

Minted in Moscow:

Two Days in the Russian Capital

Sunlight glints off the golden domes and catches your eye. The ancient, patchwork-patterned church is right in front of you, but you almost miss it as a blonde – devastatingly gorgeous with impossibly long legs – emerges from a slick black sedan. Forget onion domes and bread queues – Moscow is the epicentre of New Russia, and most conspicuous are the *Novy Russkie* (New Russians) with their designer labels and big cars. In this two-day itinerary we show you how to join the elite and live like an oligarch.

BEING BEAUTIFUL

Models don't eat so neither shall you: begin your day with a warming beverage at **Coffee Bean** (Tverskaya ul 10). This bohemian coffee house, the original and best, is still the coolest café in the city, with high ceilings, fantastic architectural details and large windows looking out on to the main drag.

Fully charged head to a *banya* for a sensuous, exhilarating Russian experience. What better way to get in shape than be steamed, washed and beaten with birch branches? There are traditional *bani* (Russian baths) all over town but **Sanduny Baths** (Neglinnaya ul 14; www.sanduny.ru) is the oldest and most luxurious in the city. The Gothic Room is a work of art with its rich wood carving, and the main shower room has an aristocratic Roman feel to it.

Nothing piques hunger like the *banya* so head to Ulitsa Petrovka for a light bite – we recommend **Gallery**, at No 27, for understated elegance.

So you've got the body, now you need the clothes. An afternoon perusing **Ulitsa Petrovka** is one well spent: what more do you need than a large department store,

a fancy shopping centre and a bounty of boutiques? For the ladies, just off the main drag is **Bustiere** (Kuznetsky most 3). Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all, baggy cotton briefs. Sensational sexy lingerie is now on sale all over Moscow, and often modelled by women on the street. Depending on the weather, you may wish to keep your new purchases under wraps, at least until you're on the dance floor.

BEING SEEN

Now your new look is complete it's time to get out there and show it off.

Begin your evening at **Pavilion** (Bolshoy Patriarshy per; ☎ 203 5110). With a prime location overlooking Patriarch's Ponds, this new place promises to be prominent on Moscow's thriving dining scene. Enjoy the original dishes with European, Chinese, Russian and other international influences in the gorgeously restored 19th-century boathouse with a chic and contemporary interior.

To really show off your minted credentials move on to **Apriori** (Bolshaya Molchanovka ul; www.aprioriclub.ru) to strut your stuff on the floor. This progressive house club has a huge bi-level dance hall, as well as an exclusive 'sofa zone'. Resident and visiting DJs host dance parties at weekends. The interior is redesigned every few weeks so it's a new experience every time. There's strict face control so dress up (think Barbie doll for women, black for men), arrive by car (the bigger the better) and speak English (foreigners are not as special as they used to be, but they're still pretty special).

BEING RICH

So how does the other half get over its hangover?

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The only place in Moscow for Sunday brunch is **Baltschug Kempinski** (ul Baltschug 1; ☎ 230 6500; www.kempinskimoscow.com). Russian champagne and live jazz accompany an extravagant buffet in this luxurious hotel with views of the river and the Kremlin's golden domes beyond. On weekdays the **Starlite Diner** (Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 16; www.starlitediner.com) serves classic Americansky breakfast fare.

Today's Moscow millionaires may have the designer threads but the former Tsars had riches that the Novy Russkie can only dream of. Visit the Armoury and Diamond Fund Exhibition at the **Kremlin** (www.kreml.ru) to ogle their spoils. It's stuffed to the gills with various gold and silver objects and precious stones galore. Spend your morning feasting your eyes on the renowned Easter eggs made from precious metals and jewels by St Petersburg jeweller Fabergé, as well as the 800-diamond throne of Tsar Alexey, the 190-carat diamond given to Catherine the Great by her lover Grigory Orlov and countless other gems.

All that drooling with envy will make you peckish. Refuel with tea and cakes at the Confectioner Café in the **Hotel Metropol** (Teatralny proezd 1/4; www.metropol-moscow.ru). Nothing short of an Art Nouveau masterpiece, the historic Metropol brings an artistic touch to every nook and cranny, from the spectacular exterior to the grand lobby and the individually decorated rooms. The overall effect is breathtaking, but the charm lies in the details – sit back and admire stained-glass windows, Oriental rugs and early-20th-century furnishings.

With the main stage at the Bolshoi closed for refurbishment until 2008, complete your day by seeing the Kremlin Ballet or Moscow Classical Ballet Theatre perform

inside the Kremlin itself at the **State Kremlin Palace** (ul Vozdvizhenka 1; www.kremlin-gkd.ru). This is a magical experience to rival that of its more famous competition and a delicious, decadent way to cap off your stay.

SLEEPING

Budget:

Hotel Budapest (www.hotel-budapest.ru; ☎ 923 1060) Excellent value accommodation in an intimate setting.

Midrange:

Alrosa on Kazachy (www.alrosahotels.ru; ☎ 745 2190) The atmosphere of an 18th-century estate with old-fashioned Russian hospitality.

Top End:

Golden Apple (www.goldenapple.ru; ☎ 980 7000) Slick stylish living from Moscow's self-proclaimed 'first boutique hotel'.

For more reviews of Moscow accommodation, check out the Sleep section on www.loneyplanet.com/accommodation.

By Fiona Buchan

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