Moscow and the Kremlin

Moscow Today

Moscow today is a metropolis on steroids--a bustling city trying to muscle its way into the 21st century. It is a hundred of Romes being built in a day--restaurants, banks, and grocery stores. It is becoming a magnet for foreigners and things foreign. Narrow, 17th century alleys and broad, Stalinesque avenues bulge with Mercedes, Jeep Wranglers and Chevrolet Minivans, most of which are driven by rich Russian bankers and merchants.

The Contrast with the Past

10 or even 5 years ago Moscow was, Moscow was a dusty and gray communist city, the capital of a police state that censored out all Western things. A copy machine was kept under lock; *Playboy* was confiscated at the border, and political activism was a hugely dangerous pursuit. Now, there are copy shops on every major street; *Playboy* is published locally, and political activism is the same as it is in the West. 5-10 years ago, food was cheap and shops were empty; food lines were commonplace, and foreign consumer goods were not easily available. Now, food is plentiful and prices are high; there is an abundance of foreign goods in every store.

What Remains Unchanged?

Moscow has always been a state within a state with its own laws, power structures and priorities. It still reserves to itself the best the "empire" has to offer: the best food, the best schools and roads, the best apartments, etc. Moscow has always been and still is a magnet to the outsiders (e.g., foreign investors, or provincial Russians looking to climb the social ladder. "Moscow, Moscow, how I dream of Moscow" (*Three Sisters* by Chekhov). In spite of the massive flux of workers, Moscow's jobless rate is unbelievably low. In 1997 there were less than 46,000 unemployed (less than 1%) of the city's population. "Only a lazy person cannot make money in this city today. Well except for the handicapped and elderly," says its Mayor Luzhkov. People dress much better now, too. The pace of change is incredible, much faster than in St. Petersburg.

History

850 years ago Moscow was a little more than a walled village sanwiched between Novgorod and Ryzan. It took Moscovite princes about 400 to bring Moscow to primacy.

The first record of settlement in the Moscow area was late in the 9th century. The official year to mark its foundation is 1147. In that year, a Suzdal prince Yuri Dolgoruky, invited his ally, Prince Svyatoslav
of Novgorod to a feast "Come to me brother, to Moscow," and this siple invitation for dinner was officially recorded in the chronicle of the period. Dolgoruky's estate in Moscow was located were the Kremlin is today, at the intersection of the Moscow and Neglinnaya rivers. It consisted of a wooden church, and a few wooden buildings surrounded by a wall.

The town walls were not laid until 9 years later, in 1156.

The next mention of Moscow in the chronicle is in 1177, when Prince Gleb of Suzdal "came upon Moscow and burned the entire town and the villages."

For nearly two hundred years thereafter, Moscow was engaged in battles with neighboring towns and principalities (particularly, with Tver).

The Mongols have conquered and destroyed Moscow in 1237.

1328 Ivan Kalita (Money Sack) became Prince of Moscow. He was selected by the Mongols to collect tributes (on their behalf) from other Russian princes. Kalita began the expansion of the Moscow principality first by combining with the city of Vladimir, and then by purchasing other neighboring regions and towns. In 1326 he convinced Metropolita Theognost to stay in Moscow, transforming the city into Russia's spiritual center.

54 years later, in 1380, Ivan Kalita's descendant, Dmitiy Donskoy, lead the decisive battle against the Mongols' Golden Horde at Kulikovo field (Pole). The name Donskoy comes from the Russian river Don which is not far from Kulikovo field. This victory cemented Moscow's military primacy.

1367 (during Dmitry Donskoy's rule) the wooden walls of Moscow's Kremlin were replaced by stone.

In 1462, Ivan III (the Great) came to power. He initiated the most significant "gathering of Russian lands," expanding Moscow and breaking the Mongol hold over Russia (he added Yaroslavl, Rostov, Ustjug, Perm, Viatka, Dmitrov, and Uglich). Further, a war with Lithuania lead to massive acquisitions in the West.

In 1472, Ivan married Sophia, daughter of the last emperor of Byzantium, and the Byzantine double-headed eagle was added to the family symbols. At that time, Byzantine court rituals and practices were established in Moscow.

The word "tsar" (from Latin Caesar) also helped to initiate the idea of Moscow as a "Third Rome." Note: the fall of Constantinople in 1453. A Russian monk wrote: "Two Romes have already fallen, but the third remains standing and a fourth there will not be."

Moscow of the 14-15th centuries resembled any other medieval city: a fortress surrounded by a wall with the population living both inside and outside of it. We know little about this early Moscow, except
that the wall, called a Kremlin, was first made of wood and than of white stone. Perhaps, it resembled similar walls of the monasteries nearby, notably, the Troitsko-Sergievsky Lavra monastery in Zagorsk.

Ivan did much to build Moscow, bringing in many foreign, especially Italian, artisans and builders. The first stone and brick buildings in the Kremlin, including the cathedrals of the Assumption and Annunciation were built during Ivan's reign. The Italians, Marco Ruffo, Pietro Sofari, Alevizio Novi, and Aristotle Fioravanti totally rebuilt the Kremlin, rechanneled the rivers running through it, and tore down the ancient white walls. They built the new wall and placed towers at every bend; five towers had entrances. The red bricks, which replaced the stones, were of the same size: 30X16X7 centimeters and 8 kilograms in weight. The height of the new wall varies from 5 to 19 meters. The thickness of the wall is between 3.5 and 6.5 meters.

Ivan III was the first truly national Russian autocrat. When the Roman emperor, acknowledging the growing significance of Moscow, offered Ivan a crown, Ivan turned it down, as it would have implied subservience to Roman authority.

"We pray to God that He let us and our children always remain, as now, the lords of our land. As to being appointed, just as we never desired it before, so we do not desire it now."

1600s are known as the Times of Troubles. The Poles were threatening Moscow and attacking it in the name of various False Dimitrys.

In 1612, when the Poles got very close to the Kremlin, Kosma Minin, a Moscow merchant, and Prince Pozharsky lead the army of Muscovites to turn back the Poles.

(Note: a statue honoring them is in front of St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square).

In 1613, the 300-year Romanovs dynasty began when the National Assembly elected Mikhail Romanov to the throne. The Times of Troubles ended.

A hundred years later, in 1712, Peter the Great, who hated Moscow and loved the sea changed the capital to St. Petersburg.

After Peter's death, under Elizabeth I and Catherine II, building in Moscow resumed its previous pace, with domestic and foreign architects offering their creations. Moscow University, the beginnings of the Arbat region, among others were created at this time.

In 1812 (the 12th year of the century) proved critical again for Moscow, when Moscow was burned rather than surrendering to Napoleon's advancing troops. The damage of the three-day fire was devastating--80% of the city was reduced to ashes.

However, much of the city was rebuilt in the next half of the century. Notable architectural additions, the
Manezh, the Bolshoy Theater were built.

By 1879 the city had over a million residents. It became the industrial and financial capital of the country, while St.Petersburg was the political and cultural capital.

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The Kremlin

Structures of note:

(1) Spassky (Savior) Tower, built in 1625.

The tower today contains the clock, which represents "official" Moscow time.

This tower serves as the main entrance for the russian officials and foreign dignitaries.

(2) The Ivan the Great Belltower, built in 1505-06. It's 81 meters high.

(3) The Uspensky (Assumption) Cathedral, built in 1474-79. This is the largest of the churches in the Kremlin. It's interior is made of evenly spred columns covered with religious art.

(4) The Blagoveshchensky (Annunciation) Cathedral, built in 1484-89. It's a smaller church; the domes were rebuilt several times; was intended more for private warship of the tsars and their families than for the public.

(5) The Archangel Mikhail Cathedral, built in 1505-08. The burial church for the tsars and their families until Peter the Great.

(6) The Deposition church, originally constructed in 1484, rebuilt in 1517. Honors Moscow's triumph over the Mongol Khan (the best in 16th century Russian church building).

(7) The "Terem" Palace, built in 1635-36. It has small onion domes; inside--wonderfull wall decorations.

(8) Other buildings/attractions

The Palace of Congresses, built in 1960.
The Armory

The Tsar Cannon

The Tsar Bell

Red Square

The Lenin Mausoleum

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Historical Museum (late 19th century)

St. Basil's Cathedral (built by architects Postnic and Barma in 1554-1560 for Ivan the Terrible) with multi-colored onion domes. It commemorates in stone the style of many wooden churches of the 16th century.