

EXPAT GUIDE:
MOSCOW

by
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Acknowledgement must be given to *The Moscow Times* (www.moscowtimes.ru) without whose invaluable pages, much of the information in the guide would not have been available. You can subscribe (for free unless you access the archive) to the *Moscow Times* on the Internet before your move to Moscow and benefit from news that will begin to give you some indication of what is going on in Moscow.

Further acknowledgement must go to the Expat list and its over +/-1,000 strong family of mostly expatriate subscribers. Like all families this one has its colourful differences, but alongside the quips, quotes and anecdotes, is a mine of important information of great value to the newcomer to Moscow. I thank all those on the list whose information has helped to spark ideas for this guide.

Children in Moscow

Very little mention is made of children in this guide, as the majority of expats who do come to Moscow do not have children. The subject of children will be addressed in a soon-to-be published volume entitled 'Expat guide: Children in Moscow'.

The book is dedicated to
my beloved son, Christopher,
for being such a wonderful companion
and for generating so much laughter in my life.

Preface

As far as I know, this is the first attempt to write up an expat guide to Moscow in such length and detail. Others have published information in the past but not in this format, it would seem.

As a reader, and when you wish to follow up ideas or suggestions made in this guide it is important that you understand that much of the information is taken from the opinions and advice of other expatriates. Opinions are opinions and often not factual and in the light of this, you are asked to take what you read as simply a guide or indication, as opposed to a complete dearth of information on whatever subject you are considering. Such conventional wisdom is better than nothing, after all, and it's a starting point for you to make your own opinion. The main aim of this book is to help you save time and effort and ensure that your learning curve is not as steep as it surely would have been without this guide.

To establish the temporal relevance of information contained in this guide, it may be worth considering that most of the material was written in the first half of 1999.

Please send any contributions that you would like to see published in the next edition of this guide to the author at: mmaurel@mistral.co.uk. These will be considered for publication with due acknowledgement to yourself, if requested.

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1/Moscow expats – the species

Probably the single characteristic that can define the announcement to one's friends families and colleagues that one is going to live in Moscow is the shocked reaction that accompanies this announcement. Most expats will feel as if they have just announced that they are going to live on the moon.

Before arriving in Moscow, most expats believe that the experience will be grim, depressing and hostile, surrounded, as they expect to be, by morose, xenophobic Russians. This can certainly lead you to think twice about your decision to move to Moscow. Given Russia's unremittingly bad press in the rest of the world, this reaction is not unreasonable. You would be well advised, however, to remember that the view from inside Russia, looking out, is vastly different from that outside Russia, looking in. The reality of Moscow life will confound this view. Of course, these elements do exist, but on the whole you will be pleasantly surprised to find Russians to be warm and hospitable people. They laugh, they cry, they love and they need to survive just like anyone else in the world. This is the bottom line.

The majority of expats will seek to dispel their sense of culture shock by trying to fathom what Russia and the Russians are all about. Don't expect that you will ever get near to accomplishing this task. Russia can be classed as 'a great unknown'. As Churchill said of Russia: "it is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma". The place and its people are like the typical Russian doll known well beyond Russia's borders. Having opened up the first doll, you are surprised to see another doll, and then another, and then another and so on.

Many have a burning desire to get to the bottom of the mystery, and for them the bitter-sweet pleasure of doing so will be indefinitely prolonged. Those that want to 'suss it out' and 'sort it out' quickly will be bitterly disappointed.

You may be a seasoned expat having experienced a wide variety of hardship postings and believe that Moscow will simply be one more such posting. Don't be complacent in your views, for the culture shock you experience in Moscow will force you to thoroughly revise these beliefs and rethink your strategies. This can be deeply disconcerting to those who arrive, confident that they will be able to cope with whatever fate throws at them.

You're probably in a better position if you're a 'green' expat and are anticipating that you will face culture shock anyway. At least then you will be prepared to have your life disrupted like a thousand-piece jig-saw puzzle flung into the air. Your ability to put the pieces back into place quickly will depend on the speed with which you amass 'on-the-ground' knowledge. This book will help you to do so far more quickly than if you were left to do so simply by trial-and-error.

What generally proves to be so disorientating is the fact that you may find yourself moving from a comfort zone where you feel competent, sane,

knowledgeable, capable and self-assured to feeling overwhelmed, anxious, impotent, vulnerable, and uncertain of even basic ways of coping.

Apart from making a serious attempt to learn the Cyrillic alphabet and even some basic Russian, one recommended way of trying to absorb the new culture is firstly to accept Moscow on its own terms. Try to tackle the task by taking small, bite-sized 'pieces' instead of trying to swallow the whole thing in one gulp. Realise that it takes time for things to begin to feel more familiar, even if they still don't quite make sense to you.

Russia has its own agenda, and your experience will be largely on Russia's terms. The best way of coping is to accept this fact, to go with the flow and try to fit in, rather than to impose your own views on the situation.

As recently as late 1997 it was estimated that foreign companies in Moscow numbered in the tens of thousands. Expat numbers are estimated to range from 100,000 to 200,000, though many of these are expats from former CIS states.

It is estimated that just after the 1998 financial crisis, there were about 10,000 US private citizens in Moscow and some 5,000 British citizens. There are also sizeable groups of French, Italian, German, Indian, and Asian citizens.

With Moscow's stock-exchange ranked as world's fastest growing in 1997, global confidence in Moscow and Russia grew to the extent that most foreign companies expected their foreign staff complement to continue expanding over the following five years.

The Russian Crisis of 1998 which was unleashed on 17 August, rapidly deflated these projections leading to a significant exodus of expats. Nevertheless, Moscow has always had expats and will always have expats, whether in large numbers or small. A big question mark hangs over Moscow's future, and it is not within the scope of this guide to ponder what is likely to happen after the next round of parliamentary and presidential elections.

The Moscow expat can broadly be pigeon-holed as follows: those that come to Moscow for business and support services, those that come to Moscow for humanitarian purposes, and the dependants of both these groups. These can be further subdivided into those that come to Moscow because of an enduring curiosity and love for Russia and its people, and those who simply land in Moscow because of the vicissitudes of fate. The latter are generally surprised to find themselves in Moscow and will either learn to love or hate the place.

The type of expat attracted to Russia can safely be said to be of a certain pioneering nature, and indeed this is the buzz that runs through the expat community in Moscow, the feeling that one is at the cutting edge of history rather than in a safe, predictable posting. In the early days after Perestroika, expats thrived on the perception that they were in the New Wild West, and this feeling was heightened between 1995 and 1997. Now, after the 1998 Russian Crisis, with even the necessary expats being transferred, those that are left are deemed to be truly indispensable by their companies. Undoubtedly the challenges on the staff, tax and legal and lifestyle fronts are huge and it takes a certain type of stoicism that matches Russian stoicism to make any kind of progress in this country. It's not easy, but it can be hugely rewarding.

Instead of regarding it simply as a job move, some expats turn things around by considering their move to Moscow as 'an awfully big adventure'.

In addition to technical skills, business acumen, adaptability and motivation, followed by international experience, are ranked as the top characteristics that organisations consider essential in their recruitment drives. But this is a somewhat bald statement, as many expats testify that to succeed in Russia requires skills that will mean you will succeed anywhere else in the world.

Before you agree to come to Moscow, try to assess the posting in terms of taxation, hardship pay, housing, medical coverage, indeed whether your salary is dollar- or ruble-based and family support. Salaries may need to be adjusted for inflation, devaluation, and projected cost of living in the light of inflationary trends. The recent trend before the 1998 crisis was that the salary gap between expat and Russian managers was closing markedly, and understandably so.

When Western expertise is deemed critical, in some instances the choice is biased towards new expats coming from outside and against expats with Russian knowledge who have been in Moscow for a while and who have unrealistic expectations fuelled by the much higher salaries that were on offer during the boom times.

More than ever, and in order to capture the dwindling market, good salespeople and marketing managers are in demand as Russians by their nature are not natural salespeople.

The Soviet mentality of each fighting for his own survival and not having to consider things from the point of view of another person has led to a certain distaste for or inability to fulfil conventional selling roles. The question of integrity also arises, as Russians regard selling as a mild form of prostitution.

Before the crisis western firms facing competition from Russian firms did not stint from paying equally attractive salaries for the brightest and the best. The crisis has also meant that thousands of top-quality Russian professionals are out of work and top quality candidates are two-a-penny and also prepared to accept a much lower salary than would be accepted by their Western counterparts.

The pressure is also being put on expats to learn and speak the language as they can no longer get away with simply relying on their technical skills. The candidates who do not shy away from this tall order will be the ones who will attract the top jobs.

As Moscow is no longer currently regarded the hardship assignment it once was in terms of cost of living and supply of services and facilities, the days when expats could expect to call the tune in terms of compensation packages are rapidly receding.

Crisis times - instability

In considering the possibility of coming to live in Russia, you will no doubt take into account Russia's history of instability. Those expats who braved Soviet times and have been in Moscow for decades became integrated and thus immune to the vagaries of Russian living. However, since the early 1990s expats in Moscow have experienced an ongoing series of shock tremors which ironically, has instilled a sense of stoicism when it comes to facing new tremors. They survive (like Russians) in the knowledge that in Moscow, anything goes, and that's part of its great charm for many expats. Many expats become hooked on this instability, indeed, any posting after Moscow (except possibly for Nigeria, Iraq or North Korea) is likely to seem tame by comparison. Probably the biggest

surprise you will find at the end of your time in Moscow is best summarised by what one departing expat said: "Moscow is like the Hotel California - you can check out anytime you want, but you can never leave".

Over the past decade much has changed in Moscow. The first stirrings of Perestroika instilled a sense of hope that Russia was emerging from its Soviet past and despite ups and downs, nurtured a growing sense of optimism in the first part of the decade. As things improved, this optimism came into full flower particularly from 1995.

To some, the zenith of life in Moscow was experienced in 1997 and into the early part of 1998. Very few foresaw that the bubble would burst, and burst so spectacularly. The lethal combination of Asian flu and a corrupt government coming to the end of its options toppled the entire edifice that was Russia, like a house of cards. The vast majority of expats were unprepared for the crisis and its ramifications, and although many left, new expats were still arriving as the crisis was breaking, and were still arriving a year later. No one can predict where it will lead, and for some companies, whether it will even be worth having an office in Moscow for the next year or two until things begin to stabilise and confidence grows in the new order.

The major issue at stake is the next Russian presidential election which could take place as scheduled, in the year 2000. There is no doubt that the outcome of the elections will determine the expat make-up of Russia for the next decade at least.

Deciding to move to Moscow is, in some ways, a high-risk decision, but the rewards can also be high. Are you prepared to take the gamble?

Issues to consider before you come

Terrorism

Since it became apparent in September 1999, that Moscow was the target of a terrorist campaign, security has been very tight. But whether it will ever be tight enough to prevent further attacks such as the devastating bombings that took place, is anybody's guess. This increased tension and insecurity will make anyone think twice about coming to live in Moscow and rightly so. If you do decide to move there or continue living there, you are advised to contact your embassy and ask for advice regarding the measures you should take to maximise your safety.

Racism

Note that a significant skinhead tendency exists in Moscow which targets African-Americans and people who are obviously of other cultures such as Asians. The police profess to wish to stop them. However, there is not much evidence of this being implemented. (Since the bombings in Moscow, darker-skinned Caucasians, and Chechens, specifically, have become the target of heightened security checks and in many cases, xenophobia.)

Prior to the bombing campaign, victims of attacks were mostly students, although ordinary men and women had also been attacked in public, in broad daylight. There seems to be a greater incidence of attacks in the period leading up

to and for a month or two after April 20, Hitler's birthday. The Fili Park CD market Gorky Park, metros and the vicinity of foreign student residences are vulnerable areas for attacks.

Anti-Semitism

There is a deep vein of anti-Semitism in the Russians. In Moscow, synagogues have been bombed and gravestones desecrated. For all that, several very prominent members of the government are actually Jewish. (See also section on Religion).

Anti-Western feeling

The view of the Kosovo conflict from Russia was vastly different to the view from Western countries, mostly as a result of initial media manipulation. This resulted in a significant increase in anti-American feeling primarily, followed by anti-Western feeling. This feeling was by no means confined to the older Russian. Somewhat surprisingly, and to the great credit of Russians, there were only very isolated instances where Westerners were made to feel unwelcome. Anti-Western feeling subsided rapidly in the months after the resolution of the conflict.

Moscow is not Russia

It is very important that you make the distinction between Moscow and Russia, for what is outside Moscow is the real Russia, just as Monaco is not the same as Italy or France. It is regarded as an island of development. Do not think that what you see in Moscow, you will see in other parts of Russia.

Safety

Moscow's image abroad is of gangsters shooting at random as they speed through the streets of Moscow in their black Versace outfits and in cars with tinted windows. The fact of the matter is that although shootings do occur, the ordinary expat is highly unlikely to come across such an incident. Many seasoned local expats are adamant that Moscow is far safer than New York or London.

Standard of living

Despite the devastating effects of the crisis, and the anti-Moscow bias of Western television, Moscow has certainly not regressed to the days when queues formed outside bread shops. Most things are available in Moscow and all the services you would expect to use, work extremely well. However, as always, this is subject to what happens in the next crisis!

Those expats who arrived and left in the early part of the 1990s and who return for a visit are always bowled over by the changes in the city since the early post-communism years. Indeed the pace of change in Moscow is staggering and visible from year to year. This rapid change presents part of what many expats find so exciting and stimulating about living in Moscow.

2/Before you arrive

You've been offered the job or assignment, you have made the decision to move to Moscow for a year or two or more. You know it's going to be difficult, but you don't know quite how difficult.

You've started asking around, possibly speaking to others who have lived in Moscow and asked them for their advice. The very nature of this advice is anecdotal and could be dated, but it will have helped you build up some kind of mental picture.

A ten-step guide to relocation

Careful advance planning can help to iron out this seemingly daunting task.

1. Finding a school for your children (if applicable)

As soon as you've accepted the posting, or even while your acceptance is pending, you should find out whether the school of your choice will be able to accept your child on the appointed date of your arrival. There have been long waiting lists in the past and children have sometimes been obliged to go to schools that were their parents' second choices. The move will disrupt your children's education as it is, and you can't afford to disrupt it further by not making sure that your children will be accepted by a school of your choice.

2. Determine where you are going to live

Pending your acceptance of your contract, you should try to determine what sort of accommodation will be available to you, either organised by your prospective employer or by yourself. Of course, it would be preferable if you were able to visit Moscow and check out the accommodation situation yourself or select your accommodation in advance. If you have children, you would need to tie in the location of your accommodation with the school so that you don't spend hours ferrying your kids to school and back. (*See Chapter 4 - Finding accommodation*)

3. Transport issues

Taking into account the above, it would help if you could also pre-determine the type of transport you will be able or expected to use. If you will have a car at your disposal, but the car is not available as yet, it would help if your company could organise its purchase and registration as well as the allocation of a driver (preferably English-speaking) before your arrival to avoid any delays in using it, once you get there. If you will have to rely on metros or buses, you will need to find accommodation or schools that are easily accessible by metro. Bear in mind

that there are very few signs in English in Moscow and the metro is almost entirely in Cyrillic) (*See Chapter 5 - Getting around*)

4. Networking

It's always worthwhile preparing the ground for your move by talking to others who might have lived in Moscow, or might still be living there. If your sponsoring organisation can put you in touch with someone on the ground in Moscow or at home who has lived there and who would be prepared to act as a mentor, that would be a valuable contact. Don't stop at one person though, as it's always better to get a cross-section of opinion. In any case, you might build up some relationships which could prove to be helpful once you get to Moscow and need to be shown around and introduced to other expats. By joining the Expatriate-list (*see Chapter 7 - Keeping in touch*), you will be able to get an idea of some of the issues of concern to expats in Moscow and also make some contacts which may prove to be helpful.

Some have found it useful to contact their embassy on arrival and inquire about any social groups or newcomers assistance programmes that may be established by fellow countrymen.

5. Planning the nitty-gritty

Once you have sorted out the above issues to your satisfaction and have agreed to sign your contract, you need to start thinking about the nitty-gritty. Even though two months might be a good benchmark for most international moves, a move to Moscow entails even earlier preparation. Depending on whether you've selected and located accommodation prior to your move, you will need to co-ordinate a move-in date with the estimated arrival date of your shipment. This includes determining whether tenants will have vacated the premises and whether all proposed alterations will have been completed. It's wise to consider contingency plans just in case your plans go awry. Obtain concrete suggestions from your employer.

Check that all visas and entry permits are in order and determine when they will be ready.

6. Selecting a shipper

Only use a company that has proven experience in moving personal effects to Russia. (*see companies listed in Chapter 18 - Leaving*). Find out what kind of regular and up-to-date experience they have had. Ask for references from clients that match your profile. Ask who will be handling the shipment once it arrives and needs to be shepherded through Customs and to your new home. Find out which port of entry your shipper intends to use and obtain guarantees that the agency handling this possibly intermediate section of the move is reliable and regularly used by your shipper.

7. Expect delays

The regularly updated tax and Customs regulatory system make the processing of a shipment more fraught with problems even for seasoned shippers to Moscow.

Although most sea shipments take between six and eight weeks, it's better to plan for 10 weeks and then be pleasantly surprised if it arrives earlier.

8. Packing your shipment and your accompanying luggage

Before you start packing, consider the following: From 1 February 1998, foreigners were charged 50 percent duty for the importation of their household goods as a result of an IMF recommendation. This applied even if the goods are imported temporarily for the duration of the employment contract or posting.

The duty level will also vary depending on whether the shipper asks to have furniture, clothing, kitchen ware and other articles charged by type, or whether a flat rate is applied to the consignments weight or valuation.

Under the ruling, duty was charged at ECU7 or \$9 per kilogram or at 50 percent of declared value. Value-added tax (+/-20 percent, confirm) is added on top.

This ruling might well have been amended by the time you read this, but it will give you some idea of how duty is calculated. Try contacting the American and British Embassies, or your own embassy in Moscow for the latest tariffs.

Whatever the situation, one of your major headaches is going to be deciding what to take and what not to take. Skimming through this guide will help to give you an idea of what is available or not.

With a possible 10-week delay that could span a season, it's wise to anticipate what sort of clothes you might need to take with you to bridge this gap. You don't want to be stuck with winter clothes in the midst of a summer-heat-wave or vice versa. Carry all precious documents such as financial and medical records with you on the plane. Consider the family who lost their worldly belongings when an entire container carrying these goods was blown overboard by a hurricane.

9. Documentation and Customs clearing

If you are bringing any items of cultural value into Moscow, remember that you will one day want to get them out again. To avoid problems with Customs clearance, see that you have all proper documentation and identification. It seems that duties are or can be levied on almost any item crossing the border into Russia, with rates and rules being applied seemingly haphazardly and almost at the whim of the Customs officers.

The Russian Customs authorities are very strict about obtaining detailed inventory lists. They are not likely to open all your boxes, but if they open one and check its contents against your list and find that the two don't tally, they'll open several more which always holds the risk of increased theft. Make sure that your list states the expected retail value of the items, especially the more expensive items.

Apart from being able to claim any items that have disappeared en route to Moscow, the list will give you a good record of what you packed and where to find it in a hurry during your first days in Moscow when boxes lie scattered and unopened around your new home.

Ensure that your shipping agent uses the services of a competent Customs clearing agent who is up-to-date with the latest Customs regulations.

Don't even think about shipping your goods yourself. Customs clearing can take days if not weeks spent in queues and getting bureaucratic stamps. Any unforeseen delay in clearing your cargo will lead to a demurrage penalty charge which can be steep. Going via St Petersburg does not avoid problems, as you will still have to transport goods to your domicile if elsewhere, and unless you are with it every inch of the way, you have no guarantee that it will all arrive.

When people say detailed inventories are needed, they mean detailed. It's a hassle, but it's worth it and it helps with the Customs clearance for if they have checked that two or three boxes tally with the list, they are likely to let the rest through without opening them.

10. Once you arrive

Ensure before departure that you know just who you will have to deal with (on your shipper's staff) once you arrive. Find out if they will have allocated a staff member to you and that the staff member can speak English and is not likely to be away on leave when your shipment is due to arrive. Ask them to provide a contingent member of staff to help you if the appointed person falls ill or is unavailable for some reason.

It's always a good idea to find out if your company has a 'fixit' person who is accustomed to dealing on the company's behalf with Customs agents and shippers. Bear in mind that if you are working you will be trying to get to grips with a new job and will not be in the best position to try to conquer the Russian Customs system at the same time. If your partner is not working, they will also have no clue nor inclination to go out and do battle while they are trying to settle children and figure out how best to feed a family, for instance. (*See Chapter 3 - Your first weeks*)

What to bring with you

To get down to more practical matters, you will need to have a good think about what you need to bring with you. Don't find yourself moaning (after your arrival) about the things you wish you had brought with you. It's a fine balancing act, but hopefully there won't be too much that you brought that you eventually wish you'd left behind.

The best way to avoid being without something you need, which is seasonally-related, and which you can't get in Moscow, is to plan a visit to either your home country or a similarly-minded but nearer country twice a year: once in the spring to stock up on summer requirements and once in the late autumn to stock up on winter requirements.

What to bring (if health is an issue)

1. Consider bringing a sun lamp if you have young children. Vitamin D may not be added to all milk products and the lack of sunshine in winter has caused rickets in babies.

2. Bring an artificial light lamp to prevent SAD (Seasonal Adjustment Disorder) in the winter if you are prone to this disorder (depression, lethargy, etc)
3. An in-room air purifier/ioniser. This will help those who are sensitive to air pollution, which increases in summer.
4. As heaters in most homes can't be regulated resulting in dry air, a humidifier can go a long way to counteracting sore throats, dry skin and chapped lips.
5. All essential medications which you take regularly or which you may need in an emergency and which you may not be able to obtain in Moscow.
6. Bring spare contact lenses and solutions in case you can't find them in Moscow.

Clothing

Winter

You and your family will need good, thick-soled shoes for the winter. The practice in Moscow is to wear outdoor shoes and take along a pair of decent, appropriate indoor shoes for your destination, be it the office or the concert hall. There are many hat and coat check places that accept your outdoor shoes (bring a bag for your other pair); and if you are visiting people, it is usual to take your shoes off in their entrance hall. Many hosts provide slippers, but you could bring some soft indoor shoes if you don't fancy wearing other people's slippers or padding around in your stockings feet.

Depending on how often you reckon you will be out in the snow, bring a snow suit or two. It's worthwhile having two for children, as they are expected to go to school in their snowsuits and with lots of outdoor play, one can easily become worn.

Other mandatory items are a good fleece-lined anorak or short coat for casual outdoor occasions. You'll also need a good 100% wool long coat or fur coat (many people wear fur in Moscow and it does not have the stigma it has in the West) for more formal occasions. You'll see a large proportion of women wearing fur coats and for most, it's a once-in-a-lifetime investment.

You will need a good hat to keep your head warm. It's no joke being outdoors in minus -20°C when your earlobes start to freeze and if you're wearing earrings, they start to feel as if they are burning into your flesh. Besides, *babushki* (the ever-present aged grandmothers who love to dispense advice) have been known to berate strangers for not having their heads properly covered.

It is possible to buy warm undergarments in Moscow for a reasonable price.

Summer

You can choose to wear shorts, T-shirts, mini-skirts, leggings, anything goes, though probably less way-out or casual than in the UK or States.

You'll need summer gear from about late May till mid- to late August, so don't be caught out. Moscow gets hot in the summer (see *Chapter 15 - Weather*). In June 1998 outdoor night-time temperature at 23:00 was still at 33°C. In June/July 1999, Moscow had an unbroken six-week period of temperatures in the mid-thirties, causing over 100 deaths mostly as a result of people drowning while trying to cool themselves down.

Sports

It's worth bringing whatever equipment you think you might need. You can buy everything in Moscow as well, but the quality might not be what you are used to, or if the quality is available, it's likely to be expensive.

Ice-skates can be purchased in Moscow for about \$60 a pair, roller-blades starting at about \$20, and if you shop around, cross-country skis can be bought at about \$40 minimum. Sleds, bicycles and skateboards as well as footballs and basket-balls can be found anywhere. Fishing rods are available. Horse-riding gear is expensive.

Kitchen equipment

Most things can be found in Moscow. Try Ramstore for a good variety at reasonable prices.

Gardening

You can find a small variety of gardening tools as well as plastic containers for a kitchen garden or balcony garden. Seeds are available from springtime as are bags of peat and compost. Plants are more expensive than in the UK and there is nowhere near the same variety. Don't expect to find big nurseries with a wide variety of plants. These are sold instead in small florist shops which can be found all over town.

Some emergency stop-gaps

Depending on what deal has been negotiated, fully, partly or unfurnished, and depending on what you have brought with you and whether your goods have been cleared by Customs, you might land up in a place with six knives, forks, plates, pots and saucers but without the little essentials that you don't think of until you miss them. Some typical omissions are a tea strainer, a sharp knife, an egg spatula, sieve, chopping board, tea towels, bedding and pillows. which means you'll have to go out and buy them.

Beware of buying too much, as you will have to get rid of it before you leave or you may end up paying extra duty on these items and they may end up as duplicates in the place you call home.

If holiday celebrations such as Easter, Christmas and Thanksgiving are important to you and your family, bring decorations that will allow you to celebrate these occasions. This will help ward off feelings of alienation.

Bring craft supplies and a sewing machine if you won't be working and will have more free time on your hands. The IWC has a long list of craft workshops (*see Chapter 8 - Getting to know others*). Identify those you might wish to join and obtain what you think might be the required supplies before you leave. If you need to speak to the workshop leader, call 147-2240 (Mondays 14:00 - 16:00 or Wednesday 14:00 - 16:00) and ask them to find out for you what you might need to bring.

You will easily be able to find videos of American and British movies, and expats occasionally offer to sell collections at a reduced price. However you might want to bring videos of favourite TV shows.

Audio story cassettes for children are ideal for a snowy day.

A computer midi-keyboard can help to while away the dark winter hours.

Bring your favourite American or British foods (for those down days when you want some comfort foods). From the British point of view, staples such as corned beef, Marmite, Ribena and Cadbury's Creme Eggs are not available in Moscow.

Bring English-language books to read. They can be expensive and the variety is strictly limited in the handful of English-language book-shops.

It's an idea to bring favourite bed linen which will help remind you of home.

If you're an avid cook or will have more time to bake, bring a full range of baking/cooking utensils, although most of these are available locally. You will often need to bake from scratch. Bear in mind that mixes will be in another language and often not the product you are looking for. Bring your favourite recipe books so that you can cook familiar dishes. If you're stuck you can always access the recipe sites on the Internet but be warned that many of them suggest recipes that contain products you can buy ready-made in your home country and which you will not be able to buy in Moscow, so they can be frustrating.

In addition, the mostly American recipes on the Internet use imperial measures which can be confusing if you are used to metric measures. Obtain a good conversion table for cooking (weights, temperatures). A set of measuring cups will also help.

Don't worry about ordering favourite periodicals, as these can be ordered and delivered locally at a reasonable price (*see Chapter 8 - Keeping in touch*).

Bear in mind that it might be counter-productive to buy clothes and shoes for children in advance. Irregular 'growth spurts' might lead you to skipping several sizes in the interim.

Remember that the electricity system differs from U.S. Instead of bringing items that will require complicated transformers and converters, buy them in Moscow. Some people believe that using transformers with your 110v appliances helps to wear them out faster. Others say you should leave behind appliances that are very high energy users or generate plenty of heat such as toasters, microwaves, vacuum cleaners, etc.

If you're into music, you don't have to bring too much, as you will have a wide choice in Moscow.

Spend some time going through old albums/photographs and select those that represent the parts of your life that make you happy. You'll need them to get over the culture shock and initial depression of separation from familiar things. You might consider also scanning them onto a zip disk for ease of use and transport.

Many expats think they should bring pictures to hang on the wall, but then find they don't use them, as there is quite a good selection of street art at reasonable prices.

Children like to look at their baby pictures and periodically have to bring old pictures to school. Home videos can also help to remind your children that 'home', wherever it is, still exists. Children have short memories.

Stock up on a good supply of passport photos on matte paper, otherwise you run the risk of ink on official stamps 'disappearing' resulting in untold hassles. This will prompt immigration officials to suggest that the visa or other document is false, even though you might have used it a dozen times before in coming in or

out of the country. Bring a supply to last you for the first few months until you discover where you can have these printed in Moscow.

Language issues

You may think this is a little out of place on this list, but determining to make a start on at least learning the Cyrillic alphabet, ahead of your move to Moscow, if not making a start on Russian language lessons, will make your arrival in Moscow that much easier and less traumatic. This cannot be emphasised enough.

Countdown to your move

This list is purely a rough guide to moving and may not conform to your specific needs. Adapt it to suit them.

Task	Due date for completion	Done
Buy yourself a phrase-book or Russian learning programme and set yourself a target for learning the Cyrillic alphabet.	As soon as you know you are moving Know the alphabet by the time you leave.	
Find out about schools in Moscow, ask for enrolment forms and complete and send off.	As soon as you know you are moving	
Obtain as much information about Moscow as possible. Contact IWC and find out which interest groups you may enroll in.	As soon as you find out you are moving	
Notify your current landlord of your intention to move, or contact estate agents to let your house while you are away	As soon as you know you are moving	
Decide how you will seek accommodation in Moscow. Will the company organise or will it be up to you? If up to you, find out if you have somewhere to stay on arrival and cost, conditions, location <i>vis a vis</i> school, office	As soon as you know you will be moving	
Estimate moving costs	2 months before	
Plan a date for a garage sale or locate charity for disposal of junk	2 months before	
Once you have selected a school and been accepted, contact estate agents in Moscow and ask them to send you list of apartments in areas convenient for school, office	2 months before	
Investigate shipping your pets if taking them with you	2 months before	

Task	Due date for completion	Done
Research storage in your home town if necessary	1 month before	
Update address book	1 month before	
List people, companies you need to notify	1 month before	
Obtain change of address or mail-redirection from post office	1 month before	
Decide banking arrangements and direct debits while in Moscow. Find out if your bank does Internet banking and set up or make alternative arrangements	1 month before	
Find out which vaccinations/inoculations are needed and arrange to have them done in time	1 month before	
Locate an appropriate medical insurance scheme	1 month before	
Decide which credit cards you should take with you according to which companies have the best representation in Russia and take steps to increase you credit card limit if necessary	1 month before	
Purchase what you think you might need to take with you (craft supplies, baking, clothing)	1 month before	
Make your travel arrangements	1 month before	
Hold garage sale, donate to charity	1 month before	
Arrange interim accommodation in Moscow	1 - 2 months before	
Arrange new home for plants/pets	3 weeks before	
Arrange insurance for high value items you will be taking. Take photographs to prove ownership	3 weeks before	
Collate personal records and documentation you will need to take with you: medical, legal, accountants, schools religious institutions	2 weeks before	
Purchase a few adapters (round, two-pin plugs only) or power converters (Russia has a 220v 50Hz system) for essential items. You will be able to buy two pin plugs in Moscow for all other appliances.	Before packing	
Notify current utilities of disconnect or transfer dates or arrange for estate agent to notify	2 weeks before	
Settle outstanding bills	1 week before	
Cancel delivery services from date of move	2 weeks before	

Task	Due date for completion	Done
Obtain international driver's licence valid for six months	1 week before	
Obtain a supply of matte passport photos	1 week before	
Plan what to do with your car while away	1 week before	
Arrange for cleaning of your house	1 week before	
Take plants/pets to new homes	2 days before	
Remember to make copies of your passport and visa for immigration on arrival. It's not essential but helps your case to be processed faster.	2 days before	
Defrost fridge and dispose of perishables	2 days before	
Leave for Moscow	D-day	

3/Your first weeks

Your first weeks in Moscow will be crucial to your long-term enjoyment of the place. If accommodation and transport have been organised for you, you will be saved an enormous amount of hassle. If accommodation has not been organised, or is pending arrangement, then you will have to find interim accommodation.

Registering your arrival

The very first thing you will need to do (i.e. within 72 hours) is to register your presence with UVIR (visa registration). If you move into a hotel, the hotel, if licensed to do so, will register your passport on your behalf. However, if you move straight into accommodation, you will need to see that your sponsoring organisation registers you at UVIR (*42 Ulitsa Pokrovka*).

Staying in a hotel

Many new arrivals will be offered hotel accommodation by their companies while they find and select accommodation. Others might have been to Moscow on a 'look-see' visit prior to their arrival and have approved accommodation selections.

If the company is paying, it will usually select the hotel for the new arrival. Some of the hotels most popular with short-term long-stay residents are the Marriott, the Radisson (both inside the Garden Ring, the ring road which separates central Moscow from its suburbs), and the Meridien Country Club which is over an hour's drive away from the city centre.

Being placed in a hotel can be both a curse and a blessing. It is a blessing because it allows you to walk into ready-made accommodation where food is provided for you without you being forced to fend for yourself in terms of supermarkets and accommodation glitches in the first few weeks after your arrival. In other words, it can provide a vital cushion of security while you adjust to your new surroundings.

However, some expatriates come to regard their hotel stays as a curse exactly because it is a 'half-way house' situation.

Depending on the supply/demand situation in the residential accommodation market and if housing is tight, some expatriates might spend up to three months in a hotel while their accommodation is made ready, or while the current tenants wait to leave. The down-side of this is:

- having to eat the same food on a routine basis;
- not being free to have access to personal goods which would normally have arrived by that point and would be sitting in storage;