

Exchange Report Moscow (Higher School of Economics) 09.2015-12.2015

Pre departure

Before going to mother Russia it is important that you get your invitation from your host university with this invitation it is possible to apply for a visa. If you are going to apply for a place in one of the HSE dormitories, what I really recommend later more about that, you also have to get a health certificate from your GP. I also recommend to let you pick up by a student of the HSE, because everything in Moscow is written in the Cyrillic alphabet and it is practically impossible to find your place when you are not familiar with this alphabet. I learned this alphabet in the plane to Moscow, but I recommend to do this in advance. Finally before going to Russia I recommend to take some cash with you (euros or even better some Roubles) and check if you can withdraw money in Russia, because I had to activate this in advance.

When you are in arrived in Moscow it is very easy to take the so-called aeroexpress to the city centre for 500 roubles (€6,66)*, where the buddy will pick you up from the train station and will escort you to your dormitory. The HSE organized a whole introduction week with all kind of lectures of things you have to do, like applying for all kind of stuff and they also organized all kinds of tours through Moscow. I came late so I didn't attend all these events, but everyone said it was not really interesting and, but off course you have to decide to go there yourself.

*Exchange rate

I record all prices in roubles and in euros, because the rouble was very volatile while prices stayed quite the same. At January 2014 you got only 45 roubles for your euro and even at my stay the RUB fluctuated between the 65 and 85 for a euro. So I calculate with the middle of them 75 RUB for a euro. Especially new about the oil really effects the exchange rate, because Russia is really dependent on its oil export. (At the moment of writing you get even 90 roubles for your Euro)

EUR/RUB Streaming Chart



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Courses

I had to get 24 credits, of which 12 were for economic courses the two first ones in the list below and 12 for obligatory courses ones. There are two modules from September till December, but all my topics covered both modules.

Economics of innovation (9 credits)

This course was a master course, with all guest lectures and was really easy to follow. We had to write an essay and give a presentation to defend this essay, where all the internationals got a 10. And we had to make an exam where we just have to give our opinion about some discussed topics.

Valuation of the company (5 credits)

This course was really interesting but far more challenging. We had to present every two weeks a different valuation method, but it was clear that our way of presenting was far more advanced than the Russian way. The final exam was really hard, but only counted for 45% and with our high participation grades we only needed a 1,2 to pass.

Russian language course (6 credits)

I really recommend to follow the Russian language course in your free space, because all the normal people (everyone who is not a student) in Moscow do only speak Russian. In the beginning it was for me hardly impossible to go on the street alone, because I could not understand a police officer, but at the end I was able to talk a bit about politics with my taxi driver.

Russian state and space (5 credits)

This course was really interesting and the professor was really enthusiastic to talk about the Russian state and their view about conquering space. Something that was really interesting with the invasion of Crimea just a year ago.

Finances

Pre departure expenses	
Visa	€110
Flight retour KLM	€345

Every month expenses	
Dormitory	1.500 RUB (€20)
Food	11.250 RUB (€150)
Mobile	500 RUB (€7)
Public transport	1.500 RUB (€20)
Going out	7.500 RUB (€100)
Trips	37.500 RUB (€500)
TOTAL	+/-60.000(€800)

Visa

Your first visa is valid for 90 days and it is a single entry visa, what means that you are not able to leave Russia, because it is not possible to enter Russia again with that same visa. Your second visa is a multiple entry visa and is valid till the 31st of December (while your last exams can be at the 26th of December). Many people booked wrong return tickets in advance so pay attention to this when you book your ticket!

Mobile

I recommend MTS as provider instead of megafon, the most common one, because MTS also has free internet outside of Moscow.

Dormitory

It was bizarre how cheap the dormitory was, at first I didn't believe it and thought they forgot a zero or try to trap me, but it was really this cheap. The dormitory where I stayed, dormitory nr. 5 by far the best one, was really nice, full with 130 international students and 20 minutes away of the city centre and HSE central location. The dormitory is 24/7 guarded by a guard who opens the door after eleven and makes sure that guests are not in the dorm after eleven. There are a lot of rules in the dorm and the babuska's (Russian old ladies) are very willing to tell you about them, but are often neglected by us often without consequences, especially the no drinking rule is violated every day.

Trips

It is clear that my exchange became expensive by my trips. I was very lucky with this low exchange rate and choose to invest this difference of money in my trips. In the list below I give a short description of all the cities I went to, but also in Moscow there is a lot to do.

Vladimir and Suzdal

One of my first trips was to Vladimir and Suzdal, you have to travel to through Vladimir to Suzdal. But in my opinion you have to go to Suzdal, it is a very idyllic town doable on a free Sunday for a little amount of money.

Borodino

If you are interested in history you have to go to the battle of Borodino, it's somewhere in September and really nice to see how the battle went between the French and Russian militia during Napoleons attack.

MAKS

A bizarre event was MAKS it was a really impressive event with a lot of nice shows with different kind of aircrafts doing the weirdest tricks with as goal on the one hand to encourage the Russian nationalism and on the other hand to sell the aircrafts to rich Africans and other interested people.

Lake Baikal

By far the most beautiful trip and unfortunately the most expensive trip I made during my exchange. I went from Moscow to Irkutsk with the trans Siberian express for 77 hours, we made a stop in Novosibirsk at the half, which was a real soviet city, so there was not much to see there. Irkutsk was very nice, but our 3 day trip to Olkhon Island was the best. The nature there was impressively beautiful.

Saint Petersburg

Another must see is off course Saint Petersburg, built on the basis of Amsterdam, a city extremely helpful to tourists in comparison to Moscow and a nice city to see in 3 to 5 days depending if you are going to the summer palaces outside of the city. If you are not planning to go to the palaces outside the city, go to Yusopov's palace, not known by everyone, but a very nice palace inside the city. Also keep in mind that the fountains of Peterhof are only functioning during summertime.

Kazan

A very nice Tatar city with a nice mosque in its Kremlin, if you like to travel it is one of the big five you have to visit to taste all the different present cultures in Russia.

Volgograd

Also known as Stalingrad was very impressive, millions of people died close to Mamayev hill in the centre of Stalingrad. There are a lot of monuments and museums to taste the past and expand your knowledge about this terrible battle. I also highly recommend to go outside the city to the graveyard where more than 200.000 Germans are buried, because this place was also really impressive.

Sergiej Posad

Also known as the Vatican of Russia a spiritual place doable in a afternoon.

Daily cultural differences

There is a lot of security in Moscow you see policemen everywhere and you will feel safer than ever. It is completely normal that they ask everywhere to check your purse for possible bombs and smell your water to exclude bombing fluids.

You also have to live with the central heating and cold outside, inside the buildings it is at least around 20 degrees, I always walked in my shorts in the dormitory. And outside it can be minus 20 even in December, so when you walk from outside in the metro you are dying because of the temperature difference.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me via Facebook or whatsoever and I am more than willing to answer your questions.

Edwin Warmerdam

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