

Russians Go French For Old New Year

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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PARIS — Hotels across France are gearing up for an influx of Russians coming to celebrate their Orthodox Christian New Year in a country that is becoming a playground for millionaires from the former Soviet Union.

As Russia grows richer, more than half a million Russians are visiting France each year, according to French tourism development agency Atout France. Numbers peak each January when Russians celebrate their New Year according to the Orthodox Julian calendar, 13 days after the Western New Year.

Well-heeled Russians favor the fashionable ski resort of Courchevel, Cote d'Azur resorts like Nice and Paris — where five-star hotels are busy lining up decadent Russian-themed soirees with caviar and vodka to mark the 2011 party.

"We get families, couples, celebrities like the model Natalya Vodyanova, oligarchs, some politicians and business clients," said a spokesperson for the swanky Le Meurice hotel, which will offer a special menu of beef stroganoff, caviar and blinis prepared by Michelin-starred

chef Yannick Alleno.

In the same chic Paris district, the upmarket hotel Bristol also has caviar and blinis on its Jan. 13 dinner menu, with prices ranging from 240 euros to an eye-watering 800 euros (\$310 to \$1,035) per head in an annexed eatery — and that excludes vodka or wine.

On the elegant Champs-Elysees avenue, nightclub L'Arc will cater to Russian revelers by laying on live Cossack-style music and installing an ice rink for the occasion.

"We're talking about a clientele with a very high purchasing power that is very much dependent on the financial markets, on stock market and commodity prices," said Thomas Deschamps, head of statistics at the Paris tourist board.

In December, Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Pinchuk made headlines in France by putting on a lavish 50th birthday bash at a reported cost of several million euros at the Courchevel ski resort. He flew in the Cirque du Soleil circus for a private show, and some 150 guests were served a gourmet buffet prepared by Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse.

With crude oil prices headed toward \$100 a barrel, and other raw materials prices surging to record highs, celebrations by wealthy Russians are unlikely to be restrained this year.

Russians headed to the French Riviera this year will be able to splash out on an Orient Express-style experience, traveling on a direct Moscow-Nice rail service launched last fall.

Tickets for the 50-hour journey start at 306 euros, and 1,200 euros buys a luxury compartment with shower and mini-bar.

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