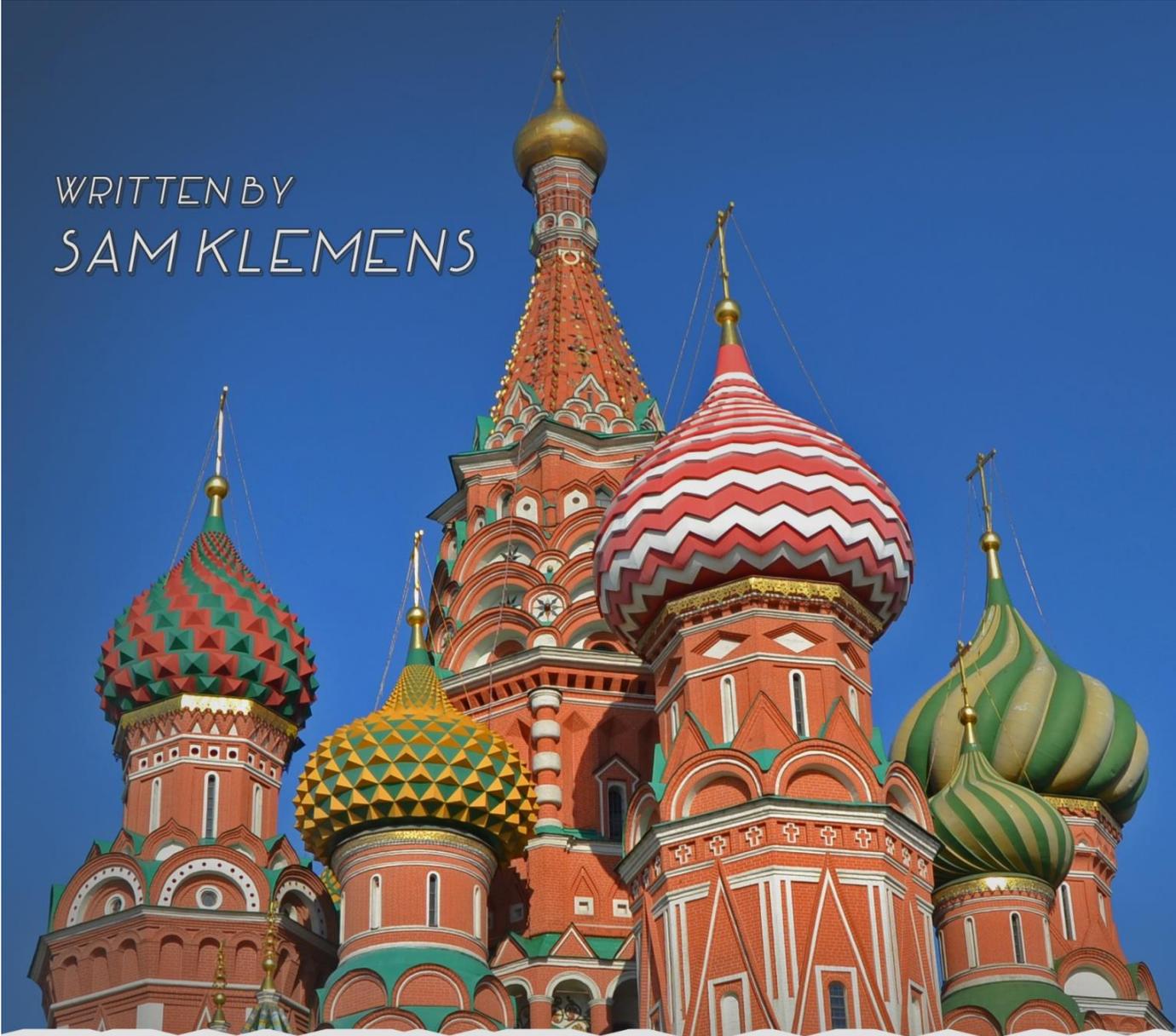


Try the Borsch
By Sam Klemens

WRITTEN BY
SAM KLEMENS



TRY THE BORSCH

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
TEACHING IN RUSSIA

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A Practical Guide to Teaching English in Russia

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Chapter 1

A Brief Review of Teaching in Russia

In Russia, YOU'RE a Valuable Commodity!

A Russian company is going to hire you because you're a native speaker of English. Even if you can't explain the difference between past perfect and past perfect continuous, you still know how to use them correctly in speech.

You're getting the job because students know that when you speak, everything you say is correct. Not only that, but you'll be speaking English naturally, idioms and all. Students prefer being taught in that environment versus learning from sterile textbooks.

While being a native speaker is necessary to get a job, you'll still need to get some qualifications first.

Almost every school you apply to will require a TESL course. A quick Google search reveals dozens of pages of results, so how do you know which one to choose?

Which TESL Course Is Right for Me?

There are two types of TESL courses. Some classes take place over the internet while others offer you a chance to teach students in the classroom.

Online Classes

Virtual courses are inexpensive and offer you the chance to work from home. However, you won't be teaching real students. This is a disadvantage because it's like reading a book about how to ride a horse, without practical application, the knowledge is almost worthless.

When I attended my TESL class, the first lesson lasted twenty minutes. I was so nervous that I ran out of content with two minutes to go. I froze like a deer in the headlights. My face turned the color of a tomato and I couldn't move. That's the type of thing you want to experience in training, not in your first class.

The second disadvantage of an online course is the reputation they have with employers. While looking for a job, you may notice that some postings state "online courses not accepted." Taking an online course is going to disqualify you from some jobs right off the bat.

TL;DR - Online qualifications are not worth the degree that's going to come out of your Epson printer.

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Physical Classes

A better choice is a TESL course where you spend time with real students. In one of these classes, qualified teachers will lead you through the most difficult stage of your teaching career, giving you feedback after each lesson. You will receive anywhere from five to fifteen hours of classroom experience, which is enough to get the jitters out and give you some confidence standing in front of students.

Before you select a course, search Google for reviews. If you can't find any positive reviews from past students, it's best to look elsewhere. There are plenty of good TESL courses; you don't have to settle for a mediocre one.

The Heavy Hitter

The Cadillac of TESL courses is called the CELTA. At \$2,700, it's twice as much as other classes. The reason you should consider paying for the CELTA is because it's backed by Oxford University, and is recognized from Bangkok to Moscow. If you have a CELTA, any language school you apply to is going to shortlist you immediately.

When it's time to decide, the question should be: is it worth the price? That depends on your plans. If you think you'll teach in Russia for a year then return home, absolutely not. You will easily find a job in Moscow without a CELTA.

On the other hand, if you have aspirations of teaching for several years, or trying to break into the market in a tougher country (France, Germany, Finland or Sweden), having a CELTA will be a huge advantage.

Sit Down and Shut Up! Teaching Kids in Russia

Teaching children is astronomically different than teaching adults. Adults study English because they want to learn. Kids are in the classroom because their parents think it's a good idea. The result is that children can and will act like rabid raccoons.

Creating an environment where kids can learn distills to this: teach them something then play games. Repeat this cycle for the whole lesson and your students will love you. Try to get them to listen to anything for more than a couple of minutes and they will hate you.

As a new ESL teacher you'll likely end up teaching kids. Senior staff at your future school have likely pegged out as many adult classes as possible, leaving you with the remainder. Despite the challenges, kids can be fun. They're always exciting and you know that every class is going to fly by.

What Makes a Teacher Awesome?

One of the misconceptions about teaching is that it's simple. People often think that as long as you aren't afraid of public speaking, you'll be a competent teacher from the get go.

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No so much.

Most teachers will tell you that during the first six months, the quality of your lessons is far from ideal. That being said, it's a stage that everybody has gone through. I've met some amazing teachers and their story is the same; in the beginning, nobody is good.

Thankfully, it's not something you have to worry about. Your DOS (Director of Studies) has been around the block. He/she knows that when one hires a new teacher, even a teacher who has taken a TESL course, they are going to suck in the beginning. As long as you get better with time, you'll be in your boss's good graces.

Three Skills You Will Learn In the Classroom

Teaching is not a one way street. In the classroom, you are going to develop some skills that you will carry with you for the rest of your life.

For example..

People Skills

You're going to develop your empathy. This skill grows from seeing students not understand material. When that happens, they become withdrawn and they dodge your attention. As a teacher, you will quickly learn to pick up on this and find a way to reengage them.

Outside of the classroom, you will find it easier to read changes in people's moods. The ability to read these shifts and act accordingly is wicked useful, especially when dealing with girls. They are naturally good at this, but for boys it's a skill that many have to learn.

Reading Learning Styles

In the classroom, you will work with students who don't learn effectively from reading. They may read a passage, answer a few questions and then forget everything in thirty seconds. If you let that same student listen to the passage, they will remember it significantly better.

Outside the classroom, this skill will help you in two ways.

First, you will be able to identify in yourself what the most effective way to learn is. You probably already have some idea, but that idea will grow into a conviction as you learn how to turbo-charge your own learning process.

Second, you'll be able to quickly detect the learning style of other people: friends, family and business acquaintances. When it's time to make a presentation to your boss, you can tailor the material to him. You'll get your message across better and he'll remember you as the guy who gave a great presentation.

Preparation is King

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Every week you will only spend about twenty-four hours in the classroom. The other sixteen hours of your workweek will be spent making lesson plans. You use these plans to ensure you cover all the material in an interesting and effective way.

At first, you may not understand why a lesson plan is important. However, with time you will realize they determine how effective you are in the classroom. Teaching is not standing up in front of your students and winging it. Instead, it's a steady process of working through your lesson plan.

After seeing the value in a lesson plan, you will see the value in planning for everything you do in life. When you prepare beforehand you learn the material by heart. That frees up your cognitive resources to be light and witty when it counts. Without a plan, you have to work to just get the message out that you don't have any resources left to be charismatic. Teaching is a great way to learn the power of approaching life with a plan.

Chapter 2

Finding a Job in Russia

Finding Your First Job Is Exciting!

Thankfully, the requirements for a teacher in Russia are low.

- 1) Native Speaker
- 2) University Degree
- 3) TESL Course

If you meet these criteria, you'll probably want to know when the best time to apply for a job is. There are two popular times for English teachers to start. The beginning of September and the beginning of January.

Jobs that start in September often start advertising in the beginning of May. The Visa application for Russia takes about fifty days and schools like to leave a cushion.

There will be lots of job postings, and plenty of companies will want you. If you have plans to take a TESL course over the summer, apply before you have completed it. Most companies will conditionally hire you on the stipulation that you complete the course in good standing.

Job Postings

More than 90% of current English teachers found their job from one of these two sites.

<http://www.eslcafe.com/joblist>

Dave's ESL forum has a comprehensive list of ESL jobs, nearly a dozen new job postings appear every day. It is widely recognized in the Expat community and every TESL teacher and school knows about it.

The Russian forum has an active community of teachers who will answer your questions.

<http://www.teachinghouse.com/english-teaching-jobs>

The Teaching House website is also a good resource. It doesn't have quite the volume of Dave's ESL Job list, but there are a couple of schools that post exclusively on this database.

4 Steps to Write the Perfect Resume

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1) Keep it short and sweet. A language school doesn't care that you worked at Burger King for three months when you were seventeen. List relevant experience and play up areas that may interest them. In particular, lay out Russian courses so it's obvious what you have studied. This is what my resume looks like:

- Introduction to Russian, two semesters
- Intermediate Russian, two semesters
- Oral Russian, one semester

That looks better than mentioning you were captain of the chess club in eleventh grade. If you didn't study Russian, no worries; most schools don't want you to speak Russian in the classroom, anyway.

2) Proofread the living hell out of it! You're going to teach English grammar and spelling. Sending in a resume with poor grammar is an easy way to get rejected.

Do you know the difference between "it's" and "its," or "were" and "we're"? If yes, make sure everything is in order. If not, have someone who knows the difference look it over. The person who is going to read your resume has been teaching for half a dozen years; they are a Yoda of English grammar.

3) Some schools you apply to may ask for a recent picture. This isn't so they can reject you if you're overweight or have yellow teeth. It's simply a chance for them to see that you can take a professional picture and look good. You're going to be standing in front of students all day and representing the school, so they want to make sure you can present yourself well.

If you don't have a good picture, put on a button down and go take one. Face the camera, neutral background and a neutral expression.

4) If a school asks for references, make sure they are suitable. If you want to list your Russian teacher as a reference, that's fine. If you have job experience and can list your boss that's good too, so long as he is going to say good things about you!

What you don't want to do is list someone in your family. Even if it's a family business that you've worked for, it doesn't matter.

Finally, *REMEMBER...*

You have the upper hand when it comes to employment. English schools in Russia have to recruit new foreigners every year, and with the current political situation, it's harder to do. As long as you present yourself well and apply early in the seasons, when many schools still have spots to fill, you will likely be offered several jobs. From there, you can pick which one suits you best. To give you an insider's look at what matters, here is...

8 Things to Consider When Picking a School

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1) Number of teaching hours a week. Teaching is difficult, especially at first. You're going to want to find a job that doesn't overload you. Personally, I wouldn't want to work more than twenty-eight academic hours a week, thirty hours is too much in my opinion.

The first few months you'll spend most of your waking hours at school, planning and teaching lessons. Before you get the hang of things, planning lessons is going to take you three times as long as it will after six months.

Key questions

"How many academic hours will I be expected to work every week?"

"Can I be forced to work overtime if I don't agree to it?"

2) Teaching on or off-site. Every language school in Russia has a central office. That office will have classrooms where classes are taught and where you prepare your lessons. However, many schools send their teachers off-site to businesses or state schools.

For you, that means the extra hassle of carrying all your materials, along with a great deal of unpaid travel time each week. During the interview, you want to find out where you will be expected to work. Teaching off-site isn't the end of the world, but it's nicer to not have to leave the office.

Key questions

"Will I ever be expected to teach offsite?"

"Is it in my contract that I will never go offsite?"

3) Ideally, you want a school that offers you support and has a nice office. Is there a photocopier and are there extra materials? Is there a way to print exercises off the internet? Is there a break room with a microwave, kettle and coffee? Once you arrive in Russia, these amenities will make a big difference in your life.

You should also find out: do the secretaries speak English? This can be a blessing and a curse. If they don't speak English, you will be forced to speak Russian, which is what you want I'm assuming.

On the other hand, sometimes you really just need to ask a question that you can't express in Russian. When that happens, it's great to have at least one receptionist who speaks English.

Another question you want to be clear on: is the origin of your DOS (Director of Studies, the universal term for a language teacher's boss) a native English speaker? If he/she's not, I would advise against working for that school. It's not the language barrier, as many Russians speak brilliant English, but the culture.

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You want a boss who understands western culture and who can commiserate with you on the seemingly irrational things that Russians do. If your DOS is Russian, he/she's more likely to view odd Russian behavior as normal and not take action.

Key questions

"Is there a photocopier and can I print materials from the internet?"

"Is there a well-stocked break room with a microwave and fridge?"

"Do any of the secretaries speak English?"

"Will I have my own room for planning lessons?"

"Where is my DOS from?" - Alternatively, you will likely ask "Where are you from?" As the DOS is likely the one conducting the interview.

4) Where is the school located? Is it in Moscow on the Metro or is it in a satellite town? If the school is not directly in Moscow, find out how long it will take to get to Moscow.

You will also want to find out how far your apartment will be from work. A daily commute of an hour adds up quickly! I have the sweetest deal in the world; I can walk from my front door to my school in 45 seconds. However, most schools will require a longer commute than that.

Key questions

- "Where is the school located? Is it in Moscow and accessible by Metro?"

- If the school is outside of Moscow. "How long will it take to get into Moscow?"

- "How far will my flat be from the school?"

- If the flat is in Moscow or if you will be teaching offsite. "Is a monthly Metro Card provided?"

5) Most schools pay for your flat, but it's a good idea to find out about the details. As for the quality of the flat, it lays in the hands of providence. Some Russian flats are amazing. Others live up to every stereotype. Ultimately, your school wants you to stay and they are going to try to pick a flat that will make you happy.

Key questions

"Will I have my own bedroom?"

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"How many roommates will I have?"

"What utilities are paid for and what will I need to pay myself?"

"If there is a problem will the school help me sort it out?"

6) From your DOS, you should be able to find out who you'll be expected to teach. For example, some schools focus primarily on children, while others teach only business English to adults. Some schools won't even teach below the intermediate level.

If you bring up the question during the interview, you may be able to request a certain type of student. However, if you're a new teacher, you likely won't have much to say in the matter. Your school is hiring you without any experience and in return, they will expect you to teach whoever they give you.

Key Questions

- "What age level will I primarily be teaching?"

- "Will I be expected to teach Business English?"

7) I'm assuming that since you have chosen Russia, you are interested in learning the language. To that end, you should ask about Russian lessons during the interview. Many schools offer Russian lessons, but there are a few particulars you should enquire about.

Key questions

- "Are Russian lessons free or will I be expected to pay 50% of the cost?"

- "How many times a week do lessons take place?"

- "Do you have a real, competent Russian teacher?"

- "Will I be able to take Russian lessons that tailor to my level?" (Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate)

8) At the bottom of the list is everything else. It's not that the following details hold no merit in themselves. Instead, it's simply that almost every single school offers the same deal.

Most schools will give you a twenty dollar Nokia cell phone when you arrive in Russia. However, I recommend that you buy a globally unlocked smart phone before leaving. Data plans are cheap and it's wicked useful to have a smartphone when navigating in Moscow.

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Also, almost every school will offer you some form of health insurance. Personally, I have no idea how to use mine or whether it's even worth anything. This may be something you wish to inquire into during the interview.

Finally, most schools you apply to will pay for your plane ticket and the costs of your Visa. The only question you may want to ask is when those costs will be reimbursed. At my school, I got half of the reimbursement after working five months and I will get the remainder when I finish my contract.

Key questions

- "Will there be someone to help me set up my phone / will there be a phone provided?"

- "Is there health insurance? How the hell does it work?"

- "Do you reimburse for plane tickets and Visa? When?"

- "Is there an end of the year bonus?"

- "Are teachers expected to get students to only speak English in the classroom?"

- "Will I have two consecutive days off?"

- "Will I have Fridays off?"

- "Will I have the same schedule every week?"

- "When I arrive in Russia, will there be a training program?"

- "How often will I get my paycheck?"

Chapter 3

Preparing for Russia

There and Back Again; The Russian Visa Process

Getting a Russian Visa is only slightly easier than winning a medal at the summer Olympics. For whatever reason, historical or otherwise, Russia does not make it easy for westerners to visit. That's bad news if you want to come as a tourist or freelancer.

As a teacher, the good news is that your school is going to take care of the most complicated bits of the Visa process. They will handle the paperwork in Russia then send you an invitation. After you receive it from DHL, there will be several things you'll have to do.

You're going to need an HIV test. Unfortunately, and I learned this the hard way, not all HIV tests are created equal. When I was applying for my Russian Visa, I went to the New York City public health clinic.

After two depressing hours, spent in the company of people who were not receiving negative results on their tests, I got my negative confirmation and had them authorize it on a sheet of paper.

When I presented that piece of paper to the authorities, they said it was not good enough. A quick test, which is what they offer in most public clinics, is not acceptable. You need a full blood work HIV test. This type of test is only available through a hospital or your doctor. When you get the result back, ask for a printed copy and make sure it looks official.

Also, check to make sure your passport is in good condition. When I was applying for my Visa, I saw a French woman get rejected because her passport had a rip in it. A problem that she loudly announced half a dozen other countries had no problem with. The Russians are incredibly picky and they will quickly reject you for small inconsistencies.

Using ILS is a Smart Choice

ILS is a Russia visa processing service with branches in the United States and several European countries. They offer a distinct advantage versus taking your paperwork to the Russian embassy.

First, you are going to be speaking with someone who knows English. Second, they will look over your Visa application and make sure everything is in order. The service will probably cost you about \$200 and expect to pay in cash.

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The average Visa takes about two weeks to come in. If you're like me, you will be on edge the whole time, thinking of all the reasons the Russians may reject you. But fret not, a Russian applying for a Visa to Europe or the United States has a more justified cause for worry than you do.

Also, ILS will offer to rush the whole process. It will cost you an extra \$100 but you'll have your Visa in three days. If you're worried about timing it's a good option. You can send your DOS an email asking if they will cover the extra \$100. However, remember that you may not be reimbursed for at least several months.

To learn more, go to

<http://www.ils-usa.com/>

Have You Ever Met a Colorfully Dressed Russia?

I wish I had had the following advice when I was naive. Before I came to Russia, I bought half a dozen colorful button down shirts from Banana Republic. Then I arrived in Moscow and realized that these shirts made me instantly recognizable as an American. Russians wear almost exclusively muted, solid colors. That means dark blue, grey, dark red and dark purple shirts are the order of the day.

When I was growing up, my dad always told me and my sister: "never say never." That being said, Russians never wear baggy clothes. Clothing here hug the body and that includes your pants. Skinny jeans are fine and your work trousers should be fairly tight as well.

You'll also notice that Russians wear dress shoes everywhere. As a teacher, you will be expected to wear them in the classroom. If I could start over, I would have bought two comfortable pairs of dress shoes to bring to Russia. One pair for the classroom and one pair for Moscow.

Packing for the Russian Winter

Pack boots. They will add five or six pounds to your suitcase but it's worth it. Boots are expensive in Russia and you may not be able to find ones that fit well or are decent quality.

You can bring your own coat or buy one here, that's really up to you. However, I would recommend bringing sweaters. During the Russian winter sweaters are a way of life. Just about every person you meet will be wearing one.

They also offer this awesome benefit: you can wear a sweater in the classroom and as long as you keep it on the whole class, it doesn't matter what shirt you wear underneath. All your dress shirts are dirty? Put a sweater over anything and bam! Problem solved.

Western Products in Russia

You may have the impression that because of the sanctions, you won't be able to find many Western products. Generally, that's not the case. Many products that you know will be here. I'll list a few off the

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top of my head: Old Spice, Axe, RedBull, 5 Gum, Pepsi, Budweiser, Stella, Lays, Skittles, H&M, Starbucks, AMP, Captain Morgan and Heinz. Everything is priced about the same as home.

The exception to this rule are high value items. That means smart phones, laptops, cameras and iPhones in particular. I would definitely recommend buying any of those products at home. Bringing a spare laptop charger and battery would probably be a great idea as well. Since you can buy a new laptop charger for \$15 on eBay, there's no excuse not to.

Finally, you'll want to buy plug adapters before leaving home. A Google search will reveal what kind of plug adapters are correct. You shouldn't pay more than \$15 for a six pack.

Final Checklist, Don't Leave Home Without..

- Winter boots
- Sweaters
- Muted, single color button downs
- Comfortable dress shoes, black
- Form fitting jeans and work trousers
- Headphones
- International smartphone
- Plug adapters
- Spare laptop / phone charger
- Oreos
- A watch
- Toothbrushes
- A backpack
- A camera
- Your sense of adventure

Chapter 4

Engaging in Russian Culture

The First Three Days

I remember mine fondly. After I got out of the airport I could hardly believe I was in Russia. My new boss collected me from customs and helped me put my heavy bag in the trunk. As we hurtled down the highway towards my flat, I stared out the window of the car and patted myself on the back for achieving my goal.

Then I didn't eat for twenty-four hours because I was too nervous to leave my apartment and find a grocery store. Hopefully the spirit of adventure will be more alive with you than it was with me

After you move into your flat, you'll probably find out that you don't live far from a grocery store. Personally, I'm within five minutes of four of them. That's an unusually high number but you'll probably be close to at least two. Hopefully you'll also be lucky enough to find a продукты (literally translated as "products"). That's the universal name for small Russian convenience stores.

At your local продукты you will find beer, soda, a small selection of real food and lots of sweets. Some sell liquor and some don't. Shopping at your продукты is usually marginally more expensive than a grocery store but you pay for the convenience. You never have to wait in lines and you can walk in without having to put your backpack into a locker.

Getting Around Moscow

After a few days in Moscow, you'll learn that the Metro is brilliant. It's ridiculously easy to use and it works flawlessly. In New York, you can expect to wait ten or fifteen minutes for a train. In Moscow, anything over five minutes is unheard of.

The lines are coded by color and getting around is made easy by one convenient tool: the Yandex Metro App. It displays an overlay of all the Metro lines and connections, making navigation a piece of cake.

5 Ways to Get the Most out of Your Time in Country

You've decided to live in a foreign country, you had the choice of taking the easy way out and going to Thailand. Instead you choose the motherland. Now that you're here, it's time to get the full experience.

1) Find a girlfriend. I've seen a couple of guys go without a girlfriend for more than half a year and it's sad. They are missing out on a wonderful opportunity to not only spend time with a girl, but to learn

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more about the culture and improve their Russian. I found a girlfriend not because I have better game, but because I had more persistence. I went on a half a dozen failed dates before I met with success.

2) Don't be afraid to use your students to help you study Russian. Now this is a contentious point. Some people may object heavily to it, I can anticipate that. Perhaps it's just because I'm in a unique circumstance.

As I teach in Russian State Schools, I don't have my own personal classroom. Thus, students take the liberty of showing up to class fifteen minutes before it starts. When that happens, Russian language lessons begin. I point at things and says

"как будет по-русски?"

My students love the chance to be the teacher. They take it very seriously and we all have a wonderful time. As long as you draw the line and make it clear that English class is for learning English, anything goes before class starts.

3) Attend the Couchsurfing events. They are almost always awesome; after seven months I can only recall two or three events where I didn't enjoy myself. That's a way better percentage than frat parties in college! At these events you are going to meet awesome people who will enthusiastically help you learn Russian (learn more about the events in Chapter 5).

On the other hand, if you want to kick back and speak English, you will be the center of attention. Over the course of ten minutes a group of Russians will form around you and you'll feel like a king. However, once a group forms, it will be nearly impossible to switch it over to Russian. If you are attending these events with the vested interest in speaking Russian, speak that beautiful language from the get-go.

4) Don't bitch about the culture. Russia is a totally different place than back home. You're going to love some parts of it and hate others. There's no point in dwelling on the points you wish you could change. If you need to, you can always reframe the annoying parts of the culture as funny. Russians will do some strangely irrational things that can be hilarious when viewed from the right perspective.

No matter what happens, remember that there are plenty of Russians who would like to go to Europe or America. It's more difficult for them to leave Russia than it is for you to come here.

5) Study the language. You are in Russia, you should be learning Russian. Not only is it enjoyable, it also gives you a higher purpose in being here. I've noticed that teachers who don't study the language seem to be more disillusioned than those that do. Without the language, Russia is just another place. Sure, you'll still get to experience a lot, but that experience will be lacking depth.

Chapter 5

Social Recreation in Moscow

Meeting Women

The rumors are true; Russian women are stunning. Not only that, but in Moscow they are everywhere. Riding through the Moscow Metro often feels like being at a photo-shoot. As a foreigner you have a distinct advantage over the local guys. Let's take a look at how you can meet someone cool.

Tinder has netted me several dates and it's how I met my first girlfriend. Generally, Tinder catches a bad rap, probably because many of the girls who use it are unattractive. This is not the case in Russia. Swiping through Russian girls on Tinder is a pleasure. Another option is OkCupid. If you write girls in English, you are immediately going to stand out.

If meeting a girl online isn't your style, there are great opportunities to meet girls in person. Several teachers I know have turned students into girlfriends. If you have older students, it's not as frowned upon as it may be in Western countries.

But the best option are the expat events (see below). These meet-ups are packed with Russians and it's a great way to meet a girlfriend. You'll know that she's interested in learning English and probably already speaks it quite well.

Russian, Do You Speak It?

Unless you speak Russian at an intermediate level, every girl you meet is going to speak better English than you speak Russian. When two people speak different native languages, the language you communicate in defaults to the easiest. If she speaks great English, expect that you will talk to each other in English.

If you are serious about learning Russian, you should make it clear you want to spend some time speaking in Russian. If you never bring it up, she will never think of it. Just like with anything else in a relationship, it's important to make it clear what you want.

Dating a Russian Girl

There's not really much too it. If you are getting along well enough, ask her out! See below for a list of ideas for where you can take her. Wherever you go, there are several things you should be aware of when it comes to Russian women.

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Expect to pay for everything on dates. During the five months I was with my girlfriend, she paid for our food twice. On those two occasions, she paid only because I had spent a good deal of money earlier. In Russia, the man pays. However, there is a flip side to his.

At home, your girlfriend is going to cook for you and you won't be expected to do the dishes. When you spend time with her, you can expect to be lazy while she takes care of household chores. In many ways, Russia is like the United States during the nineteen-fifties.

Another aspect of this traditional view on dating is texting and calling. Russian women are going to expect you to text and call them first. You shouldn't take it personally if your girlfriend doesn't hit you up that often. Russian women, in general, take less initiative than western girls.

It's a good idea to call your girlfriend, Russians make lots of phone calls. They are used to talking on the phone and probably more comfortable with it than most westerners are.

Recreation in Moscow

There are fifteen million people in Moscow! That's twice the population of New York City, and with so many people, there's always lots to do.

I love Moscow because there are a variety of restaurants and bars. Unlike New York City, most of these places are affordable. Bars are only minutes from Red Square and cheap enough for the working man.

Being a fan of social drinking environments, I've sampled at least a dozen different places in Moscow. I'll put my knowledge to work for you.

Great Places for a Meeting up With People

Papa's Place

Papa's place is the most well known restaurant / bar in Moscow. Everyone under the age of thirty has been here at least once. The atmosphere is awesome. The first time you walk down into Papa's place you're probably going to think it's the coolest place you've ever been.

Even though it's only a five minute walk from Red Square, the drinks are affordable and the food is great. I definitely recommend the pizza.

Papa's is the ideal spot for a date because it's cool, you can pay without breaking the bank, and afterwards you can walk down to Red Square.

Cafe Didu

Despite being called a cafe, I've never bought a single item off their menu that wasn't brewed from hops. This is a cafe that looks like it came straight out of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The best part of Cafe Didu is that when you sit down, they give you a handful of colored clay to work with. You'll notice immediately that the walls are covered in tiny clay sculptures and you can stick yours up when you're done.

Try the Borsch

By Sam Klemens

This is a stroke of genius for a date because it makes it so easy to glide through normally awkward silences. Both of you have something to do with your hands and if things get quiet, you can always make fun of your girl for making a stupid clay whatever.

Any Sushi Restaurant Ever

Russians love Sushi. I've read that there are more sushi restaurants in Moscow than there are in Tokyo. Impossible to verify but it sure seems like it could be true. They are great for dates because the food is tasty, most have a great atmosphere, serve alcohol, and the prices are reasonable.

I've taken out maybe eight girls and half of all those dates were to Sushi restaurants. It hardly matters which one. But if you don't know where to go, Google search for one close to Red Square, that way if the date is going well, you can always go there afterwards.

Кафе Джаганнат

This is another staple in Moscow. It's so popular with women in particular that in a city of fifteen million, two of my coworkers randomly ran into each other here, both of them on dates. It serves delicious vegetarian, Indian food and the atmosphere is great. Girls also love it!

Not only that, but it's reasonably priced and only ten minutes from Red Square. The only drawback is that they don't serve alcohol. However, it's only three minutes from the next place on our list, Komchatka.

Places to Party

Komchatka

Another basement bar, but that's about all it has in common with Papa's. Komchatka is small, overcrowded and the food is average. Excited to go there? You should be! On the weekend, it's a popular destination. It's the cheapest beer in Moscow and less than ten minutes from Red Square.

Cafe Libre

This may be my favorite spot for dancing in all of Moscow. It's got an awesome, albeit small, floor space that is ringed by a bar, couches and some tables. There is a DJ and every time I've gone there the quality of girls has been mind-blowing. It's only three minutes from Komchatka and ten minutes from Papa's.

Events

Every weekend there are numerous events, all originating from the Couchsurfing website:

www.CouchSurfing.com

If you are not a member yet, you should sign up now. The following events can be found on the website along with many others.

Try the Borsch

By Sam Klemens

Language Exchange (Every Sunday)

This is Moscow's favorite gathering. It's by far the largest event, as it's rare for less than fifty people to show up. Expect to meet foreigners of all sorts: Americans, Europeans, and, of course, lots of Russians. Most people are going to speak English, so if you want to practice Russian, you need to make that clear.

Anti-Boring Friday

Unlike Language Exchange, Anti-Boring Friday changes venues nearly every week. The organizers have both been in Moscow for years and they know the city's nightlife like Justin Bieber knows drama. Anti-Boring Friday is smaller than Language Exchange and the focus is on drinking.

You'll still find great opportunities to practice your Russian but as most events are held in loud bars, it's usually more difficult. I like to think of Anti-Boring Friday as a weekly party where you can trust the hosts will always find a place with cheap drinks.

Outdoor Recreation

During the summer Moscow is significantly greener than New York. You'll probably be amazed by how many parks there are throughout the city. In America, we would have demolished them in the name of infrastructure long ago.

While consuming alcohol in public in Russia is ostensibly illegal, you will notice that many people flout that law, just as people in America smoke marijuana in public. If you choose to join the outdoor party, there are a couple of unwritten rules that will help you out.

Don't drink around kids and families. It's beyond rude and you're way more likely to get reprimanded for doing so. Additionally, don't get drunk in public. If you're buzzed and want to keep drinking, find a bar. There are probably a thousand bars in Moscow and they open early.

The Central Park of Moscow

Another good rule to follow is no drinking in Park Gorky. It's a family orientated park and many Russians have no wish to see it filled with people drinking beer and vodka.

Speaking of it though, Park Gorky is fantastic! It's huge and beautiful in summer. There are benches everywhere, flowers, and even large bean bags the size of cars to sit on. What a great idea! My favorite thing that I've ever done in Park Gorky is long boarding.

There is a shop that rents long boards and a girl took me there once. We rode all over Park Gorky and I had the time of my life. If you're into the same, I'm sure a quick Google search will bring up the information. If not, you can always ask around. Somebody will know about it.

As for drinking, there is a fantastic park just off of the Metro station Чистые Пруды (Clean Ponds). It's the unofficial drinking spot and if you bring one of Russia's famous two liter beers there, you won't stand out. In summertime people go there to hang out, smoke cigarettes, ride skateboards, and drink.

Chapter 6

Current Attitudes and FAQ

The Second Cold War

News outlets on both sides have hyped this conflict, giving it more attention than it deserves. It's been a boon to the industry, but unfortunately it's left many people with a skewed opinion about Russia.

Take a step back and look at this conflict from a Russian's perspective. They feel like they have a right to take back Ukraine and they also feel like the West has no right to be a bully, so far from its sphere of influence. Once you come to appreciate Russian culture, you will understand that Russians can be aggressive and they dislike being backed into a corner. It's a tumultuous period in history, but there is some good news for you.

The situation in Ukraine has nearly no effect on day to day life in Moscow. Moscow is safe and the people are still kind. In my experience, Russians are warm, welcoming, and interested to find out why a westerner would choose to live in Russia. They will ask you all sorts of questions and take a genuine interest in your answer.

As for the sanctions, they have had a very small discernible impact on daily life. Everything is now about 20% more expensive, but the same products are still available on the shelves. When I think about it, I can't name a single western product that I can no longer buy.

A Note on Staying Safe

As a whole, Moscow is a very safe place to live. However, there are still a few simple things you can do to make sure you don't get into any trouble.

To stay inconspicuous, you shouldn't go around loudly speaking English. This is especially true on the Metro and any other form of public transport. You don't want a busload of people looking at you funny; it's not a comfortable position to be in. If you're going to speak in English, keep it subdued. Or better yet, practice your Russian. If you don't give people a chance to single you out, you're not going to have any problems.

FAQ

What products can I buy / not buy?

Try the Borsch

By Sam Klemens

-Most western products are readily available in Russia. If there isn't a particular product that you are used to, there is probably a Russian equivalent. Don't expect to find Oreos, they are an unknown commodity here.

Are Russian women really that beautiful?

-Yes, the rumors are true. Russian women are significantly more attractive than western girls. Not only that, but there are cute women everywhere. It's a wonderful place to be a guy.

Do Russian guys drink a lot?

-Many Russian men drink a great deal. Public drunkenness is tolerated here, you'll pass people at 10 in the morning who are already clutching a beer. Russian women tend to drink less, but when they do drink, they can keep up with the guys.

Can you bribe your way out of anything?

-Perhaps, but ideally you never want to be in a situation where a bribe is necessary. It's important to realize that while drinking in public is Russia's national past time, it's technically illegal. If a cop is hanging around, hide the beer.

Is the winter terrible?

-That depends. My first Russian winter was mild while the winter in New York killed people. Next year it may be the other way around, you never know. However, there is one great upside. Russian apartments are wonderfully hot in the winter; you will never have to worry about being cold inside.

Is Russian driving really like the videos?

-It most certainly can be. I've seen some of the most exhilarating examples of horrible driving imaginable. Russians don't view bad driving in the same light as westerners. It's a normalized behavior here.

Are there a lot of foreigners in Moscow?

-At the Couchsurfing events of course. Outside of that, not so much. It's very rare to hear English spoken on the street. You won't find foreign friends unless you seek them out.

Can you drink in public?

-While technically illegal, many people do it anyways. A good rule of thumb is that if you see someone else drinking, you can too. Just keep an eye out for cops and have a place to stash the alcohol.

Is alcohol cheap?

-Vodka is very cheap. A bottle of Stolichnaya that costs \$20 in the United States will cost you about \$4 in Russia. Beer is about the same price as in western countries.

Try the Borsch

By Sam Klemens

What will I miss about home?

-Understanding everything that is happening around you. Up this point in your life, you've probably taken for granted that you can read every sign, understand gossip on the subway, or order a sandwich without any trouble. When you get to Russia, you will understand significantly less than you are used to.

For example: If you don't know the word for mustard, unless you point and grunt, you won't have a way of getting mustard on your hotdog. Small things like this add up over time and they will make you nostalgic for the times when life was easy.

How difficult is the Russian language?

-It's a doozy, there's no doubt about it. It's easier for a Russian to learn English than the other way around (Russians will adamantly deny this, don't listen to them). However, here's the good news.

Almost every Russian you meet will be happy to help you learn the language. They will be patient, tolerate terrible grammar, and offer you encouragement. I've heard that in other countries people are not as accommodating. It's been my experience that every Russian has a little bit of teacher in them.

Is it hard living without speaking the language?

-Sometimes yes, sometimes no. As long as you can read Cyrillic and have a very basic grasp of the language you'll be fine. Russians don't engage in small talk at shops so you don't have to worry about awkward conversations. If you learn nothing else before coming to Russia, learn the numbers up to a thousand. That will prove very useful.

What customs should I be aware of?

-Men are expected to help women. That means carrying heavy stuff up the stairs for random women at the Metro or giving up your seat to a grandmother. Also, you'll be expected to pay for women when you go on dates.

Russia is like the Wild West; men still get into fights and reputation is important. Don't write checks you aren't willing to cash. That guy at the bar will punch you. However, you have to ask for it to get it. If you're reckless, bold, and pushy, expect to reap your reward. If you're just having a good time, nobody is going to bother you.

How amazing is borsch?

-It is the nectar of the gods! Borsch with sour cream is the most amazing soup in the world. As a rule I'm not a soup guy. I set that rule aside when it comes to borsch. Awesome stuff, I recommend you eat it every chance you get.

What are the downsides of Russian culture?

Try the Borsch

By Sam Klemens

-Things are shoddily made. For example, my flat is less than a year old and we already have half a dozen problems with it. Another example, have you ever seen a Lada outside of Eastern Europe? That's because nobody wants a Russian automobile. Russian manufacturing leaves something to be desired.

When is the best time to apply for jobs?

-From April till the end of June for a September start. October to the end of November for a January start. However, as teachers quit or are fired, you will see intermittent posts for jobs throughout the year.

Will I be able to save money in Russia?

-That depends entirely on your lifestyle. Since the day I got here I've been able to save half of my paycheck. I eat well enough, pay for girls on the weekends, and still save. So yes, absolutely. However, if money isn't that important to you, you'll be able to go to nicer clubs and bars than I can afford.

How difficult is it to exchange Rubles to Dollars or Euros?

-Easiest thing in the world. Now, how to get those dollars back home? Therein lies the challenge to which I have not yet found the answer.

What's the best part of being in Russia?

-Experiencing the culture and learning a new language. Drinking on the train along with six other random guys, everyone watching for cops and signaling to each other if they are coming. Trying new food and being pleasantly surprised by how good it is. Seeing beautiful women everywhere. Receiving an undue amount of attention as a foreigner. Not having to tip if the service is shitty. Meeting people who fluently speak three or four languages.

Is Moscow Safe?

-Absolutely. You would have to seek out danger as 99% of the places you are likely to go are perfectly safe. It's a great city.

What are some tips on staying out of trouble?

-Do not advertise the fact that you are a foreigner. If you choose to speak English on the Metro, do it quietly. Yelling English on the streets, at your friend fifty feet away, would generally be considered a bad idea. Yelling at him in Russian, totally cool.

Try the Borsch
By Sam Klemens

About Me

For the last eight months I've been living on the outskirts of Moscow. At the time of writing this, I speak pre-intermediate Russian, however, it's likely that by the time you read this I will be fluent in the language.

When I'm not teaching kids English or studying Russian, I'm reading or writing. I enjoy both equally and pursue them daily. I also enjoy watching American Dad in Russian, and South Park in English.

If learning Russian is something you're interested in, I've written a short fifteen page guide. The information is useful and vetted by me. I expect to have this guide edited and published by the end of July, 2015. To read more of my writing, go to:

www.SamKlemens.com

I write a daily blog on a variety of topics.
Thanks for reading this book,
I hope you enjoyed it!

-Sam (LetsLiveInteresting@gmail.com)

