has become more joyous.’

Best on Film

Elena (2011) Winner of a Jury Prize at Cannes, this drama examines the meaning of love, family and class in modern Moscow.

Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears (1980) Great chick flick that bagged an Oscar for best foreign-language film.

My Perestroika (2010) An insightful documentary about coming of age during the *perestroika* (restructuring) era and navigating life in contemporary Moscow.

Best in Print

The Master and Margarita (Mikhail Bulgakov) The most telling fiction to come out of the Soviet Union.

On the Golden Porch (Tatyana Tolstaya) Short stories focusing on big souls in little flats in the 1990s.

Anna Karenina (Leo Tolstoy) A legitimate alternative for readers who don't have time for *War and Peace*.

Children of the Arbat (Anatoly Rybakov) A tragic but vivid portrait of 1930s Russia.

Good Manners

It was not long ago that Moscow topped the list of the most unfriendly cities in the world. By 2013 the Russian capital had dropped to number 16 on the list, compiled by CNN. Muscovites may not stop to chat with strangers on the street, but it's undeniable that this city is developing better manners.

➔ The police force has cleaned up its act, with new uniforms, new standards for behaviour and a new name (*politsiya*, replacing the ominous-sounding *militsiya*).

➔ Driving rules and parking restrictions are being enforced, resulting in more conscientious driving. Notably, automobiles often stop at crosswalks to allow pedestrians to cross the street.

➔ In 2014 a countrywide ban on smoking in public places went into effect. This includes restaurants, bars, train platforms, and even apartment stairwells. Breathe freely, comrades.

➔ Smoking was restricted to promote good health, but what about cursing? Profanity was banned from films and theatre productions, while warning labels are required for offending literature and music. The reaction from Muscovites to this legislation is mixed: many support the effort to make people more *kulturny*, while others scoff ‘#%\$& that!’

Could it be that Moscow's notoriously gruff population is getting good manners? Can civility be legislated?

Liveability

When Sergei Sobyenin became mayor of Moscow in 2010, he promised a shift in focus for Moscow – away from big business and huge construction projects – towards improving the city for regular residents.

Four years down the line, the results are visible and the city is much more liveable. Millions of residents are rejoicing.