

Vyshka 2005/2006

When I came to Moscow in 2005 as part of an exchange programme between the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (University College London) and the High School of Economics (GU-VShe or “Vyshka” as everybody call it), it was not my first time in Russia, so I won't write this much about life in Russia in general. You will have to find out for yourselves how beautiful, exciting and exhausting at the same time it is. But I can tell you how glad you will be to have the help and support from the colleagues in the International Department / Students' Mobility Advisory Office of the School who organise these programmes.

Even before I left for Russia, they have been extremely helpful and patient about all my questions and all the changes in my travel plans. Everything was taken care of – the invitation for the visa, the room in the student hall, all kind of passes and ID cards for the university and the library. In a country where it can take quite a while to get all the necessary passes and documents before you can get down to work, you really learn to appreciate it when somebody helps you with all the formalities.

Once all this was settled, I had a tour around the library. If you study economics, political economy, finance, etc, this is a great place to be. You have all the latest books, periodicals and magazines you need in English as well as Russian. There are also two bookshops where you can buy all the relevant readers and books in both languages right in the main building. So you really do not have to look any further.

The reason why I came to Moscow was not only research, but also to interview a couple of scholars and representatives of civil society. Therefore, I was glad to receive all the support I was given to be able to meet all the relevant people at the School. One of the main focuses of the “Vyshka” seem to be the current reforms undertaken by the Russian government, especially reforms of higher education. But the School is not all about classes, courses and the library only. A whole range of other activities is organised and offered to and by the students. There are roundtables and seminars with leading figures in Academia and the political elite speaking on current political and economic issues, just as well as concerts which are organised twice per month. I went to one of the concerts - without too high of expectations I have to admit. I will tell you why. That week's concert was performed by a group called “The Drolls” who performed mediaeval songs from Carmina Burana. “German songs from the 15th century” the poster said. Now, I am German and not too keen on German folksongs as you probably can imagine. The concert, though, turned out to be a huge success. The hall was crowded with students and their teachers, and the “The Drolls” really “rocked”.

What I also enjoyed about the school was the fact that it is located very central. You could actually have a walk over to the Red Square (if the temperatures are not as freezing cold as they were in January 2006), and there are all the cafes, bars and bistros you need to enjoy a student's life. Around Kitay-Gorod which is five minutes walk distance from the School you have a couple of really good bars and clubs where they regularly have concerts by more or less famous bands so there is no problem whatsoever to find something to occupy yourself with in your free time.

Finally, when it comes to accommodation, you will be happy to learn that the rooms in the student halls are more than affordable. They are simple, but you have all you need right there, and it only takes you a twenty-minutes ride by the Metro to get to the School. This, again, is really good time for Moscow I think. And if you feel like meeting some of your countrymen and women or get to know your Russian neighbours a bit better, you just have to cook yourself a meal in the kitchen on your floor. You will know half of the people living there by the end of your dinner...

Enjoy your time at the Vyshka!

Erika Buerkle