

In Russia, Did You Know ...?

- When giving flowers, make sure there is an odd number in the bouquet. A bouquet with even numbers can only be brought to a funeral.
- When at a Russian produce market, you may try foods before you buy.
- When shopping, you must bring your own bags or resort to buying new ones.
- Russians do not reveal emotions easily in public areas. Smiling in public may be viewed as a sign of mental illness.
- On public transportation, it is customary to offer your seat to the elderly and to women with little children.
- Students bring flowers to their teachers on the first day of a new school year to show appreciation.



We welcome your comments or contributions. Please email us at visavis@culuralawareness.com.

People and Life in Contemporary Russia

Russia! Russia? Russia... What have we heard lately about Russia and its people? TV, radio and newspapers reveal little information about Russian everyday life, and books mostly discuss the past. The topic is rather large – almost as big as Russia itself. Let's glance at the daily life of real Russians...

Over the past ten years, life in Russia has changed in the economic, political and cultural aspects. Russian people, eager for peace and stability, joke that they live "on a volcano". The monarchy system was destroyed in 1917 and the people had to build a new political system. Another turnover came in 1985 - the well-known shift to glasnost and democracy. Finally, life in Russia began to stabilize. These changes originated noticeable generation gaps. They came so quickly that individuals with 4-5 years difference may be considered from different generations.

The most contemporary Russians are between 18-28 years of age. They went through school after "Perestroika", watched classical American movies, and know what kind of lives people have outside of Russia. Most of these individuals grew up in a pluralistic, "westernized" society and hardly relate to anyone who lived under the totalitarian government. They are now an active ingredient of Russian economy, learning and actually doing business according to "free market" rules.

The biggest group in the present workforce is made up of ages 30 to 45. They participated in democratization and the glasnost movement and are trying hard to keep moving in a spinning pace of economical development. Learning and adapting to the new "rules of the game" is not an easy task. They know what "old" rules of life looked like – they learned them from the schoolbooks written during "communism" days.

The most "out-placed" group of Russians is the 47-55 year olds. They were educated with communism morals and are becoming more con-

servative with age. New innovations, gadgets, fast action-movies, and new ways of thinking are confusing for them, making it very difficult to find a job. People with advanced degrees and many years of working experience have to work as floor or street cleaners. They need jobs in order to receive a pension from the government.



Three architectural generations in Moscow
Photo by O.V. Ivanova-Nuss

One would think that after 35-45 years of hard work, they could look forward to a good time enjoying benefits from the state! How much fun could one have with \$35-\$50 per month pension? Many retired and elderly are thankful to have their families, friends and neighbors to help. Russian people have survived many small and large revolutions and there is still a strong sense of unity. People help each other during good and bad times.

The generational gap issue is not simply an internal social problem. Understanding this nuance will help businessmen and travelers build productive and enjoyable relationships with all generations of Russians.

In business, as in society, rules are changing rapidly. Communistic central planning is giving a way to new methods of management in market-based capitalism. Younger Russians are rejecting the idea of central planning and bureaucratic structure; on the other hand, the older generation distrusts capitalistic ways of doing business. As a result, there is no clear-cut rule on how to behave in a particular busi-

(Continued on page 2)

RUSSIA: Suggested Reading

If you are planning a trip to Russia and wish to learn more about the people than what you can see through a window of a tourist bus, Deborah Adelman's book *"The Children of Perestroika Come of Age: Young People of Moscow Talk about Life in the New Russia"* will give you great insight on the new Russian culture.

Deborah Adelman first visited Russia in 1989 and conducted interviews with Moscow teenagers from a variety of schools and social backgrounds. These young people represent "...a generation caught between the old and the new". They discussed their families and their daily lives, with attitudes toward parents, relationships, sexuality, gender roles, marriage, educational and career choices, changes in the country, socialism and capitalism, religion, political beliefs, views of the West, their own values and ideals, and how they envision their society, its future, and their own roles within it. In 1992, Adelman returned to Moscow to fol-

low-up with many of the same young people. These teens had experienced not only major social and political upheavals, but important changes in their personal lives: the death of a parent; love, marriage, and the prospect of children; the beginning of a higher education; military service and entry into a rapidly changing world of work.

This book is a valuable source of information on contemporary life in new Russia because a reader "gets inside" of the real lives and dreams. .

This book leaves you with the feeling that young Russians face an uncertain future with some pessimism, but with determination and hope. Through these personal narratives, readers realize that people in different parts of our troubled world are more alike than different.



Westernized influences in Russia today.
Photo by O.V. Ivanova-Nuss

- Olga V. Ivanova-Nuss

Contemporary Russia *(Continued from page 1)*

ness setting. Businessmen are still expected to show respect to those in higher positions and remain sensitive to age, rank and gender. Management style is usually autocratic and domineering. Nonetheless, more younger managers are adopting a modern approach of participative management and low power distance.

Ninety percent of Russian women are in the workforce and generally work in education, medicine and technology. While acknowledged as equal partners at work, women generally experience a "glass ceiling" effect when trying to advance to managing positions. As women could work, vote, own property and sign contracts since the Communistic Revolution in 1917, Russia did not experience major outbreaks of emancipation. Despite that, Russia is considered to be a male-dominated society. In addition to a full time job, women are expected to carry all the domestic duties.

The latest generation is working deliberately on changing these standards. Wives of richer "new Russians" declare that if they perform household duties they should not be expected to work a job. Many career women make their husbands/partners share household duties and responsibilities. Women open their own businesses, learn to drive, and play more active, and, perhaps, less feminine roles in the society.

Countless foreigners find that Russians warmth and friendliness, while not readily apparent on the streets or in business dealings, emerges in private. You will feel as great in your Russian friends' home as in your own home. For a very long time after leaving Russia you will remember a genuine openness, friendliness and wideness of "Russian Soul" that was forming and crystallizing for generations!

- By Olga Ivanova-Nuss and Katrin Franz



For nearly twenty years, the world of international business has looked to Cultural Awareness International (CAI) as the leading resource of comprehensive intercultural and destination / relocation services for their global employees. Leading global corporations rely on CAI for everything from preview trip, orientation, home search, and settling-in assistance to highly-personalized, in-depth intercultural services available worldwide.

Cultural Awareness International, President & CEO

Priscila A.C. Montana

Relocation Services Director

Gerry Bertolasi

Operations and Business Development Manager,

Susan Kast

Vis a Vis Newsletter, Editor

Lorraine Gachelin

Contributing Journalists

Olga V. Ivanova-Nuss

Katrin Franz

Cultural Awareness International

2626 Cole, Suite 710, Dallas, Texas 75204

Phone: 214-691-4113 Fax: 214-691-4128

Email: visavis@culturalawareness.com