

beyond asia

CYRILLIC SUCCESS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARA VORHEES





Moscow is home to more billionaires than anywhere else in the world. **Mara Vorhees** looks at where and how they spend their roubles.

This year, *Forbes* magazine declared Moscow to be the best city for billionaires. According to the magazine's annual "rich list", the Russian capital is home to 74 billionaires, more than any other city in the world. Often called "oligarchs" for their close ties to the Kremlin, this upper *upper* class sits atop a massive and ever-growing mountain of money. Besides the billionaires, Moscow is home to thousands of second-tier nouveaux-riches, who have amassed millions through dealings in real estate, finance and other entrepreneurial activities.

The residence of choice for Moscow's mega-rich is a swanky street in the city's western suburbs, known as Rublyovka. In Soviet times, high-level political officials and cultural figures were awarded modest cottages in this ecologically pure district. These days, the Moscow River provides a picturesque backdrop for multi-million-dollar mansions, though most of them are hidden behind birch forests and high fences. Rublyovka has become the symbol of the new Russian rich. The average cost of a house in this high-rolling 'hood is upwards of USD 4mn, and prices are climbing. (One real estate developer famously offered a free helicopter as a bonus to sweeten the deal for potential buyers.) Home to former President Putin and current President Medvedev, Rublyovka is the pinnacle of prestige in Moscow.

But it's not only the Russians that are here: Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Ferrari, Gucci and Lamborghini all have outlets along this strip, as do Ralph Lauren and Harley Davidson.

Which brings us to our next point: newly rich Muscovites are eager to take full advantage of *everything* the high life has to offer. As well as good old-fashioned real estate, wealthy Russians are pouring money into "passion investments" like luxury vehicles, designer clothes, yachts, antiques and artwork.

Russia is the number one market in Europe for private jets. On Moscow's crowded streets, Ladas vie for space with Hummers, Rolls Royce and – most visibly – Mercedes-Benz. *Art Market Blog* reports that the value of Russian art has multiplied almost six times over the past decade, thanks to the free-spending habits of Russian collectors.

Not surprisingly, the newly rich have become adoring patrons of Europe's finest fashion houses. On the streets of Moscow, high fashionistas are seen only in full regalia, from their Hermès scarves down to their Manolo Blahnik shoes. Russians rely on these designers to dress not only themselves, but also their homes, their children and – according to the latest trend – their pets. High-class canines sport gem-studded collars; while luxury-loving lapdogs are toted about in designer carrying cases.

Around the world, New Russians have earned a reputation for bling; and as their numbers grow, they are always looking for ways to show off their wealth. Moscow's annual Millionaire Fair is a week-long spendfest for the super rich, providing plenty of creative ideas for those hard-earned roubles.

Got a gift for gab? Treat yourself to a diamond-encrusted cell phone. Suffer from insomnia? Rest easy on a limited edition King Koil mattress, covered in cashmere or silk. Crave the caffeine? Go for the gold and splurge on a solid gold coffeemaker...

Opening Spread: The onion domes of the cathedrals that fill the city's Kremlin; **Top right:** Take away art in one of Moscow's many art galleries; **Top left:** Plushchad Gagarina, celebrating the famous cosmonaut; **Bottom right:** The signature black Mercedes of the rich line the carpark of the Park Hyatt Ararat.

EAT

Arkady Novikov's name is a household word in Moscow. Originally employed at an innocuous establishment called Universitetsky, this multi-millionaire restaurateur now oversees 45 venerated venues around the capital. Novikov is known for his theme restaurants, featuring elaborate ethnic menus and matching over-the-top decor. But in recent years, he has turned his creative energy to creating slick, stylish sites that are more about class than kitsch.

In the first category, **Tsarskaya Okhota** (+7-495-635-7982) is a much-loved Russian restaurant, located on the ritzy Rublyovka. Favourite destination of former Presidents Yeltsin and Putin, the rustic restaurant is reminiscent of a hunting lodge, with animal pelts on the walls and game on the menu.

Meanwhile, back in the city, Novikov foregoes tradition for trendiness. His most recent endeavour is **GQ** (+7 495 956 7775), currently Moscow's hippest destination for drinks, dinner and other early evening socializing. The contemporary décor features an open kitchen and subtle Asian theme, which is echoed in the menu.

At the end of the night, Moscow socialites find themselves at another Novikov hot spot, **Gallery** (+7 495 790 1596). It's popular around the clock, but it's most crowded in the wee hours, when the beautiful people come to refuel after a night out on the town. And they are beautiful... high heels and short skirts are apparently part of the dress code.

Although Arkady Novikov dominates the Moscow dining scene, he cannot compete in the highest gastronomic circles. Anatoly Komm is a molecular chef – an artist who employs scientific process to break ingredients down to their most basic component and present the flavours in new forms. After earning a mention in the Michelin guide for his restaurants in Geneva, Komm is now conquering Moscow, with five restaurants opening in just as many years. His latest highly-lauded venue is **Varvary** (+7 495 229 2800), touted as "the first Russian haute cuisine restaurant". It's an elegant affair, offering a sophisticated new take on familiar flavours – black bread and beet salad in the form of foams and gels.

For traditionalists, Moscow's top destination for old-fashioned *haute russe* cuisine is the **Café Pushkin** (+7 495 229 5990), serving the same rich Russian and French foods that the tsars enjoyed. And the setting – a re-created 18th-century mansion, complete with parquet floors and frescoed ceilings – also recalls the opulence of the era.

With all of these opportunities for high stepping, fine dining and big spending, where is the most popular place for Moscow's rich and famous to congregate? The surprising answer is **Coffee Mania** (+7 495 775 4310). The friendly, informal café is beloved for its homemade soups, fresh-squeezed juices and steaming cappuccino, not to mention its summer terrace overlooking the leafy courtyard of the conservatory.

STAY

In the past decade, Moscow has become one of the world's most dynamic destinations for business and pleasure travellers. The top international hotels have hardly been able to keep pace with the influx of visitors to the Russian capital. The shortage of accommodation means that prices are high: Moscow hotels are among the most expensive in the world.

Finally, in recent years, the biggest names in hospitality have arrived in Moscow, choosing prime locations and building their five-star facilities from scratch. With a glass and marble exterior, the **Park Hyatt Ararat** (www.moscow.park.hyatt.com) blends effortlessly with its neo-classical neighbours behind the Bolshoi Theatre. On the other side of Red Square, the new **Ritz-Carlton** (www.ritzcarlton.com) occupies a prime location at the bottom of Tverskaya ulitsa. Above-and-beyond service includes experts such as a vodka sommelier and a "nightlife butler" at your disposal (the latter to assist the uninitiated in getting past the strict "face control" at Moscow clubs). Don't miss the rooftop O2 Lounge at the Ritz, offering 360 degrees of unimpeded Moscow views.

Both of these sumptuous sites may be outdone when the **Four Seasons** (www.fourseasons.com) opens its doors later this year. This





long-awaited luxury property occupies the site of the Hotel Moskva, the infamous Soviet institution with the architectural irregularities. The story goes that Stalin was shown two possible designs for the original hotel and – not realising they were alternatives – approved both. The builders did not dare to point out his error, and so built half the hotel in constructivist style and half in Stalinist style. The new Four Seasons is expected to re-create its predecessor’s architectural quirks.

For visitors who prefer a more intimate setting, the **Golden Apple** (www.goldenapple.ru) is Moscow’s first and only boutique hotel. A classical edifice fronts the street, but the interior is modern and minimalist. Featuring funky furniture, fixtures and artwork, the 92 rooms don’t skimp on comfort or design.

To get a taste of the New Russians’ New Russia, book a room at the **Barvikha Hotel & Spa** (www.barvikhahotel.com) on Rublyovka, also due to open later this year. The modern hotel is part of Barvikha Luxury Village, a swanky shopping centre, where local folk might pop in to pick up a Prada handbag, an Armani suit or – why not – a Ferrari Testarossa. The hotel is amazingly understated, offering sophisticated suites with private terraces (for summer) and fireplaces (for winter). The on-site restaurant is by Anatoly Komm, Russia’s only chef with a Michelin star.

PLAY

An evening at the **Bolshoi Theatre** (www.bolshoi.ru) is still one of Moscow’s most romantic and entertaining nights out. There is an electric atmosphere in the glittering six-tier theatre, which is scheduled to re-open in 2008 after a multi-year renovation project. The Bolshoi Ballet & Opera often stages the Russian classics, but in recent years, has also begun premiering contemporary works.

Classical performing arts aside, Moscow nightlife is much about being elite. The trendiest spots are guarded by bouncers who take their job a little too seriously. They use “face control” to keep out potential patrons who won’t enhance the atmosphere at their establishment by

looking fabulous and spending money. If you want to party like a New Russian, you have to look the part. If possible, book a table in advance. Always dress up (especially women!). Arrive by car (preferably big and black). And if all else fails, speak English.

At the time of research, the coolest club in Moscow is **Soho Rooms** (+7 495 988 7474 www.sohorooms.ru), an uber-exclusive nightclub with scantily-clad women, cool music and expensive cocktails. Of course, many clubs in Moscow can boast such things, but only Soho Rooms has a swimming pool and a poolside terrace.

By day, **Simachyov** (+7 495 629 8085) is a boutique and café, owned and operated by the famed fashion designer of the same name. By night, this place becomes a hip-hop-happening nightclub that combines glamour and humor. The toilet-themed decor (seriously!) blends effortlessly with black and white tile floors, velvety drapes and leopard skin rugs. You still have to look sharp to get in here, but at least you can be bohemian about it.

Speaking of bohemian, **The Most** (+7 495 660 0706) has decorated its post-industrial space with Baroque architectural elements. Think gold-framed mirrors bedecking red brick walls, and crystal chandeliers suspended alongside black iron pipes. Girls in gowns groove along the catwalk overlooking the dance floor. The place is co-owned by Roman Abramovich, *the most* rich and famous of all New Russians.

SHOP

Moscow connoisseurs point to **GUM** (+7 495 921 5763) as an example of just how far Russia has come since the collapse of communism. GUM stands for *Gosudarstvenny Universalny Magazin*, or State Department Store. For years, the massive building on Red Square epitomised Soviet

Above: Moscow’s opulent metro; **Right:** The Red Square entrance to the GUM shopping mall.





shortages, with empty shelves, long lines and non-existent service. Nowadays, the place has been transformed into a bright, bustling shopping mall, filled with high-end boutiques and cafés.

Just down the street in Kitay Gorod, **Tretyakovsky Proezd** is Moscow's most exclusive fashion venue. The tiny cobblestone street

Clockwise from top left: Russian fashion turns expensive, with the designs of Slava Zaitsev; Moscow's plush Evropeysky Shopping Centre; The latest luxe goods for dogs on sale in the Evropeysky Shopping Centre.

Lonely Planet Moscow City Guide (USD 19.99)

Delight in the iconic onion domes of St Basil's Cathedral, treat yourself to world-class ballet at the Bolshoi, be dazzled by chandeliers in the metro and get steamed and washed at a banya. This guide contains eating and sleeping options from Georgian cuisine to the best renovated Soviet hotels; the lowdown on clubs, bohemian bars, cafés, opera and ballet; and its insightful coverage puts Moscow's past and present in perspective.

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is flanked by tall towers and iron gates at both ends. Stroll through to see what's on offer at Armani Casa, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Prada and Tiffany. Another stylish strip is **Stoleshnikov Pereulok**, a pedestrian lane lined with boutiques: Burberry, Cartier, Dior, Hermès, Louis Vuitton, and – the wild child of the bunch – the aforementioned Simachyov.

While the European fashion houses still rule the roost, Moscow designers are attracting increasing attention, thanks to designs that incorporate uniquely Russian elements, including furs, fabrics and styles. The best-known

Russian designer is Valentin Yudashkin, whose clothes are on display at the Louvre and the Met, as well as the State History Museum in Moscow (look but don't touch!). If you wish to try something on, head to the **Valentin Yudashkin Boutique** (+7 495 785 1055).

Moscow's art world is developing at an exponential rate, thanks to the economic boom. More willing buyers mean more galleries, which attract more artists engaging in more experimentation. Witness the creative energy firsthand at post-industrial **Winzavod** (+7 495-917 4646, www.winzavod.ru). This former wine-bottling factory was converted into exhibit space, now home to five of Moscow's most prestigious art galleries. /

MOSCOW PLAYLIST ★★★★★

DIMA BILAN
BELIEVE
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
RHAPSODY ON A THEME OF PAGANINI
t.A.T.u.
ALL THE THINGS SHE SAID
PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
1812 OVERTURE
MAKSIM
MOY RAY
SERGEI PROKOFIEV
MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS
JOSEPH KOBZON
INSTANTS
IGOR STRAVINSKY
THE RITE OF SPRING
MARK BERNES
CLOUDS ROSE OVER THE CITY
NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
THE FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE