



# Half way round the

Anne grew up on a “back-country” sheep farm in Taranaki, New Zealand, where she rode a horse to primary (elementary) school. Anne and her husband Ewan, chose to stay in New Zealand until their three children had finished school before going abroad with Shell. Their first posting was to Moscow in 2002.

In Moscow Anne was the Focal Point for Outpost Moscow from 2003 until March 2007, and also worked as an IELTS examiner for the British Council Moscow, conducting speaking interview tests in many regions of Russia and marking writing tests in Moscow.

Anne and her husband moved to The Hague, the Netherlands, a few months ago.

*Anne McLeod*

Russia is a land of contradictions. It is difficult to make generalisations about the inhabitants because the country is so vast and you will instantly be proven wrong by some one else's experience. For example, I was told that Russians do not show much emotion in the streets, anyone who smiles is considered to be either an imbecile or a foreigner. However, when you meet Russians personally they are very warm and communicative.



*Anne (at right) with guide*

I arrived in Moscow in January when the streets were clogged with snow and walking to a café was a major objective for the day. I soon became immersed in the art galleries, museums, ballet, architecture and weekly Russian culture and history discussions run by the International Women's Club. It was all very fascinating as we marvelled at the depth of historical knowledge possessed by the average Russian person and began to explore the Golden Ring towns outside of Moscow. Sergiev-Posad is the closest and most spectacular with its monastery complex of colourful onion dome churches dating from the Middle Ages, surrounded by a white fortified wall of enormous proportions. This world centre of the Russian Orthodox religion has withstood foreign sieges and provided refuge during many troubled times.

On the sporting front, we purchased cross-country skis and spent many crisp blue days in the forest parks around the city, where baboushkas (grannies) pulled children on sleds and all ages skated on ponds reminiscent of a Brueghel landscape.



and very proud of his first job. The next evening we were invited to the sub-basement home of this group of teens who sleep close to the city hot water pipes that heat apartment buildings all over Russia. The next day at the museum I lingered over the native people's costumes, weapons and tools, imagining Dmitri's ancestors hunting for the mammoths' tusks and giant molluscs on display.

Petro-Pavlovsk in Kamchatka is another unique city, surrounded by a ring of smoking volcanoes covered in brilliant white snow and outlined against the blue sky. I shared my hotel with an international group of ski instructors who had hired an ex-soviet helicopter for ski descents from the top of these volcanoes down to valleys of geysers and boiling pools surrounded by snow. After work I was taken to a beach where, being a New Zealander, I got very excited about my first view of the Pacific for a long time. The waves were crashing in and the sand was black just like near my home in New Plymouth. I took off my shoes and raced in to

# world, still in Russia

I was privileged to travel to many cities across Russia during my four year stay, thanks to my job as an English examiner; from temperate Rostov-on-Don near the Black Sea to minus 33 degrees in November in Krasnoyarsk, Central Siberia. My favourite was the Far East region, where the people are far removed from central control and a stoic sense of self-reliance prevails.

Vladivostok is a city of surprises. I had heard that it was bleak and dark. However I arrived in an Indian summer of blue skies and serene oceanscapes. From my hotel breakfast bar I watched a variety of vessels cruise lazily by; naval icebreakers, cargo ships, tiny yachts and harbour tour boats.

My eager guide, Dmitri, was an indigenous Yakut. His family live far north above the city of Yakutsk where winter temperatures average minus 50 and the coldest he could recall was minus 70. He came from a long line of semi-nomadic hunters, fishermen, yak and reindeer breeders but spoke fluent English and had been awarded a scholarship to study marketing at the Far East Academy of Economics, aiming to work in USA.



On Saturday night one of Russia's more provocative rock bands, DDT, played a free concert on the quay near to a very long row of huge navy frigates and a submarine museum. It seemed that most of the city had turned out to listen on this balmy evening.

On Sunday I strolled along the beach where a nude female bronze statue gazed landward from out in the waves. I lay on the sand below a huge wooden platform where baboushkas and a young Adonis were sunbathing. That evening I ate at a Chinese restaurant with Kiwi Rachael, who runs a food programme for street kids. One of her protégées was the doorman at this restaurant

feel the foam but I was soon yelping with pain from the icy temperature and the locals thought I was quite mad. I had hoped to catch a peek of the Russian submarine fleet nearby but it was well hidden. The next day a family took me downhill skiing and we followed up with a swim in the hot pools spa. I was delivered to the airport with a bag of caviar, freshly processed by their family fishing business. I had to promise to return again in the summer to hike into some geyser valleys with them.

Khabarovsk, which featured in last month's issue of Destinations, has rich nature and wildlife in its region. The main boulevard has attractively patterned red brick buildings leading down to where the mighty Amur River flows through the city. I was taken to visit a bear rehabilitation centre where orphan cubs are raised by attentive caregivers. Their mothers had been shot by poachers. The woman called to a cub who skipped and lolloped over to her to play ball, just like a puppy. He loved being tickled behind his ears as we said goodbye. Twenty-eight bear cubs have been brought into custody as orphans this spring in Primorye region compared with eight in 2001. This shocking rise is explained by an increase in demand for bear parts for Chinese medicines. An internet search revealed that bears can be hunted for a mere \$5000 per trophy near Khabarovsk.

Another interesting spot was the humble wooden chapel in Ekaterinaberg marking the spot where Tsar Nicholas and his family waited to be taken to their death. It now sits beside a huge new gold domed cathedral honouring their memory. Ekaterinaberg, being the gateway to the Ural mountains, has many gemstone shops and a geology museum showcasing the huge range of semi-precious stones found in this region.

If you are ever posted to Russia you will find your own tales to tell and some will probably contradict mine - such is the nature of this vast land spanning 11 time zones.



*The Linge Boys supporting the Norwegian National Team during this year's World Championship in Moscow.*

# Ice hockey in Moscow

When the Linge family moved from Nigeria to Abu Dhabi in January 2000, their boys were looking forward to joining a proper football team, but instead discovered ice hockey and loved it. Two years later the family moved to Oman where the ice rink was a third the standard size and was hidden away in a dilapidated building. Luckily there was a Finnish coach, with two boys the same age as two of the Linge boys, as well as a few other keen hockey families. Together they helped the boys build wonderful memories of the Muscat Solarbears - whose main aim was to beat Dubai - and of being in a Gulf travelling team that competed in Holland, two years in a row. You can imagine the joy when the boys learned they were moving to Moscow, one of the greatest ice hockey countries in the world!

*Casper, Christian, Fredrik and Fabian Linge*

**Casper:** I was only seven years old and insisted on being a goalie. I got all the gear and went to practice with Dynamo, one of the premier teams here. It was very hard as everybody is very good and all the instructions were in Russian. Mum and Dad decided I needed more skating skills, so I was allowed to practice with my brothers' team, the Moscow Silver Sharks. I have to be on the ice at 6.45 every Monday morning before school. The boys on my team finish school at lunchtime, but I can't play at that time, so I practice with them again during the weekend. My first trainer was a kind, old man, but the parents on my team thought he was too nice, so we got a new coach who never smiled and shouted a lot! Luckily, we now have another coach, who speaks Swedish. He screams at me in Swedish if I don't pay attention and when I missed some penalty shots last week he made me do five forward rolls on the ice, as punishment. It's not easy. The boys are kind to me, and they speak a few words of English. In September I will be allowed to play regular games every weekend and that will be fun.



**Christian:** I love all sports, but although I was asked to play for Spartak football club I stuck to my passion for ice hockey and played first for CSKA and now for the Silver Sharks. Last season I scored 17 points in 23 games - pretty good for one of the world's top junior leagues. I love being on the ice with 20 Russian kids, and finding out that some of their parents work overtime just so they can play hockey and maybe one day turn pro, has taught me a valuable lesson about life. And I know the people I meet at the summer hockey camp in Norway are right when they tell me I am so lucky to be able to play in Moscow - even if it is hard sometimes to combine schoolwork with practice. After my first year I went to a summer training camp for two weeks, 40 km outside Moscow. Being the only non-Russian in the team, it was a big language lesson as well as a sports camp. I'm going again this summer - but now I speak Russian!

**Fredrik:** I've been playing hockey in Russia for two years now and it has been fun, although I've had a really hard time trying to get on the team. During the first year, I practiced every day after school and once during the weekend but I didn't make the team, so I was surprised and delighted when I was allowed to join the boys at the pre-season camp. The camp was two weeks long and we spent most of the time running - 20 km each day - lifting weights and doing exercises. After the camp my coach asked me if he could have my documents so I could play in games. This was what I had been working so hard for but it took the Russian hockey

federation another 6 months to complete the paperwork! The boys on my team surprised me with a welcoming note when I finally got to my first game - 'We are happy you are on our team' - translated into Norwegian and signed by 24 Russian team mates. It was very special and it made my mum cry. This was the last game of the season but my team played in a tournament and we came 4th. I've already got my papers approved for next season and I can't wait to get started!

**Fabian:** I was 16 years old when we arrived in Moscow and I knew it would be difficult to compete with boys who had played five times a week since they were five years old. But I plucked up my courage and went to the club with my mum who pointed at me to the changing room. The coach nodded and let me play. I had to copy everyone else when we did exercises, but slowly I got to know the routines and was just catching up with the others when I broke my arm during practice! It was really disappointing, but I was back on the ice after 10 weeks. It was great playing with the Russian boys and I was so excited when they invited me to go with them to play in Finland that I rushed home and woke up my brothers to tell them all about it. We took the train from Moscow to Helsinki, which was fantastic. We played against the top teams and had a wonderful time. Hockey has given me fond and lasting memories - particularly of playing here in Moscow where my brothers and I have been able to meet and get to know boys from ordinary, hardworking, Russian families.

*Christian (#12) during one of his league matches.*



# 'Switching' countries

Stephanie D'Souza

Stephanie D'Souza is a teenage "Shell child" in Moscow. She is 19 years old and has just graduated from school. Stephanie and her family have lived in a number of countries over the years. Stephanie last lived in her home country Australia when she was ten years old. Next year she will return to Australia to study either law or the liberal arts in Sydney. But home for Stephanie, for now, is Moscow.

*Maria Reutskaya interviewed Stephanie about living in Moscow and life on the move - this is the story.*



I lived in China for five years and when I had to leave the country for Russia, I felt very sad. I had got so accustomed to life in Beijing and when we moved I missed my friends and the Chinese way of life a lot. I had to change my life overnight to adjust to a new and unfamiliar place.

At first it was difficult for me "to switch" to another country - the cultural and language gaps were intimidating. I had learned Mandarin in China and began learning Russian when we arrived in Moscow. I took a two-week intensive course with my Mum - four hours a day of Russian. I think the Russian language is a lot more difficult to learn than Mandarin. Although written Mandarin is difficult and requires a good memory, I found spoken Mandarin quite easy. But spoken Russian is as difficult as written Russian, there are conjugations and inclinations and it really is very hard. Another thing I have found is that studying languages has become harder as I have grown older. When I was younger, it was definitely much easier for me to adapt and learn.

Moscow holds many attractions for me. The first thing is that whenever I look outside my bedroom window I can see the Kremlin (we live next door!). It's a sight that always stirs my imagination. I also love the Alexander Garden near the Kremlin, Victory Park, Tverskaya Street, Gorky Park and Kamergersky pereulok. A boat-trip on the Moscow River is also a fantastic experience. But despite the sights, my heart was not fully won until I started at school and made friends.

Of course Moscow's nightlife is absolutely amazing; it's like nowhere else in the world. My Russian friends organise huge

extravagant parties in places like the Opera nightclub - which is, by the way, one of my favourites. But I think my Mum and Dad sometimes worry that I party too much!

Everybody wonders if it is a problem to adapt in such a huge and fast-paced city such as Moscow. My answer is that if you get involved as much as you can, keep an open mind, have a positive attitude and give it time, everything will be fine! If you start with negative attitudes these perceptions will be hard to change in the future, keeping an open mind is essential. I went through a difficult process initially but you do get over it and learn to enjoy the experience and the place.

Now my stay in Russia is almost over! I have got plans to return back home to Australia, our base country. I'm getting very excited about it, as the last time I was there, other than for holidays, was when I was ten.

My studies at university begin in February 2008, so until then I'm going for a few months to Beijing to study Mandarin intensively. Then I'm going to Sydney where I plan to study law or the liberal arts.

I think my future profession will almost certainly involve moving from place to place. The downside of growing up living in different places is that you can become bored staying in one place for a long time. My eldest brother lives in Australia, my other brother is in London and my parents are in Russia. I feel both cosmopolitan and privileged with the experiences I have had.

# The famous Moscow Metro

*Susan Houben*

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Who would expect to find, beneath one of the world's most chaotic cities the most impressive, efficient, and convenient mass transit system in the world?

Everybody knows the Kremlin and St Basils Cathedral, but many of Moscow's metro stations are also fine art museums designed and embellished by prominent Russian architects, artists and sculptors and are incredibly beautiful. Their great talent and decorative skills have created a peculiar underground network of great artistic value. Some stations have won international prizes. Some are done up like palaces, others are adorned with sculptures and mosaics using original materials from all over the country. The metro stations are certainly very beautiful and impressive places to visit in Moscow.

A guide told us a train is guaranteed to arrive within 90 seconds of the scheduled time; if it does not you can ask for your money back. Not that you'd bother at 15 roubles (about US\$0.50) for unlimited travel. It has to be one of the cheapest public transport systems in the world.

And that's not all. The most incredible thing about the metro is that it was built in the 1930s, under communist direction - it is considered, still, a Stalinist project and one Muscovites are very proud of.

In the old days the stations were meant to double as air raid or bomb shelters, which is why the escalators seem to plunge halfway to the centre of the earth. The station at Park Pobedy is 84 meters deep! Later they kept on building the stations this deep because of the cold war.

The first line of the Moscow Metro was open in 1935, with early work driven by project manager Nikita Khrushchev, the later leader of the Communist Party, and was designed by a Dutch

engineer. It covered the distance from Sokolniki to Gorky Park and included 13 stations. Currently, there are over 150 stations.

The rush hours are unbelievably busy. Up to nine million people a day ride the metro, which is more than the London and New York City systems combined.

A very interesting trip on the metro can be done on the "Koltsevaya" line, the circular one, where all of the stations reflect the original decoration and architectural style of the metro, and in about one hour you can visit all of the stations. Particularly beautiful are the "Komsomol'skaya", "Kazanskaya", "Belorusskaya" and "Kiyvskaya" stations. Outside almost every metro station there are open-air shops and markets with a variety of products for sale. With almost no comprehension of the language other than "skolka"... meaning "how much"...and "pol kilo"... "half a kilogram"...you will manage to purchase almost anything you need. Another unexpected aspect about travelling the metro in Russia is that many have a modern McDonald's located near the station, you may not want a burger, but a cup of coffee and a clean toilet are sometimes a necessity in this crazy city. So when you exploring Moscow buy a ticket, it is worth the effort.





# Moscow - A decade on

*Tara Berchenko*

**Our family arrived in Moscow a year ago. My husband Ilya Berchenko is a Russian with U.S. citizenship. He left Russia at 26 years old to start a new life in the U.S. At the time he left, he did not think there was much of a future for him in Russia. The economy was in a shambles, there was often little food in the stores, and the streets were littered with trash (as basic services, such as rubbish removal, were no longer working).**

Today, 14 years later, Ilya is a Shell employee with an American wife and two boys who can't speak Russian. For Ilya, and I'm sure for other 'returnees', coming back to Russia has been wonderful. Ilya has told me how good it feels to hear Russian spoken all around him again. When he first came back to Moscow, before we had relocated, he phoned to tell me happy it made him to be able to

walk into any bookstore and see huge bookshelves filled with books in Cyrillic (the Russian alphabet). Ilya can read English, but it is more relaxing for him to read a book at night in Russian.

Ilya was also delighted by the changes that are taking place in Moscow. When he left, the city was in horrible