"Moscow - how many feelings are in this sound for any Russian heart!?"
Alexander Pushkin

Founded in 1147, Moscow has a long history as an important center of commerce and culture. The city has survived many invasions, seen the devastating effect of fire at Napoleon's time, sent the courageous Moscoviters to defend their city at the frosty December days in 1941, coped with the tank shootings against the Parliament in 1993, and celebrated its 850 anniversary in 1998. I was born in this remarkable city, and still consider it to be one of the most interesting cities of the world. Where else will you find such a mixture of different architecture styles, various religions, different nationalities, million of tourists coming every day, a combination of unbelievably hospitable and kindness people with corrupted and ignorant "people in power"? While walking down the street you have the chance to meet people from all over the world.

Obviously, life in Moscow is rapidly changing every year. Those who haven't been to Moscow for the last 3-4 years wouldn't recognize it today. There are some new apartment buildings, a freshly painted downtown, new shopping malls instead of one of the largest squares in Europe (Manejnaya Square), new monuments to Peter the Great and General Zukov, the renovated Tretiakov gallery, the golden onion-shaped domed of the rebuilt Cathedral, and the first outdoor movie-car theater ever in Moscow!

Not all the changes are for the best in Moscow, but the character is changing!

Today the greatest desire of an ordinary Moscoviter is to bring stability to their life. The latest economic, financial, political crises in Russia have brought a certain disorder. Many Moscoviters have changed their jobs, some for the best, others not. Thus, certain group of people used all the advantages of Moscow, now a typical West European city. You could buy whatever you wanted in Moscow, enjoy the intensive nightlife of the city, and visit special entertainment programs and shows. On a typical day for a well to do Moscoviter one might order tickets to the ballet, visit a museum if you wish, and/or go out to a moderate restaurant. There are western style supermarkets that make you feel you are in Chicago or New York! The affluent citizen also uses the Internet regularly.

Unfortunately, those who are not successful in finding a new job cannot maintain their standard of living. The financial differences between Moscoviters are too high. In the old days everyone went to low priced ballets and other forms of entertainment. In the former days, the main entertainment affordable for everyone was a good music concert, a theater performance or a ballet. People from all over Russia had an intention to visit Moscow to enjoy the newest performance. Now not all people can afford such entertainment. For many Moscoviters the trip to the grocery store is the most important part of their day. Many people are still looking for the cheapest goods and food - visiting the open and wholesale markets daily.

The worst days of the change were in the mid 1990s. Most Moscoviters visited the shops as if they were museums, looking at the great variety of goods , only to go away because of the high prices. Before the financial crisis in August 1998, the life of an average Moscoviter was becoming better. Approximately 20% of Moscoviters had good salaries and could afford to live in sufficient apartments full of hi-tech devices. They might even go for a holiday to Europe, Asia, or the US. Others, managed to find the way out by having different jobs. After August 1998 the situation changed for the worst again. A lot of middle-class people with relatively high salaries lost their jobs and joined the low-income group. However, the newest statistical data show that most of these middle class workers managed to find new jobs with reasonable salaries.

The worst situation was and still is with the elderly. The retired Moscoviters, as well as veterans of the War, and disabled people have low pensions, and thus they can't afford any entertainment. Their lives are
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in the hands of their relatives. The Moscow government is trying to subsidize these groups through free travel tickets for all types of transportation, low house payments, and free medical care. However, it is not enough. The government cannot afford to be so generous.

The system of health care has changed in Moscow. Now all Moscoviters have medical insurance. But if you want medical care of high quality, then you must go to the private doctors and hospitals. The best doctors, dentists, and surgeons are now private, making for a new well-paid business sector in Moscow. Education is still free in Moscow. However, there are some private elementary schools, colleges, and universities. The quality of education in these schools is not as high as would be expected. Thus, lots of students are still trying to get a degree from the well-known schools like Moscow State University. The latest booming development in Moscow is in computer technology. Every university and many colleges have their own computer programs. On the main streets of Moscow you can find Internet cafés that young Moscoviters use a lot.

Today it is quite popular among the rich Moscoviters to send their kids to schools and colleges in the United Kingdom and other countries of Europe, or to the US.

Despite the changes, the instability, the worries about day-to-day living, Moscoviters are quite optimistic about their future. They dream about economic, political and financial stability of the country. And it is this stability that will bring good fortune to their own lives in the new millennium.