**A Short Guide to Moscow**

Overview: In my view, the best tourist sites in Moscow – such as the Kremlin, Red Square, and St. Basil’s Cathedral (onion domed church in Red Square) are easily 5-star, can’t miss tourist attractions. After that, there are also a number of other worthwhile things to do and see, but the quality drops off considerably. A number of the day-trips and sites listed in a typical tourist guide are quite skippable, in my view.

Best Tourist Sites:

* The **Kremlin** and **Armoury**: These are can’t miss, 5-star tourist attractions. The kremlin is a fortress built just before 1500 and has been the seat of political power since the Bolsheviks returned the capital to Moscow. One thing to note is that it is best to buy Armoury [tickets online](http://tickets.kreml.ru/en/) **at least 5 days in advance (for busy season, mid-winter is easier)**! I’m also happy to purchase them for you as well if you have trouble online.
* Near the Kremlin is **Red Square**, which includes **St. Basil’s Cathedral** (also can’t miss), and **Lenin’s Tomb**. Lenin’s tomb opens at 10AM. A line forms in advance, so I guess the best time to minimize wait at Lenin’s tomb is approximately 10:45 AM. Walking around the Kremlin and Red Square is a must. Across the street is the **Bolshoi Theater** (once again, better to buy ballet tickets in advance!) In Red Square is also the famous department store “**GUM**”. Walking through it is also worthwhile. A few blocks away is “TSUM” another famous department store in Moscow.
* The **State Historical Museum**, the red-brick building in Red Square, is also worthwhile. The **1812 Museum** by Red Square should be skipped (it’s next to the State Historical Museum, further from the Kremlin). Somehow, I still have not been to the **Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts**, but it should be worth a visit.
* Things I'd recommend in Moscow: Unfortunately, after the Kremlin, the armory, red square, and that red-brick museum closest to the kremlin, which together is definitely a 5 star tourist attraction, the quality of the tourist attractions do decline markedly. Note, if you do all of the above, and try to walk around the old nice areas by **Sandunny Banya**, it will take more than a day. (Especially if you go by the **birthplace of Michael Romanov**, the first of the Romanovs, where you can stop for tea and snacks, bought from Monks who have continuously occupied the building since the Rurik dynasty.) I'd recommend the **Novodivichy convent** and the **Tretyakov gallery**. I would also suggest **Art Play** -- they have these art/music exhibitions which are a frequent date place. And, if they are still doing **ice-skating at Gorky Park** (or by the kremlin, depends on the season) then it is a must.
* Metro stations are also filled with Soviet Art – if possible, you should try taking the metro somewhere.
* I'm a big fan of [Sandunny Banya](http://www.sanduny.ru/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (banya = bath). The area around there is also one of the nicest areas of Moscow to walk around. It's a nice way to end the day after a tiring walk around red square/the kremlin. Three trips in the banya is standard, while [being beaten with birch leaves](http://www.theglobaldispatches.com/articles/rituals-of-the-russian-banya) (*vennig*). Booking in advance is advisable (just let me know if interested). You can also arrange a massage here. My mother did and she loved it.
* I’m also a huge fan of **Gorky Park**. It doesn’t compare with the Kremlin/Red Square in terms of a tourist attractions, but it’s a nice place to take a walk and spend an afternoon when the weather is nice. It’s an ideal place to consider doing a dead-drop for no one just to play out a Cold War espionage fantasy.
* I would also recommend renting a Velobike (they are cheap, there are stations all over Moscow, you can download the app online), and biking around the city. You can bike in/through the parks, particularly through Gorky park by the Moscow River, and then through Neskychni Sad (the “not-boring garden”), and biking through the **Graveyard of Fallen Monuments** (displaced Soviet statues, near Gorky) is the best way to see it, in my opinion.

Other Tourish Attactions which are Less Recommended

* To my mind, **Tsaritsyno** and walking on **Arbat Street** are perhaps skippable. So is **Izmailovo**, although my mother liked both that and Arbat as she wanted to do some shopping, and these places are packed to the teeth with matryoshka and other things tourists buy. Any of Moscow’s parks will be a nice place to stroll on a sunny day (Gorky Park, Kolomenskoye, VDNKh, Sokolniki, etc., etc. – Moscow has a lot of parks!), even if they aren’t must-see tourist attractions. I also don't think the **Golden ring** cities around Moscow are must-sees necessarily. For example, I've been to **Suzdal** and **Kolomna**, and wasn't all that impressed. They were nice enough, and it was nice to see the countryside, but going to **Suzdal** makes for a long day. You can get to **St. Petersburg** almost as fast, where there are great tourist attractions. Time there would be preferable to a day in the countryside.
* I would also not rate the Cosmonaut museum as a must-see, unless you have a specific interest in the space race, or are bringing children.

Restaurant Advice:

* You must try Georgian/Armenian/Uzbek food while in Moscow. **Chaikhona No. 1** is a good Uzbek chain. **Hachapuri** is a good Georgian restaurant.
* Top choices for Russian Food are (1) **Shinok**, (2) **Odessa Mama** (not as pricey as the other two), and (3) **Café Pushkin** (most expensive). There’s also an affiliated café next door which specializes in dessert.
* Other Restaurants: **Black Thai** restaurant in Pushkinskaya I also recommend. **White Rabbit**, in Smolenskaya, is good and gives you a nice view of one of the 7 sisters (the giant skyscrapers built by Stalin). The food is pricey but not totally outrageous. I also like **Ugolok**, on Bolshaya Nikitskaya which can also be a good place to stop for a cocktail (especially upstairs), and a nice neighborhood to walk around. **Severyane** next door is also good. **Odessa Mama**, with the same owners as Hachapuri, is good Russian food. **Bar Mitzvah** is a nice Jewish restaurant in the Novokuznetskaya area. The **Mushrooms restaurant** near Tretyakovskaya (where we normally house visitors), is also good. **Valenok** is good for dinner and/or cocktails. **Community** and **Magadan** are two new hot restaurants that turn into clubs later, recently displacing **Valenok** as the place to be seen.
* In summer, **Veranda 32.05** in Hermitage Garden is also a great place to go. It is located in a nice park which often has live music in the summer.
* Almost anything in the [Novikov Group](https://novikovgroup.ru/)’s restaurant empire is probably worth going to. You probably didn’t come to Russia for Texas barbecue, but the pulled pork at **Brisket** is to-die for.

Nightlife

* My favorite summer bar is **Bar Strelka** in the abandoned Red October chocolate factory. Great view of the river, and the best place in Moscow to grab a cocktail – but only in summer. **Community** and **Magadan** are two new hot restaurants that turn into clubs later.
* For a glimpse of the club scene check out the clubs in Red October, such as at Icon, Gypsy, or Rolling Stone. Jagger Bar is also interesting. **Siberia** is a good places to go if you want to go on an anthropological field trip to watch semi-professionals preen for oligarchs, a quintessential Russian experience. Most of these places get going around 1AM or so. Time Out bar is another decent place to stop for a drink, as it has a nice view. Kalina Bar across the street from my old apartment also has a nice view of the city, and for that reason alone I would recommend popping in for a drink. The club scene changes rapidly though, so I might be a bit out of touch.

Sporting Events

* Going to KHL hockey games can also be a lot of fun. It’s a different atmosphere than the NHL, with more fighting penalized by a slap on the wrist. Buying KHL hockey tickets can also be annoying. It might require showing up at the arena in person on a certain day and time. It’s often easier to scalp. If interested, let me know, and this can be easily sorted.

Other Random Tips:

* You probably already know, but you can download the google map for Moscow for offline use.
* Can’t read cylliric? Google translate now lets you read it using your camera.
* In the winter, while Moscow is cold outside, you really just need a (really!) warm coat, because Russians like it hot indoors. Not really a place for a warm sweater, but if you wear one, make sure you can take it off indoors. Your hotel room is also likely to feel a bit too warm. For me, the combinations of the blankets and heat make it too hot for me to sleep, and typically the thermostat is set by Putin (remnants of central planning). If you can’t adjust the heat, at least usually you can separate the sheet from the rest of your comforter…
* You can buy a **SIM card** at the airport. Simply having the ability to hail a taxi when you want will probably save you the money of buying the card in the first place. I would recommend.