

# The Moscow Times

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LOOKING BACK

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*“The major actors [in the pact] are Saudi Arabia and Russia,” says oil and gas analyst **Andrei Polishchuk***

# 1998

Russia experienced a massive financial crisis.

# \$50-55

likely oil price/barrel under the OPEC+ pact extension.



Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) includes nations from the Middle East, Africa, and South America, but not Russia.

## Great Expectations

By **Mikhail Fishman** & **Matthew Kupfer** [newsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:newsreporter@imedia.ru)

### To drive up oil prices, Russia pushes to extend international restrictions on its extraction

For the last days, oil prices have been on the rise. The spike came as a market reaction to Russia and Saudi Arabia’s assumed readiness to extend oil production restrictions for at least half a year.

Imposed last year by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia, and other producer countries, the supply-side pact has buffered flagging oil prices. With an extension of the agreement, prices are likely to hover around \$50 to \$55 until the end of the year, experts agree.

Unsurprisingly, Moscow is a firm believer in the extension. With oil prices rising, the Russian Ministry of Finance has just increased its expectations for budgetary income in 2017. Its previous budget was modeled on \$40-dollar oil prices. Now, the Ministry predicts the deficit will decrease.

On the surface, the agreement seems like a home run for Russia, a country extremely dependent on oil income. The reality is slightly more complicated.

From Russia’s perspective, the current OPEC+ agreement was supposed to drive the oil price up to around \$60 per barrel by reducing oil extraction by 1.7 to 1.8 million barrels per day. For Russia, this meant a daily cut of 300 thousand barrels. And the pact failed to achieve the goal of \$60. But the outcome for Russia was far better than nothing: oil prices currently stand at around \$50.



ALEXEI DANICHEV / RIA NOVOSTI  
This year, oil prices have hovered around \$50. At a minimum, Russia wants to keep them there.

For this reason, as Russia prepares for a new round of talks with Saudi Arabia, the probability of reaching a new agreement is very high. But the devil is in the details: Who besides Russia will be in the new pact? What reductions can they agree upon? How long will the extension last?

The pact operates at the margins of what is achievable for Moscow. Russian companies “can afford [these cuts] by closing unprofitable well sites, but anything more restrictive would be difficult,” says Sergei Pikin, Director of the Institute of Energy Development.

Were the OPEC+ group to agree to increase cuts to 2 or 2.5 million barrels, “this would

change the picture significantly,” he says. But that is unlikely.

A full-year extension of the pact would potentially raise oil prices to \$60. But this outcome is also unlikely, Pikin says. For oil producers, there are simply too many unknowns for such a long agreement: What will be the demand from China? And what will be the supply coming from the United States, which is not in the pact?

For its part, Russia would naturally prefer better conditions for itself — lower production cuts for example. But any move for special treatment would likely derail the negotiations, says Andrei Polishchuk, an oil and gas analyst with Raiffeisenbank.

“The major actors [in the pact] are Saudi Arabia and Russia,” he says. “In order to convince the other countries to stay on, they can’t reevaluate the current conditions for Russia.”

And Russia is unlikely to risk undermining the extension. Without the pact, oil prices could fall below \$40 per barrel, Polishchuk says. The last time that happened, in early 2016, it dragged the ruble’s value to its lowest point since the 1998 financial crisis. At the time, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov stressed the risk that the 1998 crisis could repeat itself if the government failed to make necessary budget adjustments.

For Moscow, that would be a much worse outcome than the OPEC+ status quo. **TMT**



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**Editor-in-Chief** Mikhail Fishman  
**Advertising Director** Maria Kamenskaya  
[m.kamenskaya@imedia.ru](mailto:m.kamenskaya@imedia.ru)

**Director** Elena Stepanova  
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**Founder and publisher**  
OOO Moscowtimes

**Founder’s, publisher’s and editorial address**  
3 Polkovaya Ul., Bldg. 1, Moscow 127018

**Editorial** +7 (495) 234 3223  
Fax +7 (495) 232 6529

**Advertising Sales** +7 (495) 232 4774  
Fax +7 (495) 232 1764

**Subscription** +7 (495) 232 9293  
**Distribution** +7 (495) 232 9295

**Internet** [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com)

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### GLOBAL PLAYERS

## Still No Pivot: Russia and China Take It Slow Ahead of Xi Jinping’s Visit

By **Vasily Kashin**

Senior Fellow at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.



Vladimir Putin has returned from the Silk Road Forum in Beijing, and everyone is satisfied.

For China, it was very important that Putin attended. The forum was supposed to solidify China’s new role as a motor of economic integration in Eurasia. China has already decided to make the forum a regular event, and Russians involved in organizing the event feel China is essentially attempting to create a parallel G20.

But major powers’ views on this forum are governed by their attitudes toward China’s ambitions. Of Beijing’s three major rivals in Asia, one (India) is boycotting the forum, while two (the United States and Japan) have decreased their participation to a bare minimum. Russia, on the other hand, was the only permanent member of the UN Security Council to send a head of state to the event, thereby demonstrating its broad support for China’s plans.

Traveling to Beijing was also important for Putin. Russia requires special treatment. The country wants to demonstrate its self-sufficient, independent role in Eurasia. Putin even dedicated his speech in Beijing to this theme. What’s more, the Kremlin is preparing for Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Moscow in July, and Russia expects to sign a raft of important agreements.

Of course, all this has very little in common with the official Russian state propaganda about a “pivot to the East” presented in 2014. But Western observers are also wrong to speak of a decline in Russo-Chinese relations.

After the election of President Donald Trump, there were expectations for a change in U.S. policy on China. However, Trump Administration’s Asian strategy quickly collapsed and Trump essentially returned to the “One China” principle. Today, Washington is chaotically continuing Obama’s course — but without a key element, the Transatlantic Partnership.

So, Russian-Chinese relations are developing according to their previous logic: On the whole, Russia supports China on North Korean issues. And China, by and large, supports Russia’s position on Syria, but typically backs off at the most critical moments. (For example, during the storming of Aleppo in 2016 and after the chemical weapons attack on Idlib in 2017, China abstained from voting in the UN Security Council.)

Naturally, Moscow’s official plan to achieve \$200 billion worth of trade turnover with China by 2020 is already quite unrealistic. In November 2016, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev spoke of the possibility of reaching this mark “in three-five-seven years.”

In reality, however, Russia-China trade turnover is growing, but not that rapidly. There is even hope that, this year, it will approach its pre-economic crisis level from 2013 — \$88.8 billion, according to the Russian Customs Service. The reason is not just fluctuating oil prices, but also in growth in the physical volumes of oil: In 2016, Russia became the single largest supplier of oil to China.

On the eve of Putin’s visit to Beijing, Russian officials were saying that in the last two years the country had begun to

realize the “17 joint projects with a total investment of \$15 billion.” Either way, China is already a notable investor in Russia, although it still cannot compete with the EU in this arena. It also remains nearly impossible to calculate the size of China’s economic presence in Russia — in both countries, the usage of offshore accounts has become too engrained.

Russian officials say that Russian and Chinese firms are gradually gaining experience doing business together. This is leading to an increase in deals worth under \$100 million. But it remains unclear whether this is a stable trend. Russian trade is gradually reorienting on Asia and, first and foremost, on China. But all this is happening slowly.

Ties between Russian and Chinese officials, military and business people are growing closer. But all this is happening slowly, and a qualitative shift will take decades.

When Xi Jinping comes to Moscow in July, Russia expects to sign certain “major agreements,” said Yuri Ushakov, Putin’s aide. Moscow is likely waiting for progress in preparing an agreement on the Moscow-Kazan high speed railway. But agreements on international transport corridors in the eastern Primorye region may also be signed. Russian officials have not said what specifically Moscow expects from the visit.

Naturally, there has been no breakthrough with China and Russia’s “pivot to the East.” And there is no reason to expect a breakthrough. Nonetheless, at any moment, Moscow and Beijing could announce that their relations are in the “best condition off all time” — and they would be correct. **TMT**





*"Hybrid warfare demands adequate responses to challenges" Ukrainian President **Petro Poroshenko***

61.5M

Ukrainians use Yandex, Mail.ru, Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki.



Russia's roster of banned websites contains more than 71,000 entries as of May 17.

3 Years

The period of time during which the new sanctions are supposed to remain in place.

# Unfriended

By **Daria Litvinova** d.litvinova@imedia.ru

Ukraine has banned Russia's largest social networks and online services. But it probably won't further damage relations or IT markets

If their track record for blocking thousands of websites wasn't already well documented, it would be easy to believe Russian officials sincerely cared about Internet freedom.

"It is stupid and irrational, to operate with bans and prohibitions on the Internet," Yevgeni Revenko, a pro-Kremlin lawmaker, said May 16. "People will find ways around it."

Bans on the Internet bring out "legal nihilism" in people, by forcing them to look for murky shortcuts, Alexei Volin, deputy minister of communications, noted the same day. Violating people's right to information is bad for a country's population, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov added.

On May 16, the European Court of Human Rights announced it lodged a complaint with Russia for banning 5 million websites. But Russian officials were responding to another matter entirely: Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko banning Russia's biggest internet companies from operating in Ukraine.

Among the entities facing restrictions in Ukraine under the sanctions is the Mail.ru Group, a major Russian internet company that owns VKontakte and Odnoklassniki.

The order also requires Ukrainian internet providers to block all Yandex services, including its search engine, anti-virus companies Kaspersky Lab and DrWeb and the accounting software company 1C.

"It's time we acted with more determination," Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wrote on his pages on Russia's biggest social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki on May 16. "Hybrid warfare demands adequate responses to challenges." According to Mail.ru Group, 25 million Ukrainians use their services — more than half of the country's population. Sixteen million use the Vkontakte social network. Some 10 million use Odnoklassniki, while Yandex attracts 11 million.

But the ban isn't censorship, says Ukrainian political analyst Taras Berezovets. "It is not a secret that Odnoklassniki,



Vkontakte and Mail.ru are being actively used for propaganda and counter-propaganda in the interest of Russia's law enforcement," Berezovets wrote on Facebook following the ban.

"The Security Council's decision to ban — let's call them what they are — Russia's diversionary resources is not just right, but vital."

There is a military aspect to the ban, says international affairs analyst Vladimir Frolov. When you're at war, you do what it takes to stop the enemy from spreading propaganda on your territory.

"War is war," is Kiev's logic," Frolov told The Moscow Times, "Poroshenko uses it, playing on the side of patriots."

Will Moscow retaliate? Frolov says Moscow doesn't need escalation right now — it is trying to mend fences with the U.S. and show the world that Ukrainian government is not smart.

Moreover, Russia has little left of Ukraine to ban. Most pro-Ukrainian websites in Russia were banned in 2014. "There

might be some new economic restrictions Russia could introduce, but it looks like it already restricted everything it could." Following the move, Yandex, Vkontakte and Mail.ru Group unanimously expressed their regret that Ukrainian authorities planned to strip millions of users of their services. The companies said they would suffer almost no damages.

"The Yandex group is large," a company spokesperson told The Moscow Times in written comments. "The sanctions won't affect it negatively." The share of Ukrainian business is the Mail.ru Group's revenue mix is insignificant, the company said in an online statement — the ban won't affect the company's financial or development plans.

Especially since the ban is unlikely to be implemented soon — the very mechanism of blocking websites is yet to be developed, says Sergei Petrenko, former head of Yandex. Ukraine. "It's not something you can do quickly," Petrenko told The Moscow Times.

In addition, it is easy to access blocked websites through proxy servers, VPNs and anonymizing software — Mail.ru even published a manual on how to do it. What may prove more problematic for Ukrainians is a ban on 1C accounting software — according to Evrosoftprom, a 1C distributor in Ukraine, some 300,000 companies use it.

"I have no idea what they're going to do without it," Alexander Fediynko, head of the Ukraine's Internet Association, told The Moscow Times. There are Ukrainian analogues of 1C, notes Petrenko. But they're not as good.

The question when the ban will be implemented remains unanswered. Human Rights Watch called on Poroshenko to rescind the decree banning Russian websites citing freedom of speech related concerns. Yandex, Mail.ru, Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki were still fully functional in Ukraine as of Wednesday afternoon. **TMT**

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**SPEAKERS**

**Katerina Kozlova**  
Managing director of the office, «Egorov, Puginsky, Afanasiev & Partners»

**Marina Krivobokova**  
Head of the secretariat, PWC

**Alexander Lvov**  
Deputy general director, RZD-Tours

**Kristina Maslova**  
Personal assistant to the president for Russia and the CIS, Schneider Electric

**Ekaterina Rukhlova**  
Personal assistant to the president, "Sukhoi Civil Aircraft"

**Julia Shishlova**  
Director of client service, PrimeConcept

Payment: 20 000 rubles + VAT.

Producer  
**Natalia Ivanova**  
n.ivanova@vedomosti.ru

Sponsorship opportunities  
**Evgeny Chechin**  
e.chechin@vedomosti.ru

Participation in the project  
**Alexandra Podlipskaya**  
a.podlipskaya@vedomosti.ru

| +7 495 232-3200

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*"The church has a powerful lobby in the Russian political elite. And it uses it – despite the fact that the Russian population is not very religious."*

# 1991

Both religion and atheism recognized in USSR

# 57%

of Russians believe Orthodoxy is key to being "truly Russian"



Article 148 of the Russian Criminal Code makes it illegal to offend the sensitivities of believers.

# In the Name of God

A recent court case demonstrates that the Russian church has teamed up with the state to take aim at atheists



Op-Ed by **Pavel Chikov**  
Head of the Agora international human rights organization

Since Russian video blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky was sentenced to three years probation in a Yekaterinburg court this month, the debate in Russia is on — the debate about whether it's even lawful in Russia not to believe in god.

This national conversation came to a head this week when major Russian television anchor Vladimir Pozner asked if he was breaking the law simply being an atheist. Russia's Constitutional court judge Gadis Gadjiyev responded later in an interview that atheism is not an offense under Russia's constitution.

But, he added, if a specific action is taken, "It depends on who the action was taken against. And every single case should be looked in."

For 75 years under the Soviet system, atheism was state policy. In the 1970s and 80s, those who fought for the rights of believers were dissidents and the Soviet regime treated them exactly the same way.

Then, on September 5, 1991, the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR passed the Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms. Everyone had the right to profess a religion belief, to spread religious or atheistic views, and to engage in the religious or atheistic raising and education of children.

This was the first and last time that the rights of atheists were affirmed in Russia. Now, a quarter of a century later — on the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution — the Russian church is targeting atheists with the help of the state. And Orthodoxy has become state policy.

The clericalization of Russia is, of course, not just beginning. The country's arts and creative spheres were the first to sense it. They began to send warning signals to society through modern art.

The first criminal case involving the "political" Article 282 of the Criminal Code (combating extremism) was prophetically targeted at an anticlerical performance. Artist Avdei Ter-Oganyan's Southern Atheist group held an action in Moscow in 1998 that let people buy a reproduction of an icon and pay to have it defiled on the spot.

In 2000, performance artist Oleg Mavromatti nailed himself to a wooden cross across from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. He had written "I'm not the son of God" on



Russian video blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky spent eight months under arrest and was ultimately convicted of extremism and offending religious believers in part because he denies the existence of Jesus Christ.

his back. Again, a criminal charge was filed under Article 282. Both Ter-Oganyan and Mavromatti have left Russia.

Human rights activists were the next to suffer. In 2003, director of the Andrei Sakharov Center Yuri Samodurov hosted the scandalous exhibition "Caution, Religion!" in its museum. Orthodox activists attacked the museum and broke up the exhibition, but the police did not see their actions as criminal.

The organizers of the exhibition were charged under Article 282. The court found them guilty.

Four years later, history repeated itself. Samodurov and the prominent Tretyakov Gallery curator Andrei Yerofeev organized the Forbidden Art exhibition in the Sakharov Museum, leading to another criminal case of extremism and another sentencing: a fine of 100,000 rubles (\$3900).

And then came 2012. First, human rights activist Maxim Efimov from the northern Russian region of Karelia was investigated for extremism for a post titled Karelia Is Tired of Priests. He nearly landed himself in a psychiatric hospital.

Then the group Pussy Riot demonstrated in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and their criminal case became known to the whole world. Pussy Riot was criticizing the coalescence of the Orthodox Church and the state. Nadia Tolokonnikova and Masha Alekhina became the first Russian citizens to be imprisoned for criticizing the church.

The Pussy Riot case prompted the Kremlin to introduce a new, separate article into the Criminal Code — Article 148 on offending the sensitivities of believers. Since then, attacks on the church have been singled out from general extremism.

It did not take long for the first criminal case to be brought under Article 148. In Stavropol, in southern Russia, blogger Viktor Krasnov published a post titled There Is No God in the heat of a religious debate and he called the Bible "a collection of Jewish folktales."

That case came to nothing, but it became clear that Article 148 was leveled against atheists. It also became clear that the church was willing to go to law enforcement, not only in

response to provocations by artists, but even for typical rhetoric on the Internet.

This habit reached its apogee a little less than a year ago, when video blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky, who has 300,000 subscribers on YouTube, shot a video about playing Pokemon Go in a church in Yekaterinburg. The diocese contacted the prosecutor's office, which involved the police and the investigative committee in the incident. Sokolovsky was arrested and held in custody for eight months before being released by the court. The guilty verdict against him remains in force. Sokolovsky received a suspended sentence. And one of the charges was just that: public denial of the existence of God.

These major cases did not come out of nowhere. Now the repression of alternative Christian denominations is underway in Russia. Recently, the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who number 150,000 in Russia, have been banned. The Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church and Pentecostals are under pressure. Hare Krishnas and even completely non-religious practitioners of yoga are being subjected to detention, trial and fines.

Similarly, citizens who protest the construction of churches in Moscow experience persecution and harassment. The Russian Orthodox Church, in conjunction with the police, private security forces and pro-government activists, act against these demonstrators. In one district of Moscow, a protest action was met with a criminal case. Meanwhile in St. Petersburg, the church is trying to take over St. Isaac's Cathedral, the city's most renowned landmark.

The church has a powerful lobby in the Russian political elite. And it uses it — despite the fact that the Russian population is not very religious. Only a small part of it actually participates in religious rites.

Cases like Sokolovsky's are an irritant and stir a feeling of protest in a very large section of society. But, thanks to the state, super-archaic values prevail, which only strengthens the tension between progress and Russian conservatism in its official form. **TMT**



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*"I could make 6,000 rubles (\$110) with 10 rides. Now it's 20 rides for 3500-4000 rubles," - **Mansurjon**, a Moscow taxi driver*

2013

Uber comes to Russia and debuts in Moscow.



Over the last three months, a fixed fare among app taxi sharing services has made prices lower than ever before for consumers.

17

number of Russian cities where Uber operates.



# The Price War

By **Bradley Jardine** & **Mikhail Fishman** newsreporter@imedia.ru | Illustration by **Ilya Kutoboy**

In Moscow, fierce competition is driving taxi fares lower than ever before. But the taxi drivers are feeling the pressure

**“H**ow can fuel, vehicles, and car repairs go up in price, while fares get cheaper?” asks Alexei Lukin, a taxi-driver and founder of an online group opposed to taxi aggregation apps like Uber.

Like taxi drivers worldwide, Lukin is angry. This May, he helped organize a “protest ride” on Moscow’s Garden Ring, the main road dividing the centre of the capital from its suburbs.

The group that Lukin launched is also encouraging other methods of protest, including the introduction of “silent hours,” when he and other taxi drivers would agree not to pick up orders from app providers such as Uber.

On a corporate level, United Russian Carriers (URC), a taxi drivers’ association, has suggested fixing a minimum charge on all taxi services. The organisation said it would file an official complaint to Russia’s federal competition regulator.

But neither of these measures appear to be working. Taxi drivers associations are trying to fight what they say is aggressive, predatory pricing by online taxi providers in Moscow. But so far, Muscovites have been reaping the benefits. Prices are plummeting, waits are shorter, and rides are more comfortable.

## A fixed fare

Within the last three months, Moscow’s three major app providers — Yandex-Taxi, Gett and Uber — introduced fixed fares. The advantage: Passengers know their fare before they even step into the car, and there’s no threat of Moscow’s infamous traffic jams driving up the cost.

“The fixed fare benefits the passenger because they doesn’t get any surprises during the ride,” Uber’s Moscow General Manager Vitaly Bedarev told The Moscow Times.

In written comments to The Moscow Times, Yandex’s press service also praised the measure. Yandex users have seen taxi waiting times in Moscow plunge by 29 percent. The number of daily rides for an average taxi driver has also risen by 15 percent, heralding a rise in the the average hourly salary of Moscow’s taxi drivers.

Apart from introducing fixed rates, apps have also brought in other discounts for passengers and compensations for driv-

ers. Uber told The Moscow Times that it subsidizes some fares within marketing campaigns, making the ride more affordable for the passenger at its own expense. It’s how Uber invests in increasing its share on the market.

“Of course, we are not losing money on all our rides,” Bedarev told The Moscow Times.

Competitors are applying the same logic. As a result, Muscovites feel the average taxi fare has dropped recently. For some rides, Uber is competing with public transit: the subway, trams and buses.

But drivers are ultimately losing out in order to pay for the new affordability of the digital age. For Moscow’s traditional taxi drivers, instant noodles have become the symbol of their struggle: under constant pressure from app taxi providers, they have no time for a proper lunch.

“We work twice as hard and earn three times less,” says Lukin.

“Within last three months, the work has become harder,” confirms Mansurjon, who began working as a Moscow Uber driver in Moscow a year ago. Last winter, Mansurjon could make 6,000 rubles (\$110) with 10 rides. Now, he says, it takes him 20 rides to get 3500-4000 rubles.

## A liberal microcosm

Moscow taxi regulations are among the world’s most liberal. There are no fixed minimum charges or enforced quotas. Taxi licenses is easy to obtain, pushing traditional taxi drivers unions to raise safety issues.

Moscow’s authorities have also inadvertently benefited the three major players competing for taxi shares. Local policies are increasing the cost of owning and using a car in the city. The roads are getting narrower, parking prices keep growing, and fines are increasing too.

With taxis both convenient and affordable, traditional “gypsy cabs” — unlicensed taxis who could be flagged down for a small fee — have almost disappeared. In Moscow, a city with 15 million inhabitants, owning a car is no longer a necessity.

From this perspective, Moscow looks more and more like a Western metropolis. It is also sharing some of their conflicts,

namely — the struggle between tradition taxi drivers and app providers. But whereas governments such as France ultimately siding with taxi drivers by clamping down on Uber, Russia’s regulators have stepped aside.

No wonder it goes through the same conflicts that other major cities go through, namely the pitched battles between traditional taxi drivers and app car providers. But if in France, for example, the national government ended siding with taxi drivers and clamping down on Uber, Russia’s regulators largely step aside from the conflict.

“The problem of predatory pricing by app providers is becoming increasingly urgent and needs a regulatory response,” Bogdan Konoshenko, a taxi company owner and a member of the capital’s chamber of commerce, told The Moscow Times.

Konoshenko suggests banning app providers from subsidizing their drivers. Without the extra payments to the drivers that digital companies provide, the market will stabilize and the fare will be fair, he says. Otherwise, whoever wins the price war and gains a monopolistic position on the market will then compensate the investment by hiking the prices back up.

Uber has so far dismissed this suggestion, “This is a strange suggestion” says Bedarev. “Why would anyone ban something that benefits the driver?”

At the moment, the monopolization of Moscow’s taxi market looks like a scary story, says Mikhail Blinkin, the head of the Institute of Transport Economy at Higher School of Economics. But Moscow’s unregulated market may be self-correcting says Blinkin.

“The moment consumers feel the prices do not reflect reality, Moscow’s gypsy cabs will reappear, bringing back the balance” he says.

There is also no indication of federal or local authorities looking to increase regulations. So it is likely that taxi fares in Moscow will get even lower than they are now, adding pressure on the drivers.

It’s a well known fact that Russia’s economy suffers heavily from corruption and state control. But Moscow’s taxi market looks special: with its competition and low regulation, it makes a perfect microcosm for an economically liberal Russia. And this might be the answer to Alexei Lukin’s question. **TMT**





Russia “has no one to fight in the Arctic.” — Arctic expert **Andrei Zagorsky**

**5%**

of Russia’s GDP comes from the Arctic.

**40**

approximate number of icebreakers under Russia’s command.



In 2014, President Vladimir Putin announced the creation of the Northern Joint Strategic Command to coordinate every Russian military unit in the Arctic theater.

# The Cold War

By **Matthew Kupfer** & **Matthew Bodner** [newsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:newsreporter@imedia.ru)

Russia’s military build-up in the Arctic is spooking its neighbors.  
But don’t worry — bullets aren’t flying yet



LEV FEDOSEYEV / TASS

Beyond re-opening old Soviet airfields, Russia has deployed two military brigades to the Arctic.

On May 9, Muscovites gathered on Red Square for an annual tradition: the Victory Day military parade.

Formally, the parade marks the Soviet Union’s triumph over Nazi Germany in World War II. Informally, it gives the Kremlin a chance to send its latest tanks and missiles rolling down the street and show off its resurgent military might.

This year, the Kremlin had a surprise up its sleeve: For the first time ever, it deployed to Red Square the Tor and Pantsir air defense systems, decked out in sharp white and gray Arctic camouflage.

The appearance of Arctic forces on Victory Day underscores one of the military’s most impressive and misunderstood rearmament efforts: Since at least 2011, the Defense Ministry has worked at a breakneck pace to reopen old defensive installations on the Arctic frontier and reassert its armed presence there.

But the size and scale of the Kremlin’s Arctic build-up has some of its regional neighbors worried.

“They are concerned that this series of steps by Russia may go beyond defense and portend offensive intentions,” says Kenneth Yalowitz, an Arctic analyst who was formerly U.S. Ambassador to Belarus and Georgia.

## Return to the north

If war were to break out with Russia tomorrow, the United States would have just one solitary icebreaker — the 50-year-

old Polar Star — to clear the way for its warships. Meanwhile, across the Arctic Sea, is a Russian icebreaker fleet of some 40 ships. Several are nuclear-powered, giving them incredible range and endurance — and more are on the way.

Russia has already put the U.S. in “checkmate,” Admiral Paul Zukunft, U.S. Coast Guard commandant, said earlier this month during a panel discussion in Washington. It’s a reality, he admitted, that keeps him awake at night.

As global warming decimates the polar ice caps, northern countries (and even non-Arctic states) are increasingly eyeing the region for economic opportunities. Climate change, many believe, promises new openings for shipping, resource extraction and even tourism in the far north. In these conditions, Russia’s Arctic build-up looks formidable.

But many Arctic observers doubt the situation is as dire as Zukunft believes. Moscow’s militarization of the polar north is far from a simple or straightforward development. Geography, demographics and Cold War history predispose Russia to military engagement in the region.

The Russian Arctic coastline is four times longer than the United States’ Alaskan frontier. Half of the Arctic’s population lives in Russia. And Russia’s official Arctic Zone — which does not even include all its Arctic territory — produces more than 5 percent of the country’s GDP.

“For comparison, Alaska contributes less than one percent of U.S. GDP,” says Andrei Zagorsky, a professor at Moscow’s IMEMO university and an expert on the Arctic.

As an enormous land power, Russia also faces a practical problem: The vast majority of its coastline is located in a region covered in ice for most of the year. Russia’s largest and best equipped naval force, the Northern Fleet, is designed for engagements in the Atlantic, but geography forces it to be based in the frigid northern port of Murmansk.

History plays an important role in Russia’s advantageous Arctic footing, too. Over the course of the 20th century, the Soviet Union developed and maintained an imposing Arctic presence, establishing air bases, radar stations and anti-air batteries to defend its northern coastline during the Cold War.

Although many of those bases atrophied in the wake of the Soviet collapse, Russia has since found new reasons to focus on the Arctic. The Russian economy is heavily dependent on natural resource extraction. With production in older oil and gas fields declining, the Arctic has become the new frontier for extraction.

As a result, Moscow began reasserting its military presence and its control over territory in the Arctic. The country has reopened old Soviet bases and constructed new ones. In 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the creation of the Northern Joint Strategic Command, a Murmansk-based combined command to coordinate every military unit in the Arctic theater.

Russia currently plans to reestablish 13 air bases and ten radar stations and establish air, surface, and underwater monitoring systems. The armed forces will also deploy



# Russian Tales



*"There is no potential for any kind of conflict here," — Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to the Arctic Council*

**The Moscow Times**  
No. 5804

**8**

states have membership in the Arctic council.

*"Having only one heavy icebreaker ... it is the one aspect I lose sleep over." — U.S. Adm. Paul Zukunft*



**32**

open-source count of the Northern Fleet's surface warship force.

7



ILAY PODGORNY / RIA NOVOSTI

← As the ice begins to melt, global energy companies are increasingly interested in tapping the region's vast resource wealth.

→ Environmental activists are concerned that resource attraction will threaten the local wildlife.



VERA KOSTAMO / RIA NOVOSTI

anti-aircraft and anti-submarine defense forces on these bases. Additionally, Russia will open 20 border outposts and ten integrated emergency rescue centers in the Arctic.

This makes Russia the only country with significant military forces permanently deployed to the Arctic. But the reasons for this are complicated and, at times, peripheral to Arctic security concerns.

The Northern Fleet includes strategic submarines with nuclear ballistic missiles, perhaps the single most important branch of Russia's national defense. "The main task of the Northern Fleet's surface ships is to ensure the survival of the ballistic missile submarines in the event of a nuclear war," Zogorsky says. Even so, the surface fleet is designed for operation in the Atlantic, not the Arctic. And not a single warship is under construction for Arctic war.

Beyond this, there are climatic concerns: The northwestern Kola Peninsula is virtually Russia's only convenient outlet to the open ocean. The water is deep and doesn't freeze in the winter.

"Other Arctic countries have more convenient and free access to the ocean, and so they don't have to keep their fleet up north," Zagorsky adds.

## No conflict

On May 10, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov came to Fairbanks, Alaska to take part in a ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council. The next day he spoke before the assembled dignitaries and declared that "there is no potential for any kind of conflict" in the Arctic.

On the surface, that statement seems to contradict Russia's military build-up in the region. But military observers suggest the likelihood of real conflict is low.

"Individual incidents are more likely — for example, the collision of two submarines," says Andrei Frolov, editor-in-chief of the Moscow Defense Brief magazine. But he doubts this would lead to war.

There are few other immediate reasons for conflict. A 1990 agreement demarcates maritime borders, which are not disputed. And most of the Arctic's natural resources are located in countries' coastal shelf zones, where no one disputes the sovereign rights of the states. Russia has applied to the UN to legally extend its continental shelf in the Arctic — a move the U.S. disagrees with — but the issue hardly appears combustible.

What's more, the Arctic countries take part in the Arc-

tic Council, which provides a platform for dialogue on economic development, environmental protection, and other regional issues. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum also promotes regional cooperation on maritime safety and search and rescue issues.

Still, Arctic analyst Kenneth Yalowitz says there are reasons for concern. The lack of transparency in Russia's Arctic build-up is raising other Arctic states' concerns that the militarization is not defensive.

Additionally, the deterioration of U.S.-Russian ties in the last three years has taken its toll: The two countries' direct military-to-military contacts on the Arctic have been suspended. Given the risk of "unintended consequences from a military accident" in the region, resuming these contacts would be wise, Ambassador Yalowitz told The Moscow Times in an email.

In the meantime, Yalowitz argues that the goal for the United States and Russia in the region is a limited one:

"They need to prevent broader geopolitical tensions from spilling into the Arctic" and stopping "the international cooperation necessary to deal with the challenge of climate change in the north." **TMT**

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*"Muscovites don't march in step. They are assertive and have strong opinions" - Mayor **Sergei Sobyanin**, in an interview with *gazeta.ru*, February 2012*

**12,3 m**

people Moscow's population.

**1,976 Trl**

(\$35 billion)  
Moscow city's projected budget in 2017.



There is no consensus on the meaning of the name, but most historians think "Moscow" could mean "a damp place" in the proto-Slavic language.



# Moscow's Own Trolls

By [Alexey Kovalev](#) [a.kovalev@imedia.ru](mailto:a.kovalev@imedia.ru) | Illustration by [Yevgeny Tonkonog](#)

## How Mayor Sergey Sobyanin takes the tricks Russia plays on foreign audiences and puts them to use against his own constituents

As soon as Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin unveiled his grand plan in March to demolish thousands of cheap Soviet-era apartment buildings, Russian social media buzzed.

Sobyanin's plan to wrecking-ball the flats known as khrushchevki and replace them with high-density skyscrapers, would be little short of a PR grand slam, if the Russian Internet was anything to go by.

By now, there are dozens of community pages on the social network Vkontakte with names like "We Support the Demolition of the Khrushchevki." Roughly 10,000 accounts have joined in enthusiastic support for Sobyanin's program on one of those, churning out dozens of posts and comments on Vkontakte and other platforms. The group also promotes itself aggressively. It has bought ads on social media that have hounded Moscow's Internet users for weeks.

But on closer inspection, these "ordinary Muscovites" complaining about their unbearable lives in "shabby homes without elevators or garbage chutes, with leaking roofs and smelly basements," may not be who they seem.

First, in many cases, the individuals' lifestyles, displayed proudly on Instagram, suggest that they could probably afford better homes for themselves and their families. For example, one man seems preoccupied with his flashy Mercedes — a

sports car that probably costs almost as much as his supposed dingy Khrushchevka apartment.

Another young woman (also a fan of high-end Mercedeses) diligently documents every breakfast she's had at Moscow's most expensive restaurants. The same person also happens to be the daughter of a local functionary for the political party United Russia, which dominates Moscow's landscape at every legislative and executive level.

### Hybrid Muscovites

Even a quick glance at their social media profiles of pro-demolition online activists suggests that least some harbor connections to the mayor's office itself.

For example, two of the page's administrators, as well as most of the people posting content, are members of the so-called "Youth Chamber" — a quasi-parliamentary body with no real legislative powers, whose members the mayor's office encourages to engage in "civic activities" like organizing a local sports event or inspiring patriotic creativity in their neighborhoods.

The chamber — led by a former pro-Kremlin youth movement leader — promises a successful career in the Moscow government in exchange for loyalty and active promotion of the mayor's agenda.

Below the surface, however, the "Youth Chamber" seems

to be little more than a state-sponsored troll farm. Last year, Leonid Volkov, an Internet freedom activist who now manages Alexei Navalny's presidential campaign, revealed in a series of blog posts how the "Youth Chamber" really operates. Volkov has some experience dealing with Moscow's mayor, also having managed Navalny's mayoral campaign in 2013, when the opposition maverick nearly forced a runoff vote against Sobyanin.

Members of the chamber, Volkov wrote, are employed by the mayor's office wishing to sway the public opinion on important city matters as real-life bots — not automated software but actual persons, acting as a coordinated network. Members are given bullet-pointed instructions on how to write about far-reaching measures the city government wants to implement, such as large-scale infrastructure projects and demolitions.

Armies of online activists then flood Russian social media with posts extolling Sobyanin's wisdom, promoting his latest cause. Most of these campaigns seem to have little effect on the dissenting Muscovites who loudly protest against the mayor's heavy-handed policies. But these human bots are relentless anyway, and there's reason to believe the city rewards them handsomely for the trouble. By Volkov's estimate, the city allocates up to 200 million rubles (\$3.5 million) to the "Youth Chamber."





*“Sergei Sobyenin is experienced and has the qualities to be the mayor of Moscow” - Dmitry Medvedev, the then-president of Russia*

## 2010

Sergei Sobyenin was appointed Moscow mayor.



1147: the year the name “Muscovy” was first mentioned in chronicles, considered to be the official date of foundation.

## 13Bln rubles

(\$228 million): how much Moscow city government spends on its media empire.



### Astroturf

But what's the point of these complicated online campaigns, when their provenance is easily deduced and “Youth Chamber” members are called out as “Sobyenin skills” on social media?

Anton Merkurov, a prominent Russian media expert, says the endgame is not so much to convince Muscovites to support City Hall's policies, as it is to convince the mayor himself that his electorate is rallying around him. “Both Sobyenin and Putin are completely detached from the reality on the ground. They only know of the outside world what their aides tell them. And their aides are only interested in securing more money for propaganda,” Merkurov said.

This dynamic might help explain why every new policy announcement shared on the mayor's verified Twitter account (@MosSobyenin) instantly attracts dozens of overenthusiastic replies. “Thank you, Mr. Sobyenin!” many of them say. “We've been waiting for this for so long!”

If you actually look at these Twitter accounts, however, you'll see that most of them belong to local council members and members of Sobyenin's own political party, United Russia.

But “astroturf” youth activists and local councils are hardly the Moscow government's only means of promoting its agenda and drowning out opposing voices. City Hall's schemes to influence the public often flirt with outright criminal activity, as well.

An investigation by The Moscow Times revealed that Mayor Sobyenin's office in fact manages the “We Support the Demolition of the Khrushchevki” community group on Vkontakte, controlling the group through a shady network of companies.

An outfit called Moscow Information Technologies, or MIT (set up by Sobyenin's predecessor, former Mayor Yuri Luzhkov), is officially tasked with “providing informational support for the city's projects.”

But a more honest explanation of MIT's activities is that it serves as a vehicle for subversive propaganda on the city's behalf.

A series of stolen emails released by the hacker group “Shaltai Boltai” (whose members the Federal Security Service

arrested earlier this year) shows that MIT was involved in a clandestine program to conspire with the Russian media by running articles discrediting opposition candidates in local elections. This effort included fabricating evidence against opposition activists and suppressing unwanted coverage — a clear violation of Russian media laws.

### Smearing on mayor's behalf

According to the organization's leaked ledgers, MIT used to funnel up to a million rubles (\$17,000) from the mayor's office for a single newspaper story that either praised City Hall or smeared its opponents. Media outlets published these stories with phony bylines, disguising the fact that this content was essentially a paid advertisement.

The mayor's office also manipulates the media for favorable coverage through other, more legally sound but still surreptitious means. On top of maintaining a legitimate media empire funded to the tune of 13 billion rubles a year (\$230 million) that includes several TV channels, radio stations, and online news websites, Sobyenin's administration heavily invests in swaying the agenda on Yandex.News, Russia's biggest online news aggregator.

MIT plays a role here, too. An investigation by the independent news outlet RBC showed that Moscow's authorities have found a way to dominate the news agenda when it wants, drowning out unfavorable stories with its own.

MIT devised a scheme wherein Moscow's neighborhood councils (most of them totally loyal to the mayor and to United Russia) set up dozens of similar news websites that are capable of firing off volleys of nearly identical news articles promoting the mayor's initiatives. This onslaught fools Yandex's algorithm into thinking that something important is happening. The news aggregator doesn't differentiate between the sources, and thus assumes there's a news event that deserves top billing in its ranking system, if hundreds of different outlets are reporting on a single event.

Even the most trivial stories routinely outperform genuinely important news on Yandex's aggregator. For example, on March 26, when mass protests against state corruption put central Moscow on police lockdown, the top slot on Yandex

News displayed a headline promoting a local festival supported by the Moscow government.

As a result, even though Russia's independent media has covered Mayor Sobyenin's controversial “renovation” scheme critically, it can't compete with what is essentially a coordinated bot attack on the Russian Internet's biggest news aggregator.

These “bot newspapers” are often used in conjunction with “astroturf” demonstrations organized to create the impression that the mayor is not imposing his will on Muscovites but simply responding to their demands. On Sunday, after a 20,000-strong protest in central Moscow against the demolition scheme, the Vechernyaya Moskva (“Evening Moscow”) newspaper — once a respectable daily — reported that 35,000 Muscovites rallied in support of the demolition, showing readers a photograph from the anti-demolition protest.

### Make-believe democracy

And the mayor's office is especially proud of its mobile app, “Active Citizen,” which was introduced in 2014 and has become a major part of the publicity campaign to justify Sobyenin's administration program. Moscow City Hall describes Active Citizen (another taxpayer-funded project) as the envy of other world capitals and an instrument of direct democracy that provides officials with priceless public feedback.

But there are a few issues with the app. First, most of the polls accessible on Active Citizen are of little if any consequence, such as nominations for a local talent show or the genres to be represented at a city-sponsored film festival. In the rare cases where the app allows Muscovites to vote on genuinely significant issues (such as the planned demolitions of khrushchevki), there is no way to verify the final tally independently.

Unsurprisingly, the app's numerous critics say it promotes faux democracy used to justify decisions already made at City Hall.

With bot networks, phony newspapers, its own mobile app, and more, the Moscow mayor's office controls its own bonafide propaganda empire. And the machinery at Sergei Sobyenin's disposal even rivals Russia's national efforts like RT, whose state funding is only 30 percent greater. **TMT**





The **British Higher School of Art** and Design was opened in Moscow in 2003 to train students to top international standards.

**300**  
Approximate number of  
BoConcept shops worldwide.

**135,000**  
items are kept in the  
collection of the Fersman  
Mineralogical Museum.



**Liverpool** is a port of 0.5 million people in the northwest of England. The city has strong historical ties to Ireland and is best known for football and being the hometown of The Beatles.

## THE WORD'S WORTH

# Happy Russian Anniversary!

*Юбилей: anniversary and party*



By **Michele A. Berdy**  
Moscow-based translator and  
interpreter, author of  
“The Russian Word’s Worth” (Glas),  
a collection of her columns.

When you begin to study a foreign language, at first you are struck by all the differences — and how wrong all those differences are. I mean, six main cases in Russian — really? And aspect? You really think I can take the time to figure out if I’m talking about a habitual or a one-time action before I say when I’m going to get home tonight (возвращаться or вернуться)? And consonant clusters like in взгляд (view)? Come on, Russian!

And then slowly but surely something really strange happens. Not only do you get used to cases and declensions and aspect and tongue-twisting words with seven syllables... you begin to appreciate the internal logic of Russian. Finally, one fine day you realize: Oh, this is so much better in Russian than in English.

One way Russian is vastly superior to English is in the language for celebrating special dates. First of all, there is one multi-purpose verb that is used for every occasion, from a wedding to a new job to a national holiday: поздравлять (to congratulate). Your neighbor’s kid graduated from high school? Поздравляю! Your best friends just tied the knot? Поздравляю! It’s Victory Day, Christmas, New Year’s, International Love-a-Shrimp Day? Поздравляю! If you want to get fancy, just continue the sentence: Поздравляю вас (literally “I congratulate you on...” с Днём Победы (Victory Day), с праздником (holiday), с женитьбой (wedding), or even с разводом (divorce). In English, you have to say something 19th-century, like “I congratulate you on the occasion of Victory Day,” or mumble something 21st-century like “Great! Happy holidays! Best wishes! So happy for you!”

And then Russian has better words for “anniversary.” The problem with the English word is its associations with the happy celebration of many years of wedded bliss. It sounds odd when coupled with the death of a poet or other sad event. Юбилей (jubilee) is mostly used for happy occasions. It means some variety of anniversary, usually, but not always, what Russians call круглая дата (a round number, a milestone) like 10 or 25 years. Сегодня празднуем юбилей: в этот день 25 лет назад мы с мужем поженились (“Today we’re going to celebrate an anniversary: on this day 25 years ago my husband and I got married.”) And it’s also the celebration itself: Он любит ходить в рестораны, клубы, на званые обеды, юбилей (“He loves to go to restaurants, clubs, dinner parties and celebrations.”)

The other great word is годовщина, which can be used for any kind of anniversary. Joyful: Сегодня они отмечают третью годовщину их союза (“Today they are celebrating the third anniversary of their union”). Mournful: В годовщину Сониной смерти, в октябре, мы поехали на кладбище (“We marked the date of Sonya’s death in October by going to the cemetery”). Or both, depending on your point of view: Раньше 7 и 8 ноября — годовщина Великой Октябрьской социалистической революции (“In the past November 7 and 8 marked the Great October Socialist Revolution”).

To be super-grammatical, say годовщина смерти, победы, подписания (anniversary of the death, victory, signing) rather than со дня смерти, победы (from the day of death, victory), and so on.

So I can say: Сегодня пятнадцатая годовщина моей первой рубрики! Ура! (“Today marks 15 years since my first column. Hurray!”). **TMT**

## MY MOSCOW

# Work of Art

By **Emily Erken** artsreporter@imedia.ru

Arts professor John Lavell’s last big project is to establish a British arts school in Moscow



JOHN LAVELL / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

For John Lavell, it is the everyday human interactions that make Moscow what it is.

Raised in working-class Liverpool in the UK, John Lavell has been on the move for many years. After teaching English in Japan, installing his art in Shanghai, and doing a Ph.D. in Northumbria, UK, he is now putting down roots at Moscow’s British Higher School of Art and Design, where he is a professor in the Fine Art department.

**I felt that there might be an opportunity to come here and invigorate a kind of old-school British art school.** When I took this job, I figured that this was probably it. I’ve been working here five academic years this September.

**I was born in Liverpool. My father was a carpenter by trade, and my mum was a bookbinder.** I grew up in a quite a rundown part of Liverpool, but I grew up very happily there. When I was about 20, I decided to follow my inclinations and do a diploma in art and design. I’ve done all kinds of jobs. I planted trees for a while, I was a manual laborer, I’ve packed boxes in warehouses, I’ve worked in kitchens. It hasn’t been a straight shot from art school.

**My normal way of working is manipulated paper.** I produce large scale pieces of paper which have been stabbed or pierced in some way or hit with a hammer, a semi-violent action. I’ve been very lucky to do some artist-in-residences over the last few years. I was in Iceland, Venice, and two summers ago, I got selected for the Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai.

**I didn’t have a lot of knowledge about Russia, but I did have a father who was old enough to remember the [Second World] War.** He had a tremendous respect for our allies. My dad was a unionist and a socialist as well. The idea of the “red team” and the “blue team” never floated it for me.

**One of my things is to randomly get off the metro and just walk for a day and see what I can see.** One of the things that never ceases to touch me are these tiny little meetings you might have in a queue. Or someone stops you for directions and realizes you’re not Russian, and you have a kind of semi-funny conversation. For a lot of people who have never been here, they probably see Moscow as this grey, crushing metropolis, and that’s not been my experience at all.

**One of my all-time favorite spaces in Moscow is the mineral museum at Shabolovskaya.** It’s essentially the mineral section of [St. Petersburg’s] Kunstammer! It’s moved to Moscow and it’s been Sovietized. To me, it’s one of the most beautiful places [in the city]. They’ve got a collection of meteorites. Fersman Mineralogical Museum, 18/2 Leninsky Prospekt, Metro Shabolovskaya

**I find Moscow full of stories.** My current project is a series of small watercolors based upon the marbles in the metro. One of my colleagues, Anna Mokhova, exhibited them in the Scandinavian BoConcept design shops. To me, my art is getting out into Moscow via these shops.

**Selfishly, I would recommend our degree shows on Friday, June 2.** There are drinks and the weather is usually good. All of the B.A. programs will show works, and you will see the range of creative activities from industrial design to fine art, a very eclectic collection from traditional painting to musical furniture. It is the public face of the school. You will see 100-plus perspectives on the world as imagined through a lot of different disciplines. **TMT**  
Located in ArtPlay, 10/3 Severnaya Ul. Syromyatnicheskaya, Metro Kurskaya



# Out & About



Weekly round-up of all that's new, delicious and fun in Moscow.



POLINA BAKHTINA / FACEBOOK

Medical Clinic No. 32 required an extensive makeover to transform it into an exhibition space.

## Unlikely Asylum: Opening Up the Theater

By [Alastair Gill](#) [a.gill@imedia.ru](mailto:a.gill@imedia.ru)

The annual show by Moscow's stage designers is being held in an abandoned hospital

Until recently, Medical Clinic No. 32 was little different from thousands of other hospitals abandoned after the collapse of the USSR. It had the same gloomy institutional aesthetic, the same creaking parquet floors, dim corridors and decaying linoleum.

So when the disused building at Pavletskaya was offered to the Theater Union of Russia as the exhibition space for "Itogi Sezona," its annual review of work by Moscow set designers, many of the artists were horrified. Instead of a clean, well-lit exhibition hall, they were faced with a disintegrating shell.

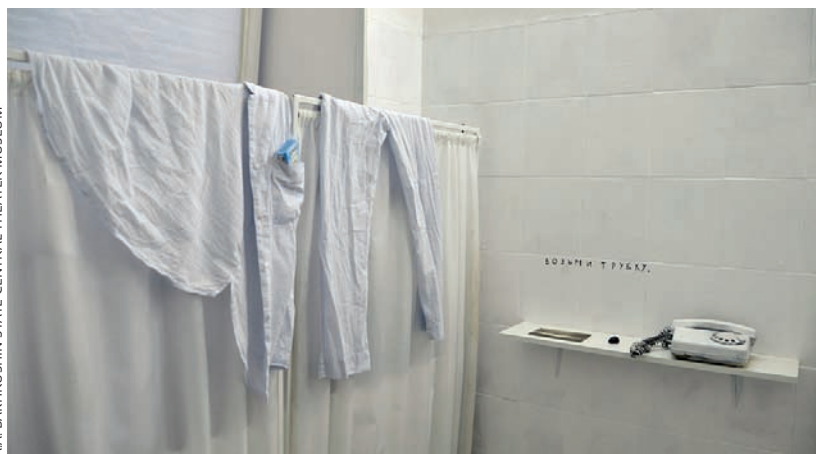
The floors were caked in dust, the windows dark and filthy, and the building also lacked electricity, having been stripped of its lights. To add insult to injury, the space was split into corridors and rooms, many of them odd shapes and sizes — a curator's nightmare.

"Some of the participants, after seeing photos of the space, just turned up, left their work and took off [in outrage]," curator Inna Mirzoyan told The Moscow Times.

Since 1991 the exhibition has been held with varying degrees of success at venues around the city, including the Manezh and New Manezh exhibition halls and — more recently — the Zurab Tsereteli Art Gallery, but has never faced the task of having to convert such an unorthodox space into a gallery.

"Itogi Sezona" was traditionally held in the Actors' House on Tverskaya Ulitsa, but after it was gutted by a fire in the early 1990s, cuts to the budget and dwindling funds meant relocating to progressively less prestigious venues. For this year's show, the group turned to its long-time collaborator, the Bakhrushin State Central Theater Museum.

A.A. BAKHRUSHIN STATE CENTRAL THEATER MUSEUM



Liliya Khismatullina made the tiled walls of her space an integral part of her exhibit.

"We approached the museum and asked if we could hold the exhibition in the main building, but there was no space," explains Mirzoyan. Instead, the museum's director offered the scenographers the use of the second floor of the neighboring Medical Clinic No. 32, which was given to the museum by the Ministry of Culture two years ago.

Since 1964, "Itogi Sezona" has served as an end-of-season review featuring models, sketches and costumes for projects Moscow's scenographers have worked on over the year.

"The season ends, and everyone puts up their pictures. It's like a Facebook feed, an archive of what has happened," says Mirzoyan.

This year's venue is a drastic departure for the exhibition, traditionally held in more conservative surroundings. The disused clinic presented the artists with a series of discrete, cramped spaces in which to display their

work. And while some participants balked at the prospect, many rose to the challenge.

"Of course it was an adventure, because in order to hold this exhibit, first of all we had to adapt the space," explains Mirzoyan.

Polina Bakhtina, one of the participating artists, took on the role of exhibition designer and developed a unifying stylistic theme. Basing her approach on the concept of "moving out" and "moving in," Bakhtina has decorated the space with cartons, white paint and duct tape — including the chairs in each room, which have been "packaged" in cardboard and yellow tape.

As the exhibition shows, a number of the participants have seized the opportunities offered by having the blank canvas of an entire room or passage at their disposal.

The chief stage designer for the Lenkom theater, Alexei Kondratyev, has transformed

his room into an entire installation devoted to Vladimir Sorokin's "Den Oprichnika" (Day of the Oprichnik). There are three set models, including the final one used for the play, as well as avant-garde works that formed part of the creative process for the project.

For other set designers, the peculiarities of the space were an unexpected boon, allowing them to emphasize thematic elements of their productions and incorporate features of the abandoned clinic into their exhibit.

Liliya Khismatullina, who designed the set for a Romanian staging of Anton Chekhov's "Ward No. 6," a story set in a provincial mental asylum, has made use of a white tiled wall to create her own ward, complete with white curtains and medical instruments. Sergei Tarakanov has used an old medical cupboard to display a series of puppets.

It is this extra creative dimension, this artistic opportunism, that captivates, with the artists utilizing their natural talents to do what they do best: visualize space as a stage.

In fact, there is something refreshingly innocent about this year's "Itogi Sezona," a sense of art returning to its roots, liberated from the buttoned-up confines of the gallery and taking back its role as something opportunist, irreverent, on the edge of the possible.

That the clinical environment of the modern-day gallery has so much in common with the white-walled minimalism of the hospital is the most telling of ironies. **TMT**

'Itogi Sezona' runs until May 31 at the A.A. Bakhrushin State Central Theater Museum.

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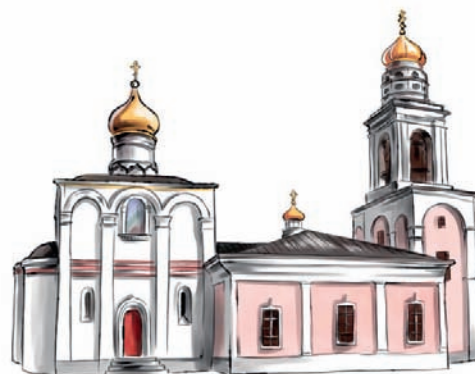
31/12 Ulitsa Bakhrushina  
Metro Pavletskaya



# Leninskaya Sloboda: A Quiet Suburb Swept By Industrialization

By [Daria Demidova](#) [artsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:artsreporter@imedia.ru) | Illustration by [Lida Iva](#)

Explore ancient relics and catch a glimpse of the daily life of Soviet blue-collar workers



## 1) Dinamo plant refectory

17 Leninskaya Sloboda, Bldg. 1

This run-down structure with a semi-circular tower may look unimpressive, but the idea behind it was of great social significance. Who cared about food services for workers in the 1920s? The Soviet government did. A Constructivist project, the dining hall fed all the Dinamo plant's staff. The building replaced the Lizin Pond (named after the "Poor Liza" who drowned here in Nikolai Karamzin's story), so wits dubbed it "Liza's bone."

The stadium at the former Likhachev Plant bears the name of footballer Eduard Streltsov, who won Olympic gold with the USSR in 1956.

## 2) The Nativity of Mary Church

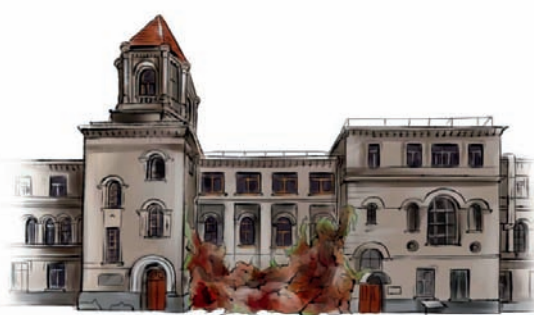
6 Vostochnaya Ulitsa

Hidden behind factories and commercial buildings, the white-stone 14th-century Nativity of Mary Church is a little relic of a quiet suburb wiped out by the construction boom of the 1920s and 1930s. The church is the burial place of two monks named Alexander Peresvet and Andrei Oslabya, who participated in the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, the first step toward the liberation of the Russian people from Tatar-Mongol oppression.

## 3) Lizino Railway Station

5 Leninskaya Sloboda, Bldg. 2

One of the curiosities of the neighborhood is the proliferation of toponyms integrating the name Liza (the short form for Yelizaveta). The former Lizino Railway Station, an excellent example of early 20th-century eclectics, is the only one of these places to have survived. Initially, commuter trains made a stop here, but later the station helped to deliver cargo to Moscow's Dinamo and Likhachev plants. Today the disused station is a prenatal clinic.



## 4) Ruins of the Simonov Monastery

This fragment of the Simonov Monastery's wall dates back to the mid-17th century. It features three towers, each of a different design — Baroque architecture was never dull. Reconstructed after the Time of Troubles, it was one of the strongholds defending Moscow's southern flank from raids. Old photos capture the monastery in its full splendor, rising above a picturesque pond, but in 1930, two-thirds of the monastery was torn down amid anti-religious propaganda.

## 5) Experimental Power Plant of the Heat Engineering Institute

23 Leninskaya Sloboda

This beautiful power plant is disguised as a castle in the Romanesque style. When construction began in 1913, the idea was that it would be a coal plant producing power for Moscow's trams, with the cable linking the plant to the transport system to be laid along the bed of the Moskva River. In 1922, the Heat Engineering Institute moved in, and the building became a series of test laboratories.

The 23,000-square-meter Likhachev Plant community center has 5,000 square meters of art studios and rehearsal rooms.

## 6) Avtozavodskaya metro station

Opened during WWII in 1943, Avtozavodskaya metro station was an homage to the struggle with Nazi Germany. Eight mosaics on the walls show workers assembling arms and soldiers squaring off. The panels were brought to Moscow from besieged Leningrad by the Road of Life in 1942; artist Vladimir Frolov never saw his work displayed since he starved to death in the northern capital. Quotes by Stalin formerly adorned the wall; they were later removed under Nikita Khrushchev.





One of the distinctive features of MOSS is its accent on contemporary art.

## MOSS: The Genuine Article?

By **Andrei Muchnik** [a.muchnik@imedia.ru](mailto:a.muchnik@imedia.ru)

*A stylish newcomer is staking a claim as Moscow's first 'real' boutique hotel*

"Moscow—as you've never seen it before"—these are the first words to greet visitors on the website of MOSS, a new hotel on Krivokolenny Pereulok. The promise holds true: MOSS takes the local hotel scene into uncharted waters, boldly blurring the lines between traditional luxury establishment, art gallery, and friendly guesthouse.

"MOSS might be the first real boutique hotel in Moscow," explains Anna Endrikhovskaya, the head of MOSS' concierge service.

"Every small hotel in the city that has four- to five-star level service wants to call itself a boutique hotel. But a real boutique hotel is defined by its location, auteur design based on a clear concept, owners that take an active part in the hotel's life, as well as attentive service," adds Endrikhovskaya.

Opened in April by the Adwill company, MOSS is run by a team of like-minded people,

including developer duo Mikhail Andreyev and Rustam Topchiev, known for a range of high-profile projects around the country.

Easy to miss, MOSS occupies a former maintenance building behind a dilapidated 17th-century house that once belonged to the Golitsyns, one of Russia's most prominent aristocratic families. MOSS. Why MOSS? "It's soft to the touch, like everything here, and the word sounds a bit like Moscow," says Endrikhovskaya.

The Trud workshop, which is MOSS' exclusive partner, produced most of the decorations, furniture and various objets d'art, which make MOSS' interior look like nothing else you've seen. Much of it makes use of the original wood and nails from the Golitsyn building.

The lobby and adjacent areas were designed by Natalya Belonogova, known for the cosy interiors of restaurants Ugolek, Pinch and Uilliam's—hence the fireplace, lit every night.

The walls of the lobby, staircases and corridors would look more in place at an art gallery than a hotel. Both Russian and foreign artists are currently on view, including multidisciplinary practitioner Protey Temen and traveling illustrator Stephanie Ledoux. MOSS plans to hold full-scale exhibitions in the near future.

The lobby's other attractions are blinking, chameleon-like lamps made from car air filters by the designer Sasha Fuchs, and a corner with clothing by Milan normcore brand Dondup.

The central staircase seems to float on air, each step protruding from the wall seemingly without any support. The walls of the elevator shaft are covered in moss—you can admire it while riding in the transparent cabin.

Sadly, MOSS' choice of restaurant partner does not match its boldness in design. The lobby hosts yet another outpost of the ubiquitous Coffeemania chain.

The hotel has 30 rooms, starting from 16,000 rubles (\$280) per night. The three categories are called "moss soft," "moss sweet" and "moss high"—and each is a work of art. From the baroque lamps to the Australian aboriginal art on the walls and the wardrobe handles made out of Black Sea pebbles, every detail speaks of a meticulous approach to design.

The hotel prides itself on its concierge service. Endrikhovskaya and her team will arrange "anything within legal bounds," from tickets to the Bolshoi to a reservation at a secret bar.

MOSS, then, has all the makings of a great boutique hotel—an alternative to the city's grand hotels that has a style all of its own and attracts locals as well as visitors. **TMT**

**+7 (495) 114 55 72**

[mossshotel.ru](http://mossshotel.ru)

10 Pereulok Krivokolenny, Bldg. 4  
Metro Chistiye Prudy, Turgenevskaya

### NEWS & OPENINGS



#### Nickel

##### The bird is the word

Barflies will recognize the space now occupied by Nickel as the former home of cult bar Masterskaya. There's nothing new here—Nickel is yet another place offering "street food" and home-made vodka infusions—but its poultry-breeding owners do supply the bar with foie gras and guinea fowl. The menu is strong on rolls and wontons but also offers heartier fare like lamb curry (640 rubles/\$11.40) and steak.

**+7 (495) 795 73 95**

[nickelbar.ru](http://nickelbar.ru)

4 Pushechnaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 1  
Metro Kuznetsky Most



#### Nagoya

##### Baumanskaya goes Japanese

This new cafe is the brainchild of Moscow State University student Maxim Lukyanov, who was inspired to open it after living in Japan. The menu at Nagoya is based on Japanese "street food"—udon noodles, ramen, fried noodles and onigiri (rice balls). Prices are low (udon with egg costs 99 rubles/\$1.75, pork ramen is 279 rubles) and every order comes with free matcha tea. Lukyanov promises lectures and film screenings.

**+7 967 258 71 72**

[facebook.com/nagoyamsc/](https://facebook.com/nagoyamsc/)

16/2 Starokirochny Pereulok, Bldg. 1  
Metro Baumanskaya



#### Mitzva Bar

##### Two bars are better than one

Mitzva Bar has temporarily moved north of the river after closing its premises on Pyatnitskaya for renovations. While refurbishment is being carried out, the bar is sharing space with cocktail bar Rumor on Pokrovka—Mitzva Bar currently occupies the Sandbox space in the basement. But don't worry, fans of Mitzva's bespoke cocktails will still be able to get their fix—the bar continues to operate in the new location.

**+7 (495) 532-42-24**

[instagram.com/mitzvabar](https://instagram.com/mitzvabar)

3/4 Pyatnitskaya, Bldg. 1  
Metro Novokuznetskaya



#### UkuBar

##### Getting back to basics

After extensive refurbishment, Ukulepyoshnaya on Pokrovka has reopened under a new name—UkuBar. The minimalist interior is all blues and grays, with the hard lines softened by musical instruments on the wall. The menu has also been revamped—check out the venison burger for 450 rubles (\$8) or the Kenyan beans for 300 rubles. However, the improvements come at a cost: Staff say prices have gone up.

**+7 (495) 642-57-26**

[uku-uku.ru](http://uku-uku.ru)

17 Ulitsa Pokrovka  
Metro Chistiye Prudy



# Summer in the City: 7 Moscow Terraces to See And Be Seen on

## Gipsy

**Drink and dance the night away by the river**  
You're probably unlikely to encounter many Roma at Moscow's restaurant-bar Gipsy, but it does boast one of the most ethnically diverse kitchens in Moscow. A look at its website reveals that it has an Australian head chef and cooks from India, Uzbekistan, and Russia — all of whom prepare their respective regional dishes. Whether you're craving a shawarma or a 9,000-ruble bottle of wine, the menu has you covered. Gipsy's riverbank terrace is its most popular attraction, with its swing benches and hammocks catering to footsore customers. There's also the customary ping-pong table for those of us that need our fix. From Thursdays to Sundays, the establishment turns into a raging nightclub that often features eclectic hip-hop — on May 19, Ukrainian sensation Griby will perform at Gipsy.  
**+7 (499) 409 86 93**  
facebook.com/pg/ilovegipsy/about/?ref=page\_internal  
3 Bolotnaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 2  
Metro Polyanka, Kropotkinskaya



JERUSALEM

## Jerusalem

**A cosy kosher corner**  
If you've ever visited Prague then you're surely familiar with the legend of the Golem who resides in the attic of the Old Synagogue in the Jewish Quarter. The synagogue on Bolshaya Bronnaya in Moscow's Patriarch's Ponds neighborhood also has a hidden secret — albeit a pleasant one. Jerusalem is the name of a kosher restaurant terrace located on the rooftop. It serves a variety of Middle Eastern and Caucasian foods, including a plethora of fresh salads with imported olives. The neighborhood's greenery, coupled with the quaint architecture, is a perfect setting for indulging in Mediterranean delights. The prices are also very reasonable, with dishes ranging from 200 to 500 rubles (\$3.50-9).  
**+7 (495) 690 62 66**  
a-a-ah.ru/ierusalim  
6 Bolshaya Bronnaya, Bldg. 3  
Metro Pushkinskaya, Tverskaya



KARLSON

*Summer in Moscow means enjoying the breeze and stunning views from the city's terraces. Whether you're out to hobnob with the elite, hang out with hip crowds or just kick back with a glass of wine, here's where to go.*

## Bar Strelka

**Still going strong**  
No, we aren't in the 1920s at a Parisian terrace drinking a brandy with Ernest Hemingway. We are, however, in 21st-century Moscow, where bohemians and rooftop terraces go hand in hand. The Strelka Institute, a non-profit educational establishment for media, design and architecture, boasts one of the most popular rooftop terraces in Moscow. Open Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to midnight, and on weekends until 3 a.m., the terrace overlooks the river and offers drinks and dishes from an international menu.  
**+7 (495) 771 74 16**  
strelka.com/en/bar  
14 Bersenevskaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 5,  
Metro Kropotkinskaya



BAR STRELKA

## Dom 12

**The hippest house in town**  
There's something about the minimalist name of Dom 12 (House 12) that immediately gives the impression the establishment is going to be a very, very cool place. Don't judge a book by its cover, because this venue offers much more than its name reveals. Dom 12 is not just the epitome of hip, but one that consists of a wine bar, a nightclub, a hidden Moscow courtyard, and a two-story veranda. It's also no surprise that this trendiest of Moscow bars is co-owned by the editor-in-chief of Afisha magazine.  
**+7 903 968 88 97**  
dom12cafe.ru/  
12 Mansurovsky Pereulok  
Metro Park Kultury



DOM 12

The terrace at Karlson has a spectacular view of the Moscow skyline.

## Karlson

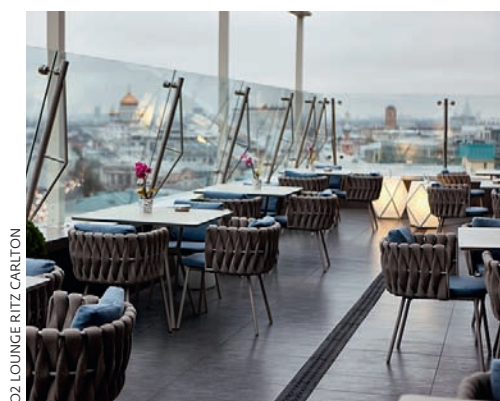
**No need for a propeller**  
One of the most iconic animated heroes in the USSR (although he actually originated in Sweden) was Karlsson, a little man with a propeller on his back who spends his days scheming his next blueberry jam heist in his rooftop house. Located on the top floor of the not so fairytale-like Central City Tower is the restaurant Karlson, where the interior, menus, and clothes of the waiters perfectly match the charm of the childhood story, creating a homely and comfortable ambience.  
**+7 (495) 280 04 28**  
a-a-ah.ru/karlson  
20 Ovchinnikovskaya Naberezhnaya  
Metro Novokuznetskaya



KARLSON

## O2 Lounge Ritz Carlton

**Where fashion sits**  
If you're feeling blue on a warm Moscow day, the Ritz Carlton on Tverskaya offers a wonderful rooftop terrace overlooking the Kremlin. The menu at the O2 Lounge consists of a variety of lavish cocktails with some of the world's most prized liquors. If you're hungry, you'll pay a hefty price for some top-class sushi, but it's worth the extra 3,000 rubles if you want to get a sense for how Moscow's glitterati live. In addition to the thrilling panoramic view, you'll likely get a glimpse of some Muscovite celebrities.  
**+7 (495) 225 88 88**  
ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/europe/moscow/dining/o2-lounge  
3 Tverskaya Ulitsa  
Metro Okhotny Ryad



O2 LOUNGE RITZ CARLTON

## Turandot

**Get the 5-tsar treatment**  
Tourists usually flock to St. Petersburg to get a taste of the garish, imperial Russian aesthetic, but if you wander into the restaurant Turandot on Tverskoi Bulvar, you'll get much more than a taste of it. The 12 grandiose rooms here feature wines that go for double-thousand digits in rubles, small ornate dishes with expensive meats, live classical music, a revolving podium, and an impressive terrace. After a visit to Turandot, you will never again question why Moscow has stolen the mantle of the nation's capital from St. Petersburg.  
**+7 (495) 739 00 11**  
turandot-palace.ru  
26/3 Tverskoi Bulvar  
Metro Tverskaya



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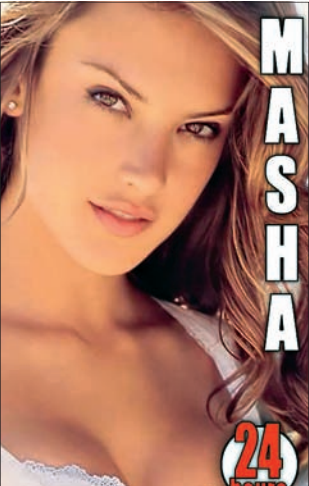
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Anti-stress-massage.ru, +7 (915) 450 5606, Irina

Chinese massage, aromatherapy, +7 (925) 162 6147, +7 (926) 762 4454 (English, German, Italian), Lina, Maria

Aromamassage, +7 (929) 965 7110, [www.bodymassage-moscow.ru](http://www.bodymassage-moscow.ru)

Antistress massage, +7 (963) 661 3088, Natalia

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# 16 What's On 18.05—24.05

## 18.05

### Various locations

#### David Lynch Weekend

The cult U.S. filmmaker's surreal classics "Eraserhead," "Twin Peaks" and "Lost Highway" will be screened in movie theaters around the city from May 18-20 in English as part of a mini-retrospective. [www.afisha.ru/festival/72867/schedule/](http://www.afisha.ru/festival/72867/schedule/)

## 19.05

### Tchaikovsky Museum

#### Music of XX Europe

A chamber ensemble with violin, harp, oboe, french horn, and trombone will perform early 1900s French music.

**+7 (495) 691-15-14**

[glinka.museum/about/museum\\_of\\_moscow\\_tchaikovsky](http://glinka.museum/about/museum_of_moscow_tchaikovsky)

46/54 Kudrinskaya Pl. M. Barrikadnaya

## 20.05

### LoftSpace

#### Esquire Weekend Festival

Q&A with former Minister of Culture Sergei Kapkov, film directors Bondarchuk and Serebryanikov, plus a food master class and live music.

**+7 (499) 406-05-31**

[ponominalu.ru/event/esquire-weekend](http://ponominalu.ru/event/esquire-weekend)

4 Bolshoi Ordynsky Per. M. Dobryninskaya

## 20.05

### Coyote Ugly Saloon Gryby

The current talk of the town, Ukrainian pop group Gryby ("Mezhdue Nami Tayet Lyod") will perform an all-night set, accompanied by Coyote Ugly's dancers.

**+7 (495) 995 71 50**

[coyoteuglysaloon.com/moscow/](http://coyoteuglysaloon.com/moscow/)

8 Stoleshnikov Pereulok M. Chekhovskaya

## 21.05

### Cultural Center Khitrovka

#### Walk in the Dark

This avant-garde theater performance uses paper figures created by children to tell the story of one man's life in a surreal, dream-like manner.

**+7 (495) 649 6863**

[hitrovka.com](http://hitrovka.com)  
8/2 Podkolokolny Per. M. Kitai-Gorod

## 22.05

### Pioneer

#### King Arthur: Legend of the Sword

British director Guy Ritchie presents the King Arthur legend as an adventurous "medieval crime comedy." Original English with Russian subtitles.

**+7 (499) 240 5240**

[pioneer-cinema.ru](http://pioneer-cinema.ru)  
21 Kutuzovskiy Prospekt M. Kievskaya

## 23.05

### 16 Tons

#### Mgzavrebi

Polyphonic singing from this St. Petersburg-based band, which originally hails from the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Expect life-affirming songs and a warm atmosphere.

**+7 (495) 253 5300**

[16tons.ru](http://16tons.ru)  
6 Presnenskiy Val M. Ulitsa 1905 Goda

## Moscow prepares to win 'the battle with the sofa' at the 11th Museum Night festival

By **Emily Erken** [artsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:artsreporter@imedia.ru)

Once celebrated as the city of 1,000 churches, these days Moscow is a city of museums. On the evening of May 20, over 200 museums, galleries, and art schools will open their doors to the public for the 11th annual city-wide "Museum Night" festival.

From 6 p.m. on, the festival offers a range of special events in museum and art spaces: interactive lectures, concerts, master classes, historical reenactments and walking tours. Most venues will be open until midnight.

The Russian Department of Culture sponsors the festival, a large-scale attempt to connect with youthful Muscovites and broaden the audience of active museum-goers.

"One of the goals of cultural politics is to form taste, to form habits and modes of consumption of cultural content," says Vladimir Filippov, deputy head of the Moscow Department of Culture.

The nocturnal art fest, which today is among the largest cultural events in the country, is one of a growing number of similar "museum nights" around the world. Moscow's Museum Night attracts a young audience, says Filippov, with the median age at about 33 to 35.

"We are winning the battle with the sofa for Muscovites' free time," he says. "Sponsoring this event develops the city's creative economy."

Pioneered in the capital 11 years ago, Museum Night is now a Russia-wide event, taking place in cities and rural estate-museums from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka. The

organizers hope to attract audiences of all ages and educational backgrounds with an ambitious and varied program.

On Saturday, leading scholars and representatives of Moscow's major museums will give lectures at the Hermitage Garden on a variety of topics, from audiovisual art to the physiology of memory. Meanwhile, the Winzavod art space will host a series of theatrical sketches and performances in its courtyard on the theme of dreams. Its gallery spaces will also be open to the public.

For children and young people, however, Museum Night opens up potentially magical experiences.

Families with young children might enjoy a historical reenactment of the court of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1629-1676) at the main palace in Kolomenskoye Park. The museum staff will play out a court scene in 17th-century costumes from 9:00-9:30 p.m. Children can also participate in master classes at the All-Russian Museum of Decorative, Applied and Folk Art.

Moscow's youth makes up an important part of this target market: To reach this group, the Department of Culture has hired minor celebrities — including cosmonauts, actors and other television personalities — to present their take on the museum's collections. Some of these tours will be video-recorded and available online.

For those who don't speak Russian, Museum Night will also offer musical concerts for a wide range of tastes.



HOTELPEKINGRU

Museum Night gives Moscow residents the rare opportunity to visit museums all over the city after hours.

At the M.C. Shepkina House-Museum, composer Misha Mishenko will perform live piano accompaniments to short films by the fashion designer Lesya Paramonova. For lovers of mid-century modern jazz, meanwhile, the Solo-Ts Jazz ensemble will play a concert in the style of Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan at the Tolstoy House Museum on Ulitsa Pyatnitskaya.

Meanwhile, the Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art on Gogolevsky Bulvar will present sets of live electronic music (dance music, ambient and noise) all evening.

To facilitate transportation around the city, the Tele2 telecommunications company has paid for a shuttle service between eight

museums, including the Museum of Cosmonautics at VDNKh, the Jewish Museum of Tolerance, the Bulgakov Museum, the State Tretyakov Gallery's two branches and the Darwin Museum. Attendees can pick up a burger and coffee at the shuttle stops before they commute to the next museum.

"It's great that in one day you can see the best of the museums," says Yelena Sakharova, a press representative for the TV channel Moya Planeta, who attended in 2016. "After Museum Night, I feel full of strength, energy and creativity." **TMT**

More information is available at [mos.ru/city/projects/museumnight/](http://mos.ru/city/projects/museumnight/)

## Elsewhere this weekend...

### FESTIVAL Seasons Design Subbotnik

#### Music, theater, and food for the whole family

Seasons magazine is hosting the eighth edition of its "Design Subbotnik" festival this weekend, with the action now taking place at the hip Khlebozavod creative cluster. The theme for this year is "young and green," represented by young designers, musicians, artists and performers. The organizers promise live versions of 1950s-1970s Soviet music, live theater, a furniture market and pop-up street food restaurants. The kids aren't left out either — children can sell seedlings they have grown at the Green Seedling Market, as well as trade their "green pets" for others.

May 20-21, Khlebozavod 9

**+7 (499) 760-92-07**

[hlebozavod9.ru/](http://hlebozavod9.ru/)  
1 Ulitsa Novodmitrovskaya  
Metro Dmitrovskaya

### FESTIVAL Moscow Coffee Festival

#### Give in to your inner hipster snob

Coffee fiends and hipsters will be in their element this weekend as trendy industrial space Tryokhgornaya Manufaktura hosts a free two-day bonanza devoted to the real black gold. Besides various brews, visitors will also be able to sample coffee cocktails, coffee lemonade and even coffee kvas, produced by cafes such as Dablby, Kafeterius, Pravda Coffee, Camera Obscura, Cezve Coffee, Kof, Les, Nook and West 4. The festival will also feature a market and an interactive zone with seminars on how to tell good coffee from bad, the best way to brew coffee at home and how to draw patterns in foam.

May 20-21, Tryokhgornaya Manufaktura

**+7 (499) 252-12-91**

[trekhgorka.ru/](http://trekhgorka.ru/)  
15 Ulitsa Rochdelskaya  
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