

moscow

O U T • I N • T H E • O P E N

words by **david wolman** and photography by **brett patterson**

During a spring concert in Moscow's Gorky Park, children from a local theater troupe sing "Ya Idu Shagayu po Moskve" or "I'm Strolling in Moscow." The 1950s song tells of a young man who walks the streets of the capital lifted by a sense of happiness he cannot fully explain. Perhaps it is the rain, the sunshine, a smile from a stranger, or a happenstance encounter with an old friend. Whatever the cause, the city brings him joy, and he feels as if he could walk all the way to Siberia and across to the Sea of Japan.

Today, with a surging economy and the intoxicating effect of newfound capitalistic freedoms, Muscovites have even more to smile about. And when winter finally departs from Moscow and days begin stretching until 10 p.m., citizens get out. Outdoors that is, to walk, sit, read, drink, gossip and Rollerblade in the parks, public squares, restaurant patios and plazas scattered throughout the city.

Previous pages: St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: delicacies ready for purchase at the Yeliseev's Grocery Store, on Tverskaya Street; discarded statues at The Park of Fallen Monuments; Komsomolskaya Station bustles with activity under a mosaic of Lenin; World War II veterans enjoy a day in the limelight on Victory Day, in Victory Park.

the Soviets may have lost the Cold War, but some of the grand designs of socialism remain, shaping both the landscape and lifestyle of the city. A walk along Tverskaya, one of Moscow's primary thoroughfares, is quick to reveal much of that imprint. Both sides of the street are framed by sprawling, ornate buildings, often painted bright shades of yellow or green, which, it is believed, help lift spirits during the dark months of winter.

In the 1930s, many of the buildings along Tverskaya were either demolished or pushed back from the curb by as much as 40 feet to widen the street and turn what was once a winding avenue built upon a centuries-old trade route into a straight, bold boulevard. Nowadays, the wide sidewalks are busy with shoppers looking their cosmopolitan best, while street-side vendors sell pastries, potato chips, cigarettes and Russian editions of *GQ*.

Most everything along Tverskaya—and much of Moscow for that matter—is enormous. The idea of socialist reconstruction, explains city guide and former schoolteacher Irina Sergeeva, "was to be big, sumptuous and prosperous. The planners wanted to display the wealth and advantages of the socialist economy; to show that everyday people could use such grand spaces and buildings."

Further along Tverskaya, dozens of people gather beneath the statue of beloved Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin. The statue is an ad-hoc meeting place for young people rendezvousing for a date or just sharing a smoke before heading off to a nearby club, casino, or pricey French restaurant chic-ified with a green apple at the center of each table. What would architects of the Soviet era think today, wandering through public spaces once intended for marches and demonstrations that now are used for smooching or simply hanging out?

To the west of the city sits Victory Park, constructed in 1995 to honor World War II veterans. The enormous stone plaza has five sets of fountains, each representing one year of the war, with the Museum of the Great Patriotic War at the southern end next to a 142-meter obelisk—10 cm for every day of the war. On a typical afternoon the park is filled with skateboarding teenagers and elderly citizens paying their respects. On weekends, brides and grooms can also be seen carrying out a unique Russian tradition: On their wedding day, Muscovite couples stop at one of the many sites around the city commemorating the service of war veterans. The meaning behind the custom, explains Sergeeva, is that a couple's happiness today would not be possible without the sacrifice of generations past.

On Victory Day, the May 9 holiday celebrating defeat over the Nazis, veterans proudly donning faded uniforms and polished medals walk slowly through Victory Park. Other Russian visitors greet them with a gift of a carnation or a tulip as a gesture of reverence. Elderly gentlemen softly kiss blond boys and girls on the forehead before the children turn and run back to take the awaiting hand of their fathers and mothers.

Another lesser-known public space rich with meaning is just north of famous Gorky Park, beyond the aging carnival rides, popcorn stands and performance stage. Inside the Park of Arts, families with strollers walk between areas of grass decorated with recently displayed sculptures. In one corner of this sculpture garden, a handful of statues of Lenin, Marx and Stalin have literally been put out to pasture in what has become known as the Park of Fallen Monuments. Perhaps such tangible symbols of Russia's tumultuous past serve as reminders to the people of all that they and Moscow have been through, ultimately bolstering a sense of pride in the city.

Modern-day Moscow is also a notably pedestrian-friendly city, with under-

EDITOR'S PICKS

Where To Eat:

- **Godunov**
095.298.5496
Features live music, high-end traditional Russian food, homemade vodkas and strawberry soufflé.
- **Kitezh-Town**
095.209.6685
Try the duck with potato, cranberries and onion served in apple slices; or turkey breast with honey glaze, potato curls and mashed pumpkin.

Where To Stay:

- **Moscow Marriott Grand**
095.937.0000
An enormous buffet, chatty bartender and spacious rooms with a central location right on Tverskaya.
- **Metropol Moscow**
095.927.6040
Elegant architecture more than makes up for smaller rooms and maze-like design. Just a stone's throw from Red Square.

ground tunnels beneath major intersections, walking bridges over the Moscow River and a remarkably efficient and still-expanding subway system, which celebrates its 70th birthday in 2005. Yet to call the capital's Metro a "subway" is a descriptive injustice. Many of the stations are as much works of art as they are utilitarian spaces. Four recommended stops: Kievskaya and Belorusskaya, with huge, intricate mosaics of idealized, rural scenes from Ukraine and Belarus; Novoslobodskaya, adorned with great stained glass artwork; and the baroque-style Komsomolskaya, decorated with enormous, almost palatial chandeliers. At Belorusskaya, one of the mosaics is of a small boy handing flowers to a uniformed soldier returning from the front lines.

With 9 million official residents and probably a few million more, expansive and yes, expensive Moscow is a stimulus bonanza for any traveler. A good way to rest one's mind and feet is to take a boat cruise along the Moscow River. On this trip, commuters and tourists alike are treated to sweeping views of the capital, not to mention the added bonus of bouncy Russian tunes playing over the loudspeakers.

Meandering south, the boat passes Christ the Savior Cathedral (the original was destroyed by Stalin, but was rebuilt), Gorky Park, and the green hills of Vorobjovy Park, where cyclists, walkers and picnickers also capitalize on the warm weather of spring and summer. As the river turns to the north passengers can see four, sometimes five of the high-rises known as the Seven Sisters. Built in late 1940s and early 1950s, these gothic, almost Gotham-style buildings are pillars of Moscow's powerful image.

For a thorough experience of street-style commerce and public space in Moscow, head to bustling Izmaylovsky Park, northeast of the city center. This colorful market is for people who do not want to do their gift shopping at downtown

stores like Versace, Benetton, Dior or Tiffany's. Here one can find far less opulent jewelry of jade and amber, as well as carpets, flasks with various KGB insignias, paintings, antiques, pins, fur hats, shawls, used books, sneakers, magnets and, of course, Russian dolls, though here they are decorated with the likes of Britney Spears and President George W. Bush. Izmaylovsky, in short, is a souvenir hunter's dream, and on a recent afternoon one journalist was spotted purchasing a pair of '50s-era bomber goggles for no apparent reason.

Izmaylovsky Park is a modern-day nexus for shoppers, but the historic market center of Moscow is Red Square. ("Red" derived not from anything to do with communism, but from the Russian word for beautiful, *krasnyy*, which evolved to also mean the color red.)

On clear evenings, the famous plaza at sunset crescendos into a symphony of color on the chaotically patterned, yet somehow congruent domes of St. Basil's Cathedral. Muscovites pass through the square carrying briefcases, heading through the plaza toward apartments on the south side of the river. Others are simply out walking with friends, heading nowhere in particular. But everyone, locals and tourists alike, can't help but feel the historic import of this spot, as if the very stones underfoot somehow radiate significance.

Moscow undoubtedly delivers generously when it comes to mayhem, unpredictability and raciness. Yet the layout of the city, the parks, the wide boulevards, and the elegant subway stations make it feel as if Moscow isn't racing quite so fast. Even at the Izmaylovsky market, the tempo is toned down. Stall-keepers will try to make their sales, but they rarely hassle. Some just pass the day playing backgammon or chatting with a friend manning the neighboring stall. Their city may indeed be booming, but Muscovites aren't hurrying. They're strolling. ▼

Journalist David Wolman has written for publications such as *Newsweek*, *Outside* and *Skiing*.