

EXPAT GUIDE: **RUSSIA**

INCLUDES MOSCOW CITY GUIDE

This expat guide offers information and advice if you are moving to Russia.

Click on the different tabs to find out about anything from tax rules and banking to education and culture shock.



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Bupa International is the specialist international division of Bupa, and we have operations in UK, Denmark, USA, Spain, France, Hong Kong, Egypt, UAE and Australia.

We care for the lives in our hands, and are dedicated to providing all the insurance services, help and advice you need to keep yourself and your family in the best of health. Our dedicated team respects everyone's individuality, culture, privacy and dignity, and aims to provide a personal service you can rely on throughout your Bupa International membership.



Moving to Russia

Russia is a vast country with mysterious allure. Although the country has opened up significantly to the West since the fall of communism in 1992, it has managed to retain its unique flavour. Moving to Russia could offer many new business opportunities and will definitely expose you to a rich and complex culture. Moscow is the capital, the main commercial city and home to more than 15 million people. St Petersburg is known as the cultural capital of the country. Most expats tend to move to one of these cities as they are the largest economic centres in the country.

Russia is famed for its cold, dark and long winters. However, summers can be very hot and pleasant. The flip side to the very short days in mid-winter are the White Nights of summer, when the sun hardly sets before it starts to rise again.

Shipping and removals

While it is possible to ship crates or containers privately, you will have to be prepared for a long wait at customs and some intricate bureaucracy to release your shipment.

As of 13 July 2010 a recent union between Customs of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan has confirmed that a new code will now charge on all household goods imported to Russia. Thus, all shipments (except diplomatic) will have fees levied at 4€ per 1 kg gross. As a result large shipments easily become quite expensive; a cost-effective alternative is to purchase household goods once within Russian borders.

The Russian postal service is not overly reliable and more important documents or parcels are sent via courier services.

Links

- Russian moving company: www.moving2russia.com
- Russian shipping company: <http://russia.shipping-international.com>

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Working in Russia

Below you will find information about:

- [Visas and work permits](#)
- [Banking, money and taxes](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Business culture](#)
- [Public holidays](#)

It is a good idea to have a job lined up before moving to Russia. There are many international companies active in Moscow and it might be a good idea to look for employment with one of these. Another popular career choice (which will allow you access to more rural areas of Russia) is teaching English (EFL or ESL) or working at one of the English-language newspapers in Russia.

Employment information: www.jobsabroad.com/Russia.cfm

Visa and work permits

Russian visas are notoriously expensive and can be an administrative exercise to obtain. In addition, to get a visa you will need to provide a medical certificate stating that you do not have Aids. There are generally three types of visas permitting you to work legally in Russia: your own business visa (enabling you to conduct business in Russia as per your current employment), a business visa sponsored by a foreign company or a business visa sponsored by a Russian company. Within each of these are several options defining the length of the visa and the number of exits and re-entries permitted. You must register with the local police within three days of arrival in Russia.

Legal employment information: www.waytorussia.net

Banking, money and taxes

While they have stabilised recently, Russian banks have had a nasty history of collapsing. This has caused a serious distrust of banks by most Russians and consequently it is recommended to open an account with an international bank and to transfer the money you want to save to a bank in your home country.

Residents pay a standard personal income tax of 13%, which is deducted by the employer. Tax returns do not need to be filed by taxpayers. You will need to find out if a tax treaty exists between your country and Russia to determine whether you need to pay Russian taxes or not. It is best to get professional advice on Russian taxation, as it can be very easy to fall foul of the law in this area.

While trading in US dollars or Euros is illegal in Russia, you might see prices marked in YE, or units, which are loosely linked to the US dollar. This is due to the dramatic fluxes in the value of the Russian rouble in the past. The Russian rouble seems to have recovered from the rampant inflation it was subject to in the 1990s. Trade in the country is still largely cash-based, so if you are going anywhere outside Moscow or St Petersburg make sure you have enough cash with you. You will probably struggle to get hold of roubles outside of Russia, so make sure you have some cash to exchange on arrival.

Links

- Russian tax information: www.worldwide-tax.com/...
- Foreign business support: www.vfbs.ru

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Business culture

For the most part, the business etiquette in Russia is similar to that of most Western countries. It is important for expats to dress formally, shake hands and have direct eye contact when meeting people. Business cards are exchanged and expats should have these printed with English and Russian on alternate sides.

The usual business hours are 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Public holidays

	2011	2012
New Year's Day	1 Jan	1 Jan
Russian Orthodox Christmas Day	7 Feb	7 Feb
International Women's Day	8 Mar	8 Mar
Spring/Labour Day	1-2 May	1-2 May
Victory Day	9 May	9 May
Russia Day (Independence Day)	12 Jun	12 Jun
National Unity Day	4 Nov	4 Nov
Constitution Day	12 Dec	12 Dec

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Living and culture

Below you will find information about:

- [Safety](#)
- [Language](#)
- [Climate](#)
- [Local customs](#)
- [Cost of living](#)
- [Travelling in Russia](#)
- [Do I need a car in Russia?](#)

For information about Bupa International healthcare [click here](#).

The average Russian is well educated and you might find to your surprise that the cleaning lady working in your office building is a qualified engineer. Economic collapse has meant that it is often more lucrative to do hard labour for a foreign company than to work in your area of expertise. Another aspect of life in Russia, which might be due to the economic troubles, is that "gift-giving" (or bribery) is a standard practice.

Due to a lack of consistent funding, many of the national infrastructures are falling apart – it can be a shock to see this next to the absurdly lavish lifestyles of Russia's nouveau riche.

- [Information on life in Russia](#)

Safety

Due to the security situation in the North Caucasus people travelling there should take precaution. You should also be alert when travelling to North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia. There have been occurrences of domestic terrorism and hostage-taking in North Caucasus and Moscow.

Pick pocketing remains an issue in crowded areas such as markets, so be aware of this and never carry your wallet or any other valuables in accessible places. Expats should ask to see official ID from police officers, and avoid all political protests and demonstrations.

Language

Russian is the official language but English, French and German are sometimes spoken. Since it can be difficult to find Russians who speak English, it is a good idea to know the basics of Russian before you arrive – even if you only learn how to read the Russian alphabet and a few basic phrases.

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Climate

Russia has a predominantly continental climate, although this becomes arctic in the north. The weather gets more severe the further east you go, with eastern Siberia experiencing the worst winters. There is snowfall in northern Russia for much of the year, but the south has warm summers with a high rainfall and colder, snowy winters. The weather in spring and autumn is generally mild and fairly dry.

Dressing for the Russian winter

What you may not realise before you arrive in Moscow, or any other Russian city, is that while the weather outside may be frightful, Russian buildings are incredibly warm in the winter. Heat is provided from a central location and is not always something you can control. While you need warm clothing to wear outside in the winter, you may find your apartment so warm that comfort requires a combination of T-shirts and shorts, opening windows in January, and even resorting to using your air conditioning.

It may be harder to find clothes bargains in Russia, but the Russians certainly know how to keep warm and do it stylishly. Women's outerwear is both functional and feminine. And if you are not opposed to wearing fur, this is definitely the place to wear it.

Local customs

It is illegal to photograph anything related to the military, strategic sites or airports. It is considered rude to refuse alcohol, food and gifts.

Women should wear skirts and headscarfs when entering a Russian Orthodox church.

Foreigners are legally required to carry passports for identification; copies are not adequate.

Cost of living

Moscow has a reputation as one of the most expensive cities in the world, with food and accommodation being particularly costly. However, in smaller cities accommodation you will be able to find cheaper solutions.

Most supermarkets will stock a full range of products comparable to European supermarkets, with European products obviously more expensive than local products. But if you are not in a major city it can be difficult to find imported food and specialties. During winter, fresh fruit and vegetables are mostly imported and therefore become more expensive.

Travelling in Russia

The major cities have good public transportation systems. There is an extensive railway network across the country, which is the most popular option for long-distance travel. Be sure to check what kind of compartment you have bought tickets for; many trains have shared compartments or open dormitory-style compartments with almost no privacy. Aeroflot, the Russian national airline, has many domestic flights connecting major cities.

Do I need a car in Russia?

It greatly depends on where you intend to live – public transport is efficient, safe and cheap in Moscow and St Petersburg. Maintaining a car can be very costly and a nightmarish bureaucratic experience. You will also have to get a Russian driving license. On top of all this, the weather conditions in Russia make it more challenging to keep any car running. However, if you live in a more rural area or plan to live on the outskirts of the city you will need a car. Many expats opt to hire a Russian driver.

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Education

Below you will find information about:

- [Education and schools](#)
- [Links to schools](#)

Education and schools in Moscow

The Russian education system is one of the best in the world, resulting in a near zero illiteracy rate. A lot of emphasis is placed on rote learning, and Russian schools are known to motivate students criticism instead of through praise. To a child coming from a Western school system this might be very discouraging.

Russian schools have very good sport programmes, although many children participate in private sports clubs after school.

The school year follows the Northern hemisphere pattern, with the longest break being in the summer months (July and August). School is generally Monday to Friday from 9am to 3 or 4pm.

Most expats decide to place their children in one of the many good international schools in Moscow. Most of these schools are very pricey, with the most expensive being the Anglo-American School.

There are several English-language schools to choose from as well as many other international schools, including the German school, the Indian school, and the Korean school. Models range from those that follow American or British curricula (like the Anglo-American School and the British International School) to ones that combine the Russian curriculum with international curricula (such as the Moscow Economic School). Most of the schools compete against each other in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

Useful links

- Montessori School of Moscow: www.mosmontessori.ru
- The Anglo-American School: www.aas.ru
- The English International School: www.englishedmoscow.com
- International School of Moscow: www.internationalschool.ru
- Moscow Economic School: www.mes.ru

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Useful information

Money: The rouble or rouble (RUB, рубль/rubl' - plural рубль/rubli) is the official currency of Russia. It is divided into 100 kopeks. Notes are in the denominations of 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1000. You can check the latest exchange rates [here](#).

Time: There are 11 time zones in Russia, ranging from GMT +2 in the east to GMT +12 in the west; +1 from the end of March to the end of September. Moscow and St Petersburg are GMT +3 (GMT +4 in summer).

Electricity: 220 volts, 50Hz. Round two-pin plugs are used in Russia.

Communications: The international access code for Russia is +7, and the 0 on the relevant area code must be included. For calls out of Russia, dial 8 (wait for a changed tone) followed by 10 and then the relevant country code (e.g. 8-10-44 for the United Kingdom). There are city and area codes in use (e.g. 495 for Moscow; 812 for St. Petersburg). Public phones and phone cards (available at newsagents and post offices) can be used for both local and international calls. Mobile phones work in most areas, and local operators use GSM 900/1800 networks.

Emergencies: The number for emergency assistance is 112

Embassy contact details

Russia Embassies:

- Washington DC, United States: +1 202 298 5700
- London, United Kingdom: +44 (0)20 7229 2666
- Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 235 4341
- Canberra, Australia: +61 (0)2 6295 9033
- Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 362 1337/8
- Dublin, Ireland: +353 (0)1 492 2048
- Wellington, New Zealand: +64 (0)4 476 6113

Foreign Embassies in Russia:

- United States Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 728 5000
- British Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 956 7200
- Canadian Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 105 6000
- Australian Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 956 6070
- South African Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 540 1177
- Irish Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 937 5911
- New Zealand Embassy, Moscow: +7 495 956 3579

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EXPAT GUIDE: **MOSCOW**

This expat guide offers information and advice if you are moving to Moscow.

Click on the different tabs to find out about anything from tax rules and banking to education and cultural highlights.

You can also read our expat guide to the Russia.



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Moving to Moscow

Moscow is an incredibly large, interesting and challenging city. One of the best ways to prepare for moving to Moscow is to learn some Russian and how to read Cyrillic. This will make your life a lot easier as you will be able to recognise signs and look up words in a dictionary when necessary.

While it is regularly listed as one of the most expensive cities in the world, Moscow can be somewhat underdeveloped and you will find yourself occasionally having to make a mental switch between life in the first and third worlds. But if you have the money (and you are prepared to pay), it is possible to have a lavish lifestyle on a par with any major international city.

The city vies with St Petersburg for the title of "Russian Cultural Capital", and while most would agree that St Petersburg deserves this title more, Moscow is by no means short of cultural activities and events. No visit to Moscow is complete without a trip to the Bolshoi Opera House, or to ballet performances at the Kremlin Palace. There are many fascinating museums in the city as well as wonderful architecture (particularly in the city centre). Some of Moscow's most attractive features are the many public parks dotted throughout the city, which give it a more spacious and leafy feel. Going for a walk in the park is a daily habit for many Russians.

At first glance, some people find that Russians maintain a distant and uninvolved mask in public. This cultural perception is misleading. Upon greater interaction with the locals, people often find that Russian culture can be very warm-hearted, generous and romantic.

Useful links

- From an American in Russia: <http://jondayres.blogspot.com/>
- Further expat insights: www.globusworldwide.com

Shipping and removals

The Russian postal service can be rather unreliable and getting shipments through customs in Moscow is often very frustrating and time-consuming, not to mention costly. The best option is to use an international removals company or to purchase household goods within Russian borders.

[A useful guide to shipping to Moscow](#)

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Working in Moscow

Many large international companies hire expats in Moscow, particularly expats who can speak Russian. Many EFL teachers also make a living as freelancers, giving private English lessons.

It should be possible to find a job in many different sectors, but if you can come to Russia on your own business visa it might be easier to find employment once you have arrived.

Useful links

- Read this experience of teaching English: [Teaching the Rich in Moscow](#)
- Read about working in Moscow: www.onestopenglish.com

For more information about visa, banking, taxes and more view the "Working" tab in the "[Working in Russia](#)" on page 3.

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See and do

Below you will find information about:

- [Lifestyle and shopping](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Getting around](#)
- [Weekend getaways](#)
- [Cost of living](#)
- [Restaurants](#)
- [Do I need to learn Russian before moving?](#)
- [See and do](#)
- [Safety](#)
- [Annual events](#)

For information about Bupa International healthcare [click here](#).

Lifestyle and shopping

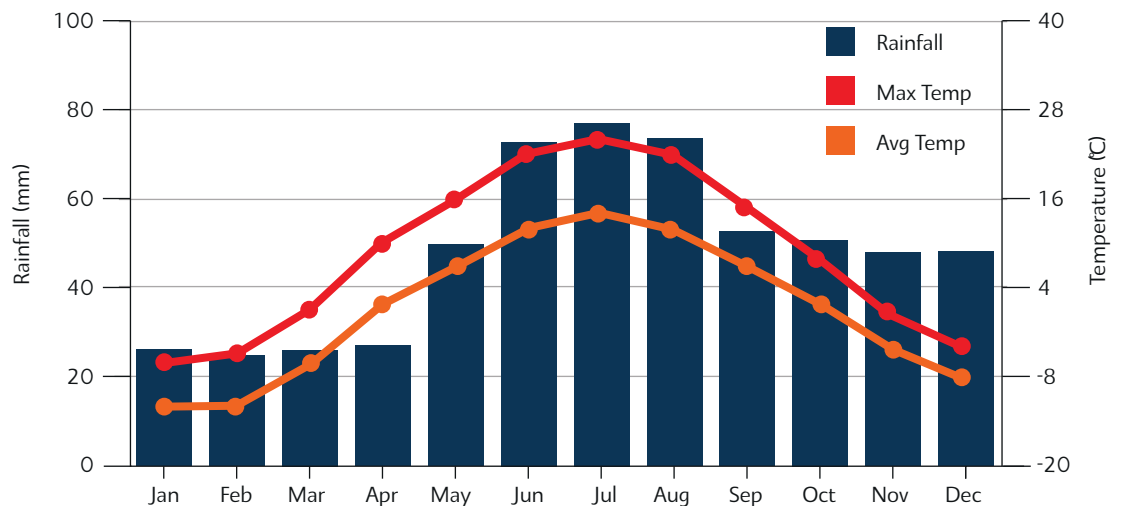
Moscow offers a wonderful lifestyle for expats to enjoy, with a number of shopping, restaurant and nightlife options. There are various malls and boutiques to be browsed in the city centre; the GUM building in Red Square is a favourite, as is nearby Tverskaya Ulitsa Street. Okhoktny Ryad, at Manezh Square, has high-street fashions and electronic goods. Local markets include the Izmailovskii Park market (Russian arts and crafts) and the Cheremushinsky Rynok market (fresh produce). The exclusive E liseev Gastronome supermarket sells the best caviar and vodka.

The nightlife in Moscow is extraordinary, featuring everything from bars and clubs to bowling alleys, billiards rooms and casinos. The trendiest nightlife areas are in and around Arbat, Kitai Gorod and the Garden Ring. Some favourite venues include the Piramida bar, Le Club and Fabrique. B2 and the Chinese Pilot host live music. Bi Ba Bo is a popular bowling alley, and Casino Desperado is good for gamblers, while ice-skating and opera can be enjoyed at Hermitage Garden.

Weather

With its continental climate Moscow has long, cold winters and warm summers. There are only about six hours of daylight in mid-winter (January) and temperatures can drop well below freezing. The winter snowfall starts in October and often carries on into spring.

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Getting around

The most used means of transportation is the metro, the Moscow underground, which is very efficient, safe and cheap. Trains run regularly from 5am to 1am on all lines. The Moscow metro is one of the easiest to use in the world, despite the lack of English signs.

Buses can be very infrequent so a good alternative is to take a marshrutka (a minibus taxi) which follows the bus routes and will drop you off anywhere along your route.

Taxis can be quite expensive, particularly from the airport. It is a very good idea to agree on a price before get in a taxi. Many private cars will act as taxis for a bit of extra cash.

Trams seem to be more reliable than buses and have the added advantage of not being affected by the heavy traffic. Muscovites are known for an erratic driving style and casual disregard for traffic rules, something which has prompted many expats to hire a driver.

Weekend getaways

It is possible to take an overnight train to St Petersburg, which makes a weekend break possible. Generally, weekend breaks are not that popular and most Muscovites stay in the city. The notable exception to this is over the summer months when there is a mass exodus to the dachas (summer cottages) on the outskirts of the city.

Cost of living

The cost of living depends greatly on what kind of lifestyle you want to have. If you are happy to buy local products, to use the metro and not to live in a renovated apartment in central Moscow, you will be able to save a lot of money on your daily costs. In general, Moscow is much more expensive than any other place in Russia and is among the more expensive big cities in the world, particularly clothes prices can be very shocking.

Restaurants

Expats in Moscow can enjoy traditional Russian cuisine, such as caviar, chicken kiev and beef stroganov, at many venues throughout the city. There are also a number of restaurants serving seafood and international cuisine. Some of the best restaurants are located in the *Garden Ring* and *Kitai*, as well as the *Poklonnaya Hill* area. *Red Square* and *Kiev Station Square* are also popular dining areas.

Do I need to learn Russian before moving?

It is best to probably learn some basic Russian, and at least how to read Russian, before you arrive so that you can use dictionaries or phrasebooks and can orientate yourself. Bear in mind that Russian is quite difficult to master and you will have to be prepared for some intensive study if this is your goal. The grammar is quite complicated; there are six cases for nouns, with endings differing in each case depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine or neutral, and again whether it is plural or singular.

See and do

The Kremlin: The quintessential Moscow attraction is the Kremlin, dating back to 1147 and home to numerous golden-domed churches and palaces, as well as museums and monuments.

Telephone: (495) 695 4187

Red Square: Set in the heart of Moscow, the Red Square is a spacious cobbled area that has been used for everything from festivals to executions in Russia's turbulent past.

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St Basil's Cathedral: The beautiful, multicoloured domes of St Basil's Cathedral are an extraordinary sight for all expats in Moscow to experience.

Telephone: (095) 298 5880

Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre: Culture buffs in Moscow will love going to the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre to watch the world-famous opera and ballet companies, all hosted in an exquisite venue.

www.bolshoi.ru / Telephone: (095) 292 9270 (tickets)

Tretyakov Gallery: The Tretyakov Gallery is home to an exemplary collection of Russian art works from as far back as the 11th century.

www.tretyakovgallery.ru / Telephone: (095) 951 1362

Poklonnaya Hill: Military enthusiasts will enjoy a visit to Poklonnaya Hill, invaded by both Napoleon and Hitler and home to a memorial Mosque and Synagogue, and an open air museum dedicated.

Telephone: 495 142 4185

Cathedral of Christ the Saviour: Originally established by Tsar Alexander to commemorate the soldiers who fought against Napoleon, and currently the largest Orthodox Church in the world, this is a sightseeing must for expats in Moscow.

Borodino Panorama Museum: This museum houses artefacts of the battle of Borodino, regarded as the bloodiest of the Napoleonic wars, and features a 360° painting of the battle.

Telephone: 495 148 19 67

Moscow Metro: The extraordinary Moscow Metro features elaborate pillars and walls decorated with realist artworks, as well as marble floored "tarmac".

Safety

Despite its very active criminal underbelly, Moscow is still quite safe compared to many other big cities. As long as you are aware of what's going on around you and take the usual precautions you should be safe. Using public transport is very safe and walking home alone should be fine provided it's not in the middle of the night.

However, it is a good idea to be extra cautious about drawing attention to the fact that you are an expat as this could trigger unwelcome interest from either the police or other commuters. It is important to be extra cautious if you are not Caucasian as neo-Nazism is on the rise and incidents of violence towards non-whites have been reported.

Annual events

Russian Winter Festival: The Russian Winter Festival is an event held over the Christmas and New Year period that features lots of Russian cuisine, vodka, traditional folk music and troika (sleigh) rides.

Maslenitsa Festival: In a prelude to the deprivations of lent, the Maslenitsa Festival sees a deluge of pancake eating, bare knuckle fist fights and puppet shows.

Millionaire Fair: An October event best attended without your bank card (unless you're extremely rich), the Millionaire Fair features the exhibition and sale of items such as golden coffeemakers, diamond-encrusted phones and Bugatti sports cars.

www.millionairefair.ru

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Accommodation

There are virtually no houses in Moscow, so be prepared to live in a flat. These range from the average communist "pigeon-cage" style of accommodation (rooms can be spacious, but bathrooms and kitchens tend to be small) to extremely luxurious multi-storey flats. If you want some more space and don't like the idea of living in such a crowded city, the other option is to live in a renovated dacha. These summerhouses on the outskirts of the city, which traditionally were basic sheds to sleep in, have become very chic among Russia's elite and have subsequently been remodelled into mansions.

There are also more luxurious buildings in central Moscow where all the flats on one floor have been combined to make for more spacious living arrangements. The closer you want to live to the centre of Moscow and to a metro station, the higher rent you can expect to pay. The best idea is probably to find an apartment via a Russian estate agent.

Utilities are very cheap. The down side of this is that you have very little control if you are living in a normal Russian flat and not in one of the very luxurious Western-style compounds. Your heating will come on and be switched off when the central heating centre decides it is cold/warm enough.

During summer your hot water will be cut off for three weeks for general maintenance of the pipes – this happens in every area of Moscow.

Useful links

- Property portal: www.evans.ru
- Property purchase guide: www.blackwood.ru/eng/index.php

Renting a property in Moscow

Renting in Moscow is a new game in comparison to most western countries resulting in even less market and rent law control. Unfortunately there has been quite a few reports of bad experiences with renting in Moscow. If your company can arrange accommodation for you it is a good idea to agree to this. If this is not a possibility there are some things you should be aware of:

- A signed contract does not carry much weight – there have been stories of Russian landlords upping the rent as and when they like. It is nonetheless a good idea to make sure any comments you might have about the apartment are included in the contract.
- Rent is sometimes asked to be paid in cash – at your front door.
- It is prohibited to put pictures or shelves on the walls in most rentals. There are often several people in the rental process: the owner, the owner's agent and your agent.

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Education and schools (Russia)

The Russian education system is one of the best in the world, resulting in a near zero illiteracy rate. A lot of emphasis is placed on rote learning, however, and students are motivated not through praise but through criticism. To a child coming from a Western school system this might be very discouraging.

Russian schools have very good sport programmes, although many children participate in private sports clubs after school. This could be a good way to make sure your child interacts with Russian children and learns some Russian.

The school year follows the northern hemisphere pattern, with the longest break being in the summer months (July and August). School is generally Monday to Friday from 9am to 3 or 4pm.

Most expats decide to place their children in one of the many good international schools in Moscow to make transition back to your country easier and to prevent education being interrupted while Russian is learned. Most of these schools are very pricey, with the most expensive being the Anglo-American School.

There are several English-language schools to choose from as well as many other international schools, such as the German school, the Indian school, and the Korean school. Models range from those that follow American or British curricula (like the Anglo-American School and the British International School) to ones that combine the Russian curriculum with international curricula (like the Moscow Economic School). Most of the schools compete against each other in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

Useful links

- Montessori School of Moscow: www.mosmontessori.ru
- The Anglo-American School: www.aas.ru
- The English International School: www.EnglishEdMoscow.com
- International School of Moscow: www.internationalschool.ru
- Moscow Economic School: www.mes.ru School search: <http://www.gsgi.co.uk>

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Our services include:

- Easy access to multilingual medical professionals
- Second opinion service delivered by Advanced Medical
- Appointment booking
- Direct settlement with providers
- Evacuation services

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On MembersWorld you can:

- View your plan
- Update personal details
- Track the progress of your claims*
- Make payments online
- Search our international hospital directory
- Download claim forms and other useful documents
- Talk to a customer consultant via our free webchat service

**MembersWorld may not track claims in the USA as we use our partner here.*

You can also find us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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In Bupa International we care for our customers. We have a reward programme for our members with gifts, offers, health content and news.

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