



RLUS Moscow Orientation Pack
2012-2013

Welcome to Russia!

Welcome to Russia from your RLUS representatives, Victoria Leonard and Lee McAneney. We both work at Language Link and share the job of providing RLUS students in Moscow, Volgograd, Tver and Yaroslavl with advice, assistance and support for the duration of your stay in Russia. We have both graduated with Russian degrees and have experience travelling and working in Russia.

This orientation pack contains a lot of the information that you might need during your stay (including important safety and emergency information), so please read it carefully and keep it for future use. If you have any questions that cannot be answered by this document, contact us and we'll be happy to help. However, please remember that RLUS is only one part of our full-time jobs. Things like organising trips and booking theatre tickets aren't part of our responsibilities. As RLUS representatives, we can help you in the following ways:

- **If your valuables/documents get lost or stolen**, you should notify one of us within 24 hours. As soon as possible (preferably the same day), one of us will go with you to file a police report. We will then help you arrange your insurance claim.
- **If you lose your passport** we will help you make arrangements to get a replacement.
- **In the unlikely event that you get arrested**, contact one of us as soon as possible and we will notify the Consul at the British Embassy. If you cannot get through to us, contact the Embassy Duty Officer, who will put you in touch with the Consul. Do not leave a message on an answer phone, as this is counted as a call.

NON-BRITISH STUDENTS please note: We will not be able to help you unless you provide us with the contact details of your Consul and Embassy duty officer.

- **If you fall seriously ill**, you will probably be able to contact the appropriate clinic yourself (at Western clinics in Moscow the staff speak English). However, you may contact us if you need assistance, and we will arrange for a doctor to visit you, or for an ambulance to take you to a clinic. We will also help you make an insurance claim for your medical bills if they exceed the insurance excess of £40.
- **If you want to make a doctor's appointment**, you can contact them yourself (see page 15), or we can help you if required.
- **If you need to go home for compassionate or health reasons** we will assist you in this and also in making the necessary insurance claims.
- **If you are having problems with your course or accommodation** we can liaise with the course providers to resolve the matter.

We will have regular group meetings with you to deal with any queries or problems that arise, and both of us can be contacted at work or at home. We will provide you with our mobile phone numbers in case of emergencies, so you can always contact one of us wherever we are. However, they are for emergency purposes ONLY.

Russia is a unique place, and the lifestyle and attitudes here are very different from those in the West. Living here will be a rewarding but challenging experience. It will undoubtedly leave you with memories to treasure for the rest of your life, but at times, unexpected cultural differences may irritate and unnerve you. We therefore ask you to pay attention to the information in this pack, even if you have spent time in Russia before. Things here are constantly changing, so you are bound to come across something new.

Enjoy your stay!

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Tips on Living in Russia

Life with a host family

All Moscow RLUS students stay in homestay accommodation, unless they choose to find their own accommodation. As Moscow is a huge city, you should expect a commute to the school of about 45 minutes. You will have your own room and share the facilities of the flat with the host family. The standard homestay setup is usually with a middle aged or elderly lady who is used to having foreign students as lodgers. The main advantage of home stay accommodation is that you get to speak a lot of Russian. Payment is made directly by you to your host family in roubles on a monthly basis. Please be aware that you will have to make the first rent payment on arrival or the next day and that these prices are subject to increase as inflation is much higher in Russia than in the UK (though Language Link will give you plenty of warning if this is the case). You are required to pay a deposit of 1000 roubles which will be returned to you at the end of your course provided that you have not broken or damaged anything during your stay. Students opting for bed and breakfast must understand they will not automatically be given access to the kitchen to prepare evening meals, although hosts are generally happy to let their guests prepare light suppers (i.e. preparation time less than 1 hour).

Relations with your hosts

Russian parents do not always regard their teenage and young adult children as adults, and tend to advise them on what to wear and eat, and generally ask lots of questions about what is going on in their lives. As a 'host child' it is likely your 'host parents' will treat you in a similar manner. Please try not to take offence – it is simply a demonstration of care for your well being. If you really find such attention annoying or unpleasant, just remark politely that you are not accustomed to it, or that it embarrasses you.



Many host families are relatively elderly, and may be upset if you regularly come home in the early hours of the morning in a less than sober state. Although you have a right to an independent lifestyle, please try to respect your host family's feelings, and always warn them if you're planning to come home late. Please DO NOT bring friends to stay overnight without asking permission first. Friends of the opposite sex will not be allowed to spend the night.

Please make sure that you pay your rent on time every month, and that the first payment is made on the day of your arrival, to avoid any problems or misunderstandings with your host family.

Meals

If your hosts provide you with breakfast or supper, do not hesitate to say if you find something too rich or sweet, or that you simply do not eat a certain food. Your hosts might try to give you more food than you are used to eating—don't politely accept this at first, as later they might worry that your appetite has decreased. In order not to offend the hostess, you may say that the food is tasty, but that you are not used to it and would prefer something else or that you are already full (useful phrases include “я уже сът(а)” (I'm full); “у меня аллергия на этот продукт” (I am allergic to this); “я не могу привыкнуть к этому вкусу, я больше не хочу, спасибо” (I'm not used to this kind of food – please don't give it to me again)).

Please be considerate if you use your host's kitchen to cook any of your own meal and clean up after yourself.

House Rules

In Russian homes it is not acceptable to wear your street shoes in the house. Instead, people wear slippers (тапочки) or socks. Russians will often wash their hands when they first enter their home and may expect you to do the same. Russian apartments are not usually very spacious, so it is not acceptable to leave your things all over your room, or other rooms, or to leave your bed unmade. Please make an effort to be tidy!

Cultural Differences in Interpersonal Relations

Visiting Russian Friends

If you visit acquaintances for the first time, it is a good idea to take a gift for the hosts (e.g. a box of sweets or chocolates, a bottle of wine, flowers). Only buy odd numbers of flowers, as even numbers are associated with funerals.

Russians are not very punctual people. The limit to acceptable lateness is about 10 minutes (this does not apply for lessons or important meetings). When making arrangements, Russians often give an approximate time (“около 7” [about 7], “к двум часам” [around 2 o'clock], “дня через 3” [in 3 days or so]).

Conversations with Russians

Russians are more open than Westerners in talking about their incomes, although this is becoming less common. Do not be offended if someone asks how much your parents earn, or about average salaries for various professions in your country (although of course you are not obliged to answer such questions).

The ‘Вы’ form should be used during introductions, in conversations with people older than yourself and with strangers. You can use ‘ты’ to address students your own age, children, or once your Russian acquaintances suggest speaking ‘на ты’.

Russians often criticize and even curse their authorities, laws, systems, and government, but they can react very negatively to similar criticism by foreigners.

It is generally acceptable to phone people between 10am and 10pm. You should only call earlier/later if you have given prior warning, or are sure the person won't object.

Behaviour in Public Places

It is not considered acceptable to speak loudly on public transport, in public areas, in restaurants, or in museums.

Russians often seem very serious and unsmiling to foreigners. However, the absence of a smile simply signifies a neutral attitude. A smile expresses goodwill.

Russians have a different concept of personal space from Westerners. It might feel that they are standing very close to you in queues or on escalators, and they may lightly touch you during conversation.

In the street and on public transport you may be stopped by strangers asking for neutral information, e.g. directions, what time it is, if you have a lighter etc (they generally start such questions with “Вы не подскажете...”). In other circumstances you can ignore strangers who speak to you in the street.

Gender Roles

At bars and restaurants, the person who invited you usually pays the bill, although you should always offer if you are unsure. Men will almost always pay for women.

The division of roles for men and women is much more traditional than in the West. Men will offer to carry women's bags, and it is considered unacceptable for women to lift or move heavy objects such as furniture. On the other hand, men generally don't get involved with cooking and washing up.

City Transport

Russian Drivers

Unfortunately, Russian drivers are not the strictest observers of traffic regulations. Be very careful when crossing the street here. Where possible, take an underground pedestrian passage called a переход, the location of which is indicated by a blue sign with a picture of stairs, or use a pedestrian crossing.



Taxis

Most official taxis are yellow, but you will often see Russians flagging down “gypsy cabs” (private cars) instead. This is illegal and you must avoid it at all costs. The car may not be insured and the driver may be without a license or have no intention of taking you to your requested destination. If you are drunk or not sure about how to get home this is particularly dangerous. Be safe and book a taxi.

To book a taxi, one good firm (“Allo Taxi”) can be contacted on telephone number 8 (495) 745 5049. You will have to make the booking in Russian (“можно заказать такси на [time, date etc]”), but they work 24/7 and don’t overcharge. They will arrange for the driver to phone you when he arrives at your house, to tell you the number plate and make of the car you should look for on the street.

It is also advisable to never get into a taxi on your own, even for males.

Buses, Trams and Trolleybuses

Moscow is served by an extensive system of buses, trams and trolleybuses that run until about midnight, with 5-15 minute frequency. If you buy tickets from the special kiosks (киоски ‘Проездные билеты’) one single journey costs about 25 roubles (irrespective of how far you travel). If you purchase your ticket from the driver or conductor, it will cost about 28 roubles.

If the vehicle is not equipped with a turnstile system (which are increasingly common in the capital), you must stamp your ticket yourself using one of the hole-punchers on the vehicle. Sometimes people may ask you to punch their ticket or to pass money to the driver for a ticket. Occasionally ticket inspectors get on, and will fine you if you don’t have a valid ticket.

Apart from municipal public transport, there are also lots of маршрутки (маршрутные такси), which are privately run transit vans that follow certain routes and go faster than other forms of public transport. One journey costs 25 roubles. You have to tell the driver when you want get off (“Остановите [на остановке], пожалуйста”). If you sit at the front of the van then be prepared to collect everyone’s money and give change to those who need it – a good test of your numbers!

There is no legal limit to the number of people that can travel in one vehicle. Expect to be quite squashed when travelling at peak times of day. People don’t queue to get on buses, trams, trolley buses or маршрутки, so be prepared to push to get on.



Metro

The Moscow metro is extremely fast and efficient. Services begin around 05:30 and the entrances to stations and переходы shut at 01:00.

Tickets for the metro can be bought for 1 (28 roubles), 2, 5, 10, 20 or 60 trips. It is possible to buy a monthly pass for no more than 70 trips, or a plastic re-chargeable magnetic card that gives you unlimited journeys within 30 days (1710 roubles plus 50 roubles for the plastic card) or 90 days (3485 roubles plus card).

Make sure to write down the number on the back of the card, so that you can get it replaced for a nominal charge if you lose it.

General Advice on Public Transport

If a Russian says something to you on public transport, nine times out of ten they're asking whether or not you are getting out at the next stop ("Вы будете выходить на следующей?"). If you're not, move to let them through.

Seats on public transport are intended for the elderly, people with young children or disabled people. Be courteous and give up your seat.

It is a good idea to always be as on the ball and aware as possible on the metro. It is a very busy and often daunting place, and at times people push and shove. It is best to just always keep an eye and hand on your stuff, and to be quick on your feet.

Travelling by Train and Plane



Russian Railways

Train travel within Russia is still very cheap in comparison with the West. The two main classes are купе (four to a cabin, two up two down) and плацкарт (open carriages, less luxurious but cheaper). All carriages have a samovar, so there's a constant supply of boiling water for making tea, coffee and pot noodles. You will pay a small fee for bedding once you're on the train, if you're travelling overnight.

Buying Train Tickets

Train tickets can be bought in advance from any station (be warned that queues are often long). Do check that the queue you choose is not for a counter that is going to have a break some point soon (there's usually a notice above or next to the window)! Tickets can also be bought from railway ticket agencies (железнодорожные кассы) often located in and around metros—there is one just outside the Новослободская metro station. The queues are much shorter, but be aware that you will on average pay an extra 150 roubles per ticket. You can also buy tickets from the new ticket machines located in and around the stations, if you don't want to queue or speak Russian.

You need your passport number to buy tickets and your passport to get on the train. Tell the lady at the counter: "Один билет (2/3 билета) на поезд № ____ на ____ число." ("One ticket (2/3 tickets) on train number ____ for the [date you wish to travel]").

You can also book train tickets online at www.realrussia.co.uk. For local trains you can often get a student discount so don't forget your student card.

Moscow Stations

There are nine railway stations in Moscow. Generally, these railway stations correspond to the following travel directions:

- Western direction (to Belarus and Poland): Белорусский вокзал
- Northern/north-western directions (St Petersburg and the Baltics): Ленинградский вокзал, Савёловский вокзал, Ярославский вокзал, Рижский вокзал (NB. If you are buying tickets to St Petersburg, the tickets will say Москва-Октябрьская as the departing station, but the trains leave from the Ленинградский вокзал.)
- Eastern, north-eastern, and south-eastern directions: Казанский вокзал, Павелецкий вокзал
- Southern direction: Курский вокзал
- South-western direction: Киевский вокзал

Plane Tickets

A good place to buy plane tickets in Moscow is the big branch of STAR travel at metro station Sokol. They have a website at www.statravel.ru which includes a map explaining how to get there (and the other branches in Moscow). They speak English. You can also obtain student cards (such as ISIC) from there.

For contacting airlines directly: BA use Домодедово airport (where the group flight arrived); you can contact them on 8 (495) 363 2525. Трансаэро and Аэрофлот also offer decent deals: For details of your nearest office and information on prices and flight times, visit www.transaero.ru or www.aeroflot.ru. Аэрофлот fly from Шереметьево airport. Keep an eye out for the increasing number of other budget airlines, such as Skyexpress and S7, flying to various locations across Russia.

Changing Your Return Flight Date

Your RLUS flight is booked through BA. If you wish to change the return date, you should go directly to the BA office at 4th Lesnoy Pereulok 4, 5th Floor, Lesnaya Plaza Business Centre 125047 (+7 495 363 2525) They are open 10-6 Monday to Friday.

Getting to the Moscow Airports

Moscow has several airports, but the ones you are most likely to travel to and from are Домодедово and Шереметьево 2. In order to help you with independent travel plans or leaving Russia at the end of your course, here are directions on how to get to both of these airports.



Домодедово: There is an express train that leaves from Павелецкий вокзал, which is located near Павелецкая metro station (at the intersection of the green and ring lines in the southeast of the city). The easiest way to locate the касса selling tickets for the express train (аэроэкспресс), is to exit at the green line station and follow blue аэроэкспресс signs to the ticket desk. Tickets cost 300 roubles. The train leaves on the hour from 06:00 to 23:00 (with a few trains going on the half-hour, look at the schedule on the website for more details) and takes about 40-50 minutes to get to the airport. The platform you arrive at is connected to the airport terminal. Домодедово has a good website if you need more information: www.domodedovo.ru. You can also get to Domodedovo from Domodedovskaya metro, near the end of the green line of the metro. If you exit the metro and follow vague but just discernible signs for buses to the airport, you should see the place where they all line up outside a cafe with a Nescafe sign. They go very frequently, take about half an hour, and cost 120 roubles

Шереметьево 2: There is an express train that leaves from Белорусская metro station (at the intersection of the green and ring lines in the northwest of the city) and takes about 35 minutes to get to the airport. Tickets cost 300 roubles. You can also take the metro to Речной вокзал metro station at the top of the green line, where you can catch a bus or a маршрутка to the airport. At the metro station, exit up the stairs by the first car from the center; you'll have to walk from the station to the main road. The airport bus, number Щ 851с, works from 06:30 to 20:30 and costs 15 roubles. There are also regular buses and маршрутки that leave from the same area which cost 30 roubles. Look for signs that say Шереметьево in the bus window (or for other people with suitcases). Make sure that you get off at Шереметьево 2, as the buses also go to the domestic airport Шереметьево 1. The airport also has a website, although the English version is not as helpful as Домодедово's: www.sheremetevo-airport.ru. Please note – opt for a маршрутка if you are running short on time, as the bus makes a lot of stops on the way to the airport (although if you're there during rush hour, no matter what this will be a long journey).

Visas and Insurance

Most RLUS students have an initial 3-month single-entry visa which is converted into a multi-entry to cover the duration of their course after the first month. These allow you to cross the border as and when you like. However, if you don't have a multi-entry (многokратная) visa and you wish to travel abroad during the reading weeks, you need to apply for an exit/re-entry visa. Exit/re-entry visas take about two weeks to process, so don't book flights until you have your visa. DO NOT LEAVE RUSSIA BEFORE THE END OF

YOUR COURSE ON YOUR CURRENT VISA IF IT'S A SINGLE ENTRY. YOU WILL BE UNABLE TO RE-ENTER THE COUNTRY.

If you are going anywhere south or west, even within Russia, check you have the visas required for any countries you may pass through on the way (e.g. a transit visa for Belarus). US, Canadian, EU and Swiss citizens currently don't need visas for the Ukraine (for maximum 90-day trips); however, this policy may change and you should always check the latest visa requirements with the Embassy before you travel.

If you are travelling to another country that requires a visa (e.g. China) it is up to you to sort out that visa yourself.

Please check your insurance policy. If you are covered for Europe only, you will not be covered for travel beyond the Urals.

General Travel Advice

Due to laws passed in 2007, if you are planning on leaving Moscow (even if just to another city in Russia) for any reason, you are required to inform the authorities ten days before your departure, and then submit your passport to them within one business day of your return. To do this, contact your RLUS representatives and tell them the dates of your trip and your destination AT LEAST ten days before your departure. When you return to Moscow, bring your passport to them (with your visa and migration card) and all original travel tickets (bus, train or plane) **before** 11 a.m. of the **first** business day following your arrival in Moscow. Failure to abide by these rules will incur a 45,000 rouble fine from the Russian authorities, which you will be responsible for paying.

As a courtesy, please inform your host family of your travel dates and destinations. Leave a contact number and address, if possible. Remember that no one guarantees you complete safety during your travels through Russia. Be careful and attentive, and keep in contact with your host family and the RLUS representatives while travelling. It is imperative that you always inform your RLUS representatives about your travel plans; you also need to let them know if you have made plans and then changed them. We need to know where you are in order to get in touch with you in the case of an emergency

Before you plan any trips, we recommend you check out the British foreign office website (www.fco.gov.uk), which provides up-to-date information about where it is unsafe to travel, and what regulations there may be. This recommendation extends to students who are not British; however, you should also check your own foreign office website for specific information and travel advice pertaining to citizens of your country.

PLEASE NOTE: Absence from the course is only permitted in cases of illness or during official travel weeks. Attendance and marks will be sent to your universities.

Safety in Russia

Documents

You must have a copy of your documents (passport, visa, migration card and registration slip) with you at all times. The police have the right to arrest anybody without documents. You can be detained for up to 72 hours or until your documents are produced. You should also carry your student card with you, as the police may ask to see it.

If you believe the risk of losing your documents is higher than the risk of being stopped and fined, then you may choose to carry photocopies of them instead. Strictly speaking, the law requires you to have the originals with you, but you can often get away with copies as long as they're clear. Make sure you have copies of your passport information page, your visa, migration card, and registration slip. Double check that your passport number matches the one quoted in your visa. As a side point, for any kind of first transaction in a bank, your original documents are absolutely vital, so let your RLUS representative know upon arrival if there is anything that you need to do at a bank.

The Militia

Contact with the police (once known as the милиция but now known more frequently as the полиция) should be avoided as much as possible. Most often you'll see them in the metro and near buildings of governmental or state importance. You should try to blend in as much as possible. Please note that if you are very drunk, the police have the right to, and will, arrest you. The police regularly stop young males – normally they just check your documents and let you go. Your documents will be in order and registered, so if the police try to say otherwise and start demanding money, they are probably just trying to supplement their own (admittedly meagre) salary. There are a number of ways to deal with this: offer to travel to the милиция station to pay the fine on the condition that a representative from your Embassy meets you there, and get out your mobile phone to call the Embassy. If that doesn't stop them bothering you (it should do), then demand to see their names and numbers on their милиция ID (удостоверение). If you legitimately have to pay a fine (for drunken behaviour or not having your documents with you), demand a receipt that has been stamped and signed. However, if you are on your own very late at night, and the милиция officers are behaving threateningly or aggressively, the easiest thing to do is to pay the fine. Being out alone in the early hours of the morning, especially when carrying large sums of money, is asking for trouble. It is illegal to bribe a policeman and you can get yourself into more trouble for trying. Although people are generally being stopped less than they used to be, there is still the possibility that you could be asked at any point to produce your documents. If in doubt, ring your RLUS representative or your Embassy.

If the police visit you at your home to check your documents, you are not required to open the door. Be aware that there are people who will represent themselves as police in order to gain access to your apartment. The best policy is not to let them in.

If you are arrested SAY NOTHING and SIGN NOTHING. If you are forced to sign something write that you do not understand what you are signing. Keep demanding to speak to your Embassy or to a RLUS representative (you should carry the emergency numbers card given to you in Russia). Try to use the one phone call you are entitled from the station to speak to the Embassy, rather than a RLUS representative or your course provider, as the Embassy Duty Officer is better placed to provide assistance.

Common Sense Advice

Foreigners are particularly vulnerable to crime in tourist areas so avoid drawing attention to yourself – don't walk in big groups speaking loudly in English. Pick pocketing is very common. Only carry a small amount of money in your purse/wallet and keep most of your cash separate. Watch out for pickpockets at markets, in tourist areas and especially on the metro. Keep bags and wallets shut at all times, and ensure that they are in front of you where you can keep an eye (or even better, a hand) on them at all times. Never leave your bag or coat with valuables in the pockets unattended or on the back of a chair in a cafe. If you do have something stolen, you can make a claim for it through your insurance policy.

To make a claim, you will need to obtain a police report (справка) within 24 hours of the crime. A RLUS representative can accompany you to the police station (отделение милиции) nearest to where the crime took place; the RLUS representatives will then assist you with sending the справка and claim form to the insurance company.

Absolutely never touch drugs here. The penalties are simply not worth the risk, and if you break the law, at the end of the day we cannot help you. The attitude even towards soft drugs like cannabis is no different than to heroin, and usually entails a prison sentence. This would be a great way to improve your Russian, but prisons here are not pretty...

If you go out for the evening, stay in a group, and plan it so that you accompany each other home right up to the front door, even if you then have to stay the night on someone's floor. It is inconvenient, of course, but better to be safe than sorry, and your hosts (given some warning) should be understanding. Female students are strongly recommended not to walk home alone after 11pm, and they should be prepared to put up with occasional verbal harassment late at night as the attitude of some Russian males towards the opposite sex unfortunately leaves a lot to be desired. Russians who have had too much to drink might be loud and obnoxious, but if you ignore them they usually won't bother you. Male students should be especially careful when out late at night in large English-speaking groups, as nationalism is on the rise and there has been a growing number of unprovoked attacks on foreigners.

Some streets are badly lit, so if you're out at night try and keep to the main streets, which tend to have better street lighting. When taking a taxi late at night, see that you are delivered to your doorstep and NOT to the nearest metro.

Remember that safety, both here in Russia and at home, is generally a question of using common sense and making smart decisions. Always be aware of yourself, your belongings and your surroundings, and you shouldn't come across any major problems.

Visitors

If you are going to be entertaining guests from home, they will need to have a tourist visa. If they're coming through a tourist company, and staying in a hotel, then this should all be organised for them and they can register their visa at the hotel.

If your guests are travelling independently, things are a little more complex, but not impossible. Visas can currently be purchased from on-line companies and UK- or Russia-based tourist agencies. Your guest will have to register the visa within three working days of arriving in Russia (make sure the visa company you use gives you instructions on how to do this). You could try searching for visa companies on Google or Yahoo, but we would recommend trying to organise visas through an established travel agent as they are usually much more reliable. Although many people do use online companies without any problems, visa laws are subject to frequent change, and on-line companies don't always offer legal registration. A few tourist agencies in the UK worth checking out are Scotts Tours (www.scottstours.co.uk, sales@scottstours.co.uk, 020 7383 5353), Intourist (www.intourist.co.uk, info@intourist.co.uk, 020 7727 4100), Direct Passport and Visa Company (020 7229 0116/ 020 7229 1412) and Alpha-Omega Ltd. (www.alphaomega-travel.com, neilh@alphaomega-travel.com, 01274 760600).

You can refer to Demlink Travel (www.demlinktravel.com) at metro Белорусская or Russian National Group at metro Чистые пруды, located on Чистопрудный бульвар 5/10 office 214, 8 (495) 980-84-40, 980-84-38, as they offer visa invitation and registration services. The most cost-friendly option that we have found is Moscow Bureau of Voyage, located at ул. Тверская 2/30 Office 18 – open Mon to Fri 10.00-17.00. The documents usually required for registration are: passport, visa, immigration card.

A lot of hotels in Moscow are incredibly expensive. The latest edition of the Lonely Planet is very up to date on more budget options, as are the following websites:

- www.hostelmoscow.com
- www.trav.com/cities/hostels/moscow.html
- www.bootsnall.com/hostels/re/Russia/Moscow+Hostels.php
- www.hotelopia.co.uk/home/homepage.jsp

Previous students advise looking at hotel options outside of the centre. Though Moscow is a big city, the metro means that nothing is really too far away.

Shopping

Grocery Shopping

Western style supermarkets are now common in Moscow. The main chains include Перекрёсток, Седьмой Континент, Spar, Karousel, Ashan and Пятёрочка. The best of these with the largest amount of choice seems to be Ashan, and there are quite a few of these around the city.

Prices in supermarkets are generally comparable with the local stores. In larger shops where products are on open display, you usually have to leave your bags at the entrance, either with an attendant or in a locker.

There is bound to be at least one small продукты shop within 5 minutes' walk of your home-stay, where you can buy basics like bread, cheese and frozen food. In such small shops, the products are stored behind counters so you have to explain to the attendant exactly what you want. Be advised to bring a bag if you would like to save money, as you will be charged (though usually not more than a rouble) for each bag you need to take your purchases home.



Most fruit and vegetables can be bought from small kiosks on the street. There is a smaller variety of fruit and vegetables in Russia than in the West (don't expect to find yams for an affordable price), and availability depends greatly on the season. Summer is a great time for fruit – all around the metro stations babushki gather to sell their home-

grown apricots, apples, plums and berries.

Shopping for Household Goods

There are three Ikea stores (located in МЕГА malls) on the outskirts of Moscow that Moscow RLUS students usually visit at least once during their course. Buses go there every 5-10 minutes from the metro stations Речной Вокзал and Планерная (for the northern Химки store), Ясенево and Аннино (for the southern Тёплый стан store) and Кузьминьки, Люблино and Выхино (for the southern Белая дача store). However, for cheap, basic household goods, it's best to look for smaller Russian stores (хозяйственный магазин/товары для дома) in the area where you live. There are also numerous shops selling household appliances, including M-video, Eldorado and Technosila.

Shopping for Clothes

Russia is not a great place for buying clothes, as good-quality clothes are very expensive and Russian styles and sizes differ greatly from those in the West. For a true Russian experience, it is best to head to the market (where goods are cheaper, though the quality can be suspect). Large markets in Moscow can be found next to Рижская, Люблино, Спортивная and Черкизовская metro stations.

Decent places to buy clothes are the Охотный ряд shopping centre next to the metro of the same name (shops there include Top Shop, Guess, Mexx, Mango, United Colours of Benetton, Accessorise, Jennifer and Colin's Jeans) or the new Европейский shopping centre at the metro Киевская (with similar shops to Охотный ряд). A wide variety of stores can also be found at the three МЕГА malls (see the section about Ikea stores above).

It is generally better to buy your clothes in advance of coming to Russia. There are some English stores here, such as New Look, and Peacocks, which do both men and women's clothing, but even these are marked up slightly higher than the normal cost. We are still eagerly awaiting a Primark!

Shopping for Books and DVDs

In Moscow there are a number of larger bookstores, including:

- Библио-глобус (metro Лубянка, ул. Мясницкая 6) has a large selection of literature including textbooks and other books in foreign languages, art books and postcards.
- Дом книги (metro Арбатская, ул. Новый Арбат 8) has a large selection of different books, though English language section is rather limited. This shop also stocks atlases and posters.
- Москва or Книжки (ул. Тверская 8) sells educational and children's books, fiction, modern classics, even in English.

One of the most popular DVD markets in Moscow is really an 'everything' market, known as Горбушка, and is located next to Багратионовская metro station. It's one of the best places to buy cheap DVDs and CDs (the DVD market is in the courtyard Горбушкин двор, on the 2nd floor, and is open every day from 10:00 to 21:00). The current black market price is 100-150 roubles, and even the legal variants rarely cost more than 250 roubles.

Shopping for Souvenirs

The most popular places for buying souvenirs are the Старый Арбат and the Вернисаж near Измайловский парк.

Unfortunately, shopkeepers and market stallholders often overcharge people with a foreign accent, so you should always bargain. It's advisable to go souvenir shopping with a Russian who can haggle for you, or find out beforehand what a reasonable price is for whatever you are shopping for (ask your host family, or look around). You can sometimes get good deals on souvenirs by shopping at the end of the day, as the stallholders are packing up.

Telephones

Phoning Home

You must use an international phone card (телефонная карта для международных звонков) to call abroad. **DO NOT USE YOUR HOST FAMILY'S PHONE TO CALL ABROAD WITHOUT A CARD.** You will need a phone that can be switched from 'pulse' to 'tone' mode (sometimes you need to switch to the tone regime on answer by pressing the * or P-T button) or you can go through the operator given on the card. Using phone cards makes calls much cheaper, e.g. Zebra Telecom/MTU/Matrix/ArcTel cards give about 3 hours to the UK for £6. Previous students recommend Евросеть, a telephone store across from Новослободская station (and all around Moscow: look for the yellow stores) for particularly good deals on international calling cards. They can also be bought at kiosks or mobile phone outlets. You should follow the instructions on the back of the card.



International phone calls can also be made from the Central Telegraph office on ул. Тверская and from various international phone offices, if necessary, although these are expensive options. You pay at a counter, are directed to a booth, and make your call following the instructions on the wall.

Dialling Codes

To make an international call from Russia you must always dial 8 first, wait for the tone to change, dial 10, then dial the international country code for wherever you're calling, and finally the rest of the telephone number (including area code). The country codes for the UK is +44, and remember to remove the initial 0 from area codes).

Calling within Russia

Local calls are no longer free in Russia from domestic telephones. You must use your phone card for making all calls: to mobile phones, to other domestic phones, and other cities (follow the instructions on the back of the card); if you don't, be sure to pay for calls on the itemised bill when it arrives. Peak rate is 08:00 to 20:00.

To make calls to other cities in Russia (or to parts of Moscow with a different area code, or to mobile phones) you have to dial 8 first, wait for the tone to change, and then dial the number with area code.

Public telephones are called таксофоны, and are found on street corners and at almost all metro stations. To use them you need a phone card, which can be bought at kiosks in various units. Put the card in the phone box, chip upwards, dial the number and remember to press the telephone symbol button on answer (otherwise the person you're phoning won't hear you). Only local calls can be made from public telephones.

Calls from Abroad

If friends and family want to call you from home the cheapest way is to use a phone card such as Swiftcall or onetel (UK) or US2Global or BestRatesCards (US), which can be bought on the Internet. Try www.1st4phonecards.com for a few options. You can buy cards for calling Russia for as little as 1.1p a minute. For even cheaper calls, go to the website: www.telediscount.co.uk. The international dialling code for Russia is +7 and the Moscow code is 495 or 499.

Mobile Phones

It's a good idea to get a mobile phone while you're here, for security and convenience. You can buy a Russian SIM card for about £5 (giving you some credit to start), and have it inserted in your phone from home, or buy a Russian phone for £20 - £100. They are not expensive to run (and it's easy to top up your credit in shops, using automated kiosks or buying pay-as-you go top-up cards), though with some companies you do pay to receive calls, and if you are contacted from a landline the cost is much higher. If you want to use your own phone and not buy a Russian one, it is best to check in advance that your phone is unlocked so that it will register the sim card.

Technically it is not possible to buy a SIM card without a passport and a registered visa, though in certain shops you may be lucky with only a copy of your passport and a letter stating that your visa is in the process of being registered. However, your RLUS rep will take you on your first day to get a sim card so that you are automatically contactable. Alternatively, you can wait until your visa has been registered and take your passport and registered visa with you to obtain your SIM card. MTS, Megafon and Beeline are widespread networks, although some students have had difficulties texting England from Megafon and Beeline networks. You may be charged heavily for receiving calls from the UK on your mobile.

E-mail

There are hundreds of Internet cafes in Moscow. Large 24-hour ones can be found on the bottom floor of the Охотный ряд shopping centre near Red Square and there is another by Новокузнецкая metro station.

If you have a laptop, you'll be glad to know that internet access is much cheaper than at home, and is fairly simple to set up using a portable modem (a dongle which allows you to connect wirelessly to the internet), this can be purchased from almost any phone or electric shop. You should always ask your landlady's permission before logging on at home, because it usually means tying up the phone line. It is possible to get WIFI connection almost everywhere, especially in chains of coffee shops and cafes, and it's usually free as long as you buy a coffee or cake.

Post



Sending Letters

The postal service in Russia is unreliable and can be extremely slow. If you feel that somebody is sending you something very valuable it is possibly better to wait until you return home, or to send it express via DHL, FedEx, or Pony Express. If you want to send letters abroad, you can buy stamps at any post office. Just ask for "марки на письмо в Англию/ wherever you want to send your letter".

Sending Parcels

Not all post offices accept parcels (you can't even send them from the Central Telegraph Office on ул. Тверская). There is a post office at Чистые пруды (right by the metro exit) and also one at ул.

Новослободская 49/2 (about 10 minutes from the metro on the left hand side), both of which accept parcels. At Чистые пруды, the parcel counter is located in a separate part of the building from the main post office and is reached via a different entrance at the side of the building. Be warned that there are often long queues for sending parcels.

If your parcel is small and weighs less than 20g, you can send it as a бандероль. This is a small plastic packet, in which they will place the item you wish to send (don't wrap it up yourself). It is a bit simpler and less time consuming than sending a посылка, which is a bigger type of parcel that has to be wrapped up in brown paper (at the post office), glued and tied with string. For both types of parcel you have to fill in a couple of (if not four!) customs declaration forms (in Russian only) stating the contents and its value, the sender and the recipient.

If you want to send books home, there is a special reduced rate for sending printed matter (and it doesn't involve any forms). You have to go to Moscow's main post office (почтамт) which is located right next to Чистые пруды and Тургеневская metro stations (the exit for the почтамт is signposted at the top of the escalators) – ул. Мясницкая 26. Take your books in a plastic bag (not ready packed) to one of the windows for 'International Correspondence' (Отправление международной корреспонденции). You will be asked whether you want to send it as registered mail (заказная) or not, and whether you want to use overland mail (наземная) or airmail (авиа). Prices range from about 400 to 800 roubles for 5kg books, depending on the type of service you use.

Receiving Mail

Letters and parcels that are NOT being sent to you express can be sent to you at the Language Link PO Box address (Your Name, c/o Victoria Leonard, Language Link, Post Office Box 309, Moscow 125047, Russia. Or in Cyrillic script: Россия, 125047, Москва, а/я 309, Лэнгвич Линк, с/о Victoria Leonard, Your Name).

If you have things sent to you express (i.e. DHL, FED-EX, UPS, Pony Express, EMS, US Post Office Global Priority, etc...), they should be sent to the Language Link Central Office address. (Your name, C/o Victoria Leonard, Language Link, Novoslobodskaya St, Building 3, floor 5, Moscow Russia 127055. Or in Cyrillic script: (Россия, 127055, Москва, Ул.Новослободская, д.3, этаж 5, Компания Лэнгвич Линк, С/о Victoria Leonard, Your name).

To pick up letters/parcels, please inform the RLUS representatives, and they will collect them from Central Office and bring them to Central School for you.

It's not advisable to send large parcels via DHL. Past experience has shown that they are prone to being stopped at the border and can only be picked up for a fee (with the added complication of Russian customs forms) or sent home on payment of a fine.

Health

Moscow offers a good variety of 'Western' and other clinics for treatment and regular appointments. The following is a list of clinics, used and recommended by former students (and teachers at Language Link). Keep in mind that while at 'Western' clinics you'll be able to make an appointment with an English speaking doctor, you will most likely have to pay for this privilege.

MEDICAL CLINICS:

1) The International SOS Clinic (www.internationalsos.com/en) has been used by many students in the past, especially in more serious cases or emergencies. It has its own ambulance service. Metro Проспект мира, Орловский переулок, 7 (3rd floor). Open 24 hours/7 days a week. Tel: 8 (495) 937-6477.

2) InterMedCentre *formerly The American Clinic* (www.intac.ru/en) is an excellent clinic and also has its own ambulance service. Metro Проспект мира, Грохоловский переулок 31 (1st floor). Open 24 hours / 7 days a week. Tel: 8 (495) 937-5757.

3) European Medical Center (www.emcmos.ru) has two addresses:

- Metro Пушкинская or Маяковская, Спиридоновский переулок 5. Tel: 8 (495) 933-6655.
- Metro Проспект мира, Орловский переулок, 7 (3rd floor). Tel: 8 (495) 933-6655.

DENTAL SERVICES:

1) US Dental Care Clinic (www.usdentalcare.com/home_eng.htm). Metro Охотный ряд or Театральная, ул. Большая Дмитровка 7/5, корпус 2. Open Monday to Friday 08:00-20:00, Saturday 09:00-17:00. Tel: 8 (495) 933-8686.

2) American Russian Dental Center (www.ardc.com). Metro Маяковская or Баррикадная, ул. Садовая-кудринская 21А. Tel: 8 (495) 797-9759.

Teachers and students at the Language Link RLUS centre have also gone in the past to a Russian clinic located at metro Китай город, Большой Черкасский переулок 13. Here it is possible, even as a non-

member, to have a basic diagnostic appointment for 500-550 roubles. Appointments can be made with “English” and Russian speaking doctors. Tel: 8 (495) 921 2340.

Please read your insurance policy before you have any medical treatment, as if you have any which is not covered then you may have to foot the bill (e.g. treatment on problems which existed before you came to Russia are normally not included). Please be aware that even for things covered by your policy, you will have to pay all charges directly to the clinic where you are treated and make an insurance claim afterwards.

Always use a condom if you have sex, as STDs in Russia are rife. Most chemists stock a wide range of brands. Morning-after pills are largely available over the counter at chemists. Currently the most well-known (and perhaps the only) pill is a two dose pill called *постинор*, found in most pharmacies for a reasonable rate. If you have any questions, you would be best advised to consult a pharmacist. You will be given the extension for the pharmacy at SOS from the main switch board. There are a number of 24-hour pharmacies operating in Moscow.

Be wary of food poisoning, and be careful when buying fast food from street kiosks.

In Russia you should not drink water straight from the tap. You should always boil it first, and then filter it to improve the taste. If you travel to St Petersburg you should definitely avoid the tap water since it is taken from the Neva River and contains various pollutants, such as lead and mercury. It also has the parasitic bacteria ‘*Giardia lamblia*’ which can cause stomach cramps and diarrhoea. The treatment for this is 200mg of Metronidazole every day for two weeks. In Russian chemists this is known as *Trikapol*.

Money

Changing Money

There are plenty of places in town (*обмен валюты*) where you can change cash. NEVER change money on the street - it's illegal, and you'll probably be fleeced. It is generally better to change money in a bank, such as Sberbank, Absolut Bank or Barclay's.

Travellers' cheques can be a nightmare to change, although it is sometimes possible for a hefty commission. American Express cheques are recommended, as they appear to be the cheapest to exchange. You have to show your documents (photocopies are not sufficient) to change travellers' cheques, so if you've decided to bring money in this form, you'll have to wait until you've received your registration to change them.

Cash machines

Cash machines (*банкоматы*) are everywhere. Your bank will probably charge you 1.5% to 2% per withdrawal for roubles and some banks may make an additional charge if you withdraw dollars. Previous students recommend getting a Caxton FX card as it does not charge you for withdrawals abroad. It is often a good idea to let your bank know before you are coming to Russia, so that they don't block your card or allow the machine to swallow it, although this has been known to happen despite letting the bank know.

Laundry

It cannot be guaranteed that you will have access to a washing machine in your home-stay. If you don't, either make friends with someone who has one, or wash by hand, as most Russians do. If your hosts do have a washing machine, you will be asked to buy your own washing powder as this is not included in your rent.

Self-service laundrettes are non-existent as far as we know, although there are dry-cleaners (*химчистка*) where you can drop off your laundry and pick it up later. These are located all over Moscow but are usually expensive.



Entertainment

Listings publications

In Moscow, English language entertainment guides can be found in the Friday edition of The Moscow Times, which is available free at LL Central School reception, and in internet cafes and Western-style outlets. Other English language papers include The Moscow News, and the somewhat crude Exile. The Moscow Times and Moscow News are particularly helpful in terms of listings for upcoming concerts, gigs, shows and sporting events. You may also want to keep your eye out for monthly English language magazines, such as PASSPORT or WHERE that can be found, though not as reliably, in similar locations in and around Moscow and high-lights performances, sights, and restaurants of the month.

The best Russian language listings about exhibitions, sports events, gigs, plays, and films happening all over Moscow (with addresses) can be found in Афиша and Ваш Досуг, which are available from most press kiosks. Both magazines have their own websites – www.afisha.ru and www.vashdosug.ru. Both these sites are in Russian only. There is also a monthly theatre guide, somewhat confusingly also called Афиша, which is sold at the kiosks selling theatre tickets.

Radio and TV

TV listings can be found in English in The Moscow Times, and in Russian in several newspapers and weekly magazines such as ТВ Парк and Семь Дней. Russia has 15 free terrestrial channels, so it's best just to channel hop and see what you like. The quality of programmes is not great, although there are frequently good films on at weekends.

BBC World Service broadcasts on MW around 1300 kHz. The most popular Top 40 radio station is Radio Maximum 103.7FM. Эхо Москвы on 91.2FM is good for current affairs and political interviews. Radio Monte-Carlo 102.1FM plays mostly western up-to-date music and a few golden oldies, while Наше Радио on 101.7FM and Русское Радио focus on the many delights Russian music has to offer.

Sport and Leisure

The number of ways to spend your free time is endless. Recently, RLUS students have particularly enjoyed regular Sunday afternoon football matches in a gym near metro Багратионовская. Outdoor ice-skating is great in winter at Парк имени Горького. You can hire skis or snowboards at Крылатские горы (end of the light blue line) and skis, skates, rollerblades, and bicycles at Парк Сокольники (on the northern branch of the red line). Essentially you can take part in almost any sport here.

In the spring and summer a river cruise is highly recommended. Boats leave from the Новоспасский bridge near metro Пролетарская, or outside the Radisson-Slavyanskaya hotel at metro Киевская.

The Svetix dance school offers a variety of club, hip hop and RnB classes. Classes are held at different times and locations throughout the week and at weekends. The classes are for beginners to pros, and cost around 150 roubles per hour dance class (or 900 roubles a month if you're keen to make it a regular habit). The website www.svetix.ru allows you to see where/when and with which instructor the classes are. Mango gym just outside Language Link has been very popular with previous students too.

The Moscow International Choir meets Tuesdays at 7pm in St. Andrew's Church, Vosnesensky Per., 8. They perform once or twice a semester. This is a great chance to make not only Russian friends, but acquaintances from all over the world.

If you're interested in taking up (or continuing) balalaika lessons in Moscow, a previous student recommended contacting Evgenii Shabalin on 8 (495) 479 8900 or 8 (903) 228 1793. In 2005-06 he charged \$20 per hour for individual classes. His school is based at metro Октябрьское поле. The student was known to him as Clara (she was Clare), so mentioning her name would help him to understand where you heard about him.

Among the multitude of cinemas is the English-language one Кинотеатр Под Куполом at metro Проспект мира (www.domecinema.ru), attached to the Renaissance hotel. On Новый Арбат, the cinema Октябрь has one theatre showing films in English. For an assortment of international films, as well as interesting film

festivals, check out the cinema 35mm at metro Курская or Красные Ворота (www.kino35mm.ru). Pioneer is also reasonably priced and shows English films, and is located near Kievskaya.

There are several professional football and ice hockey teams in Moscow. Tickets can usually be bought at the stadium or arena, or at kiosks around the city. Most of the matches (especially for the ice hockey teams) shouldn't be dangerous for foreigners, with the exception of any Спартак football matches; the Спартак fans are known for their nationalism and hooliganism.

To keep yourself entertained, the best thing to do is grab a copy of a listings paper and take it from there.

Cafes, Bars and Clubs

Moscow has simply too many cafes, bars and restaurants to list here. Favourites of past students the various Пирогы, Кружка and Проект Оги bars located in various parts of the city. Here are also a few very popular places:

Going Out in Moscow

Whether you're the sort of person who enjoys just having a quiet drink in a bar or if you're someone who enjoys clubbing, dancing the night away till the early hours, then you can guarantee that there is something for you here in Moscow. If you find somewhere that you enjoy going to, make sure to get to know the staff. Discounts and specially made drinks are just some of the perks you can expect.

Vokzal

Conveniently located a stones-throw from Language Link, Vokzal is the perfect place for a post-class pint and bite to eat for next to nothing.

Сущевская ул., 21
м. Новослободская/Менделеевская

Fishka Bar

Perfect for a quiet drink on an evening. This Sports Bar, close to Language Link, hosts a wide range of delicious homemade cocktails, as well as some more well known brands of beer. A nice, comfortable, relaxed atmosphere.

Лесная ул., 55
м. Новослободская/Менделеевская

MyBar

MyBar is the best of both worlds. During the week pop along for a quiet drink, but at the weekend expect to see the music turned up, people on the dancefloor and good times being had. MyBar is particularly good for birthdays, etc. as it has a small private room which you can use for no charge. Just make sure to book early.

Ул. Кузнецкий Мост, 3, (Entrance through arch opposite Coyote Ugly)
м. Театральная

Gogol

Although Gogol is set on one of Moscow's most expensive shopping streets, you'll be surprised at how reasonable the prices are. Themed around a Soviet bunker, Gogol is split into three areas: a bar, a restaurant and a dance area. Perfect for a quiet weekday drink or as a stop off on a weekend before hitting a club.

Столешников пер. 11, стр. 1 (Entrance through arch opposite Chanel)
м. Театральная/Чеховская

Fullers Pub

If you're missing the comforts of your typical British pub, then fear not! Fullers Pub offers a good selection of Real Ales as well as some good British-style home cooking (unfortunately no Yorkshire Puddings). They also show a lot of British sport on a big screen here. A little bit more expensive than most bars, but definitely worth it if you're feeling a bit homesick.

ул. Большая Ордынка, д. 40, стр. 1
м. Третьяковская

Proekt OGI

Possibly the most bohemian of places you're likely to find here in Moscow. On Friday nights anything and everything can happen. On a standard night expect to see someone chain-smoking whilst writing an essay, a crammed dance floor, the people dancing to an eclectic mix of Soviet, American, English and Russian tracks as well as the occasional person passed out on a table. Free Entry.

Потаповский Переулок, 8/12
м. Чистые пруды

Propaganda

If you're looking for somewhere a little bit more trendy, Propaganda is perhaps more suited for you. During the day it doubles as a restaurant, however on a night expect to hear some of the best mixes the city has to offer from world renowned DJ's. Propaganda operates an anti-face-control policy, so don't turn up in your best threads. The cooler you dress the better. Free Entry.

Большой Златоустинский переулок, дом 7
м. Лубянка/Китай-город

Solyanka

This hipster stronghold is one of Moscow's favourite clubs. Like Propaganda, Solyanka doubles as more than just a club during the day. Expect a range of acts on a weekend from local heroes to some big names from all over the globe. Dress to impress as Solyanka does operate a face-control policy. Entrance is around 500 rubles.

ул. Солянка, 11/6
м. Китай-город

This list is by no means exclusive nor will all these places be to your liking. You can find out about a lot more places using Google, sites such as TripAdvisor or by making friends with the locals. But, wherever you do choose to go, do your homework and make sure you dress appropriately. It should also be noted that most clubs in Moscow are closed on Mondays and therefore most bars will shut earlier too, if quiet.

Useful web links

Processing your Russian visa

See the document on the RLUS website.

Advice about travel to Russia

- www.britemb.msk.ru/consular/index_ie.htm - Consular advice for UK citizens (see FCO travel advice: Russia)

General information about Russia

- www.moscowtimes.ru - English Language newspaper providing up to date news on Russia and entertainment listings for Moscow
- www.sptimes.ru - English Language newspaper providing up to date news on Russia and entertainment listings for St Petersburg
- www.expats.ru - The Moscow Ex-pat Site – a virtual community for English speaking ex-pats and Russians
- www.rbcnews.com - news and information site

Travel in Russia

- www.poezdka.ru (Russian) – search engine for flights/air tickets
- www.polets.ru (Russian) – search engine for flights/air tickets
- www.tutu.ru (Russian) – elektrichka timetable for Moscow and Moscow region
- <http://russia.km.ru/trans/moskwa/vokzal.htm> (Russian) – train timetable for Moscow railway stations

- <http://startravel.ru/eng/index.shtml> - Star Travel (STA Russia) for cheap tickets (air/train/bus) and under-26 and ISIC discount cards
- www.marshrutky.ru – useful for checking train times and routes

Information about Moscow

- www.afisha.ru (Russian) - Russian site providing entertainment listings for Moscow
- www.vashdosug.ru (Russian) - Russian site providing entertainment listings for Moscow
- www.waytorussia.net/Moscow/Info.html - featuring 'What is Moscow', and Practicalities, Maps, Transportation, Accommodation, Eating Out, Entertainment, Sightseeing

How to Survive the Russian-ness of Russia

Although Russia is becoming more and more Westernised in many places, there are still plenty of aspects of life in this country that can take a lot of getting used to. Sometimes you can laugh at the differences without any problem (why do Russians always seem to leave footprints on toilet seats?), but when you've been flattened by a rampaging babushka for the umpteenth time, or spent two hours queuing at the post office only to be told it's the wrong counter, and you should have gone to that counter (but don't bother because they haven't got one of the six forms you need to fill out anyway), it can leave you fuming and ready to get on the next plane home.

But try to resist the urge to phone British Airways. Remember, you are a guest in a totally different culture, and you must try to respect that things here are done differently. Try to be prepared for frustrations, and hopefully you'll acclimatise before too long. The following are points that you may want to bear in mind...

- Standards of efficiency and service in Russia are often somewhat lower than what you get in the West.

You may come across friendly, efficient service on occasions, but be warned: at times you will be exasperated by Russians working in official or administrative capacities. They may seem slow, unhelpful, and inconsistent to the point of rudeness, leaving you with the urge to pull your hair out, and theirs too... but try not to internally combust. For a start it's unhealthy and won't get you anywhere, and secondly there are reasons (or excuses, depending on your point of view) for this infuriating aspect of Russian culture.

It all comes down to culture and mentality. Generally speaking, Russians take a far more laid back attitude to work than their counterparts in Western, consumer-driven, corporate-management societies. Whereas in America everything should be done 10 minutes ago and in the UK it should be done right now, in Russia it probably won't get done until the end of the working day (or week). It's just the way it is, the way it always has been, and Russians, particularly among the older generations, see no reason why it should change. They certainly won't take kindly to a pushy young foreigner telling them how to do their job. Even the RLUS representatives, while slightly more experienced at battling the system, can't be guaranteed to get anywhere fast when working with big institutions (so please don't expect miracles).

The key to survival is PATIENCE. Be flexible, try to adapt to a different environment from the one you're used to. Waiting is an accepted part of life here – it's considered normal, and to many Russians, even among the younger generation, your expectations and desire to get everything done by yesterday will seem impatient, unreasonable and unnecessary. Things are changing gradually, but as they say here, Moscow wasn't built in a day.

- Russians like to say exactly what they think.

There are various words to describe the way Russians communicate. Leaving aside "incomprehensible", some people call it "rude", "impatient", "tactless", "angry", especially after trying to purchase train tickets from scary women with even scarier make-up, who certainly don't seem to have time to sell tickets to people with funny accents. But in fact, many prefer to describe their approach as "direct" and "emotionally expressive". Yes, people may yell at you here: for getting in the way, for going to the wrong counter, for

daring to breathe on the glass of exhibits in museums. But don't take it to heart as it's nothing personal. Partly, it's just the style of the Russian language; whereas a British person might ask "Do you mind not touching the glass please", a Russian would say "DON'T TOUCH THE GLASS" with a glare and a tone of voice that ensured you understood completely what they were getting at. Direct, to the point and effective—just hard to get used to if you were raised in most Western cultures. Yes, Russians will let you know if they are angry or if something is not quite as it should be— they are open, and say what they think. And this is not necessarily a bad thing: the openness is also reflected in great warmth, hospitality and friends you can really count on to be honest with you.

- Don't judge a дом by its подъезд

Anyone who has spent any time in Russia will know that a Russian дом is in no way, shape, or form the same thing as an English 'house'. While the Mercedes-driving, pent-house suite-dwelling новые русские are obviously an exception to the rule, the vast majority of ordinary Russians live in multi-story concrete blocks, which are undeniably not the most aesthetically-pleasing structures in the world. They are generally very large and very grey, with entrances and hallways (подъезды) that smell of something unpleasant, and where the paint is not always guaranteed to be stuck to the walls. Thankfully, however, this outward decrepitude is generally no reflection of the flats inside.

Your Russian home is guaranteed to be comfortable and cosy with all the basics necessary for survival. Although you will have your own room, there probably won't be a massive amount of space, as space (especially in Moscow) costs money. This may mean that you sleep on a sofa bed rather than a 'normal' bed, (these are popular here as it is common for Russians to use their bedroom as a sitting room during the day). The kitchen will invariably have a fridge and cooker, but other amenities such as microwaves, washing machines, etc. are rarities. It is also unlikely that everything will be shiny and new, as that's not the kind of rent you're paying.

In winter your flat should be very warm, and the most common problem is that accommodation is over-heated rather than under-heated. If by any chance your flat does feel a bit chilly, do as the Russians do and tape up the windows to keep the cold air out (you'll be amazed at the difference it makes). Unfortunately there is no such simple solution to the fact that every building in Russia has its hot water switched off for two weeks every summer. But it doesn't last forever...

Please also be aware that Russia (and particularly Moscow) is built on a completely different scale from British cities, and you may well be living a 15-minute walk from the metro. It's a fact of life – to look on the bright side, at least it helps you walk off the блины and the fried pasta.

Final note: All information in this orientation pack is correct at time of going to press, but as things in Russia change almost daily (restaurants open and close, new registration laws are passed), it is very likely that information will change during your stay here.