

# Stalin-Era Cinema Returns, Up for Hire

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The Zvezda cinema opened in 1952, and residents in the building could enter without having to go outside.

The Moscow cinema world is dominated by multiplexes, but the return of an old cinema that caters to those not so keen on Hollywood blockbusters and can be hired for a small fee now offers something different.

The small Soviet-era cinema Zvezda, located close to the Kursky railroad station, reopened late last year and is offering its small hall to film societies, directors, students and anyone else who thinks they have a film worth sharing with the rest of Moscow.

The cinema has been refurbished as part of the Culture Ministry's Moskino scheme, an initiative to reopen the forgotten cinemas of the Soviet Union.

The ministry owns 22 in Moscow, but only 11 are used for their original purpose, such as the Ulan-Bator, Vladivostok, Sputnik and Khudozhestvenny cinemas. Others are used for business, including a car showroom and a furniture shop.

The cinema wants to attract movie societies and already has an Italian club that shows movies in the original language with Russian subtitles once a month and a documentary club. The cinema also shows regular releases with a focus on foreign-language movies.

"Not only is it central and a comfortable size for debate, the surroundings are of an artistic and architectural value akin to the Moscow metro," the cinema's director Olga Shipulina said of the small hall that contains the cinema's single screen.

Built under Stalin in 1952, Zvezda was originally part of the residential building. The idea was that the high-profile figures living there could go to the pictures without even stepping outside, Shipulina said.

Located near the Indian Embassy, Indian films became its speciality.

Today the building is an odd mix. A tiny, shiny box office, which has a fake fireplace for some reason, leads onto a grand hall with a beautiful white ceiling with original Stalinist plastering with hammers and sickles, and stars.

The modern tables, brown-velvet armchairs and matching curtains look as if they have been transported in from a 1980s sitcom, but don't detract too much from the hall's old charm.

"There is a real lack of opportunities in Moscow to show diverse films," said Yevgeny Golynkin, who organized Moscow's Documentary Film Club event at Zvezda, "Young people have been deprived of this kind of community. New films can be a source of the debate that is so lacking today."

The cinema's hall costs 6,000 rubles (\$200) to hire for a film showing — although you must first get the film approved by the cinema — and seats 60 people. The screen is 4.5 by 2.2 meters.

To use the cloakroom, you pay an extra 1,000 rubles, although as there is a notice on the entrance of the cinema offering a reward of 50,000 rubles for a bag that went missing in the cloakroom, that may not be the best option.

If you want to show a film, then you may have to pay a license fee depending on the film in question. No payment is needed if you are showing a Russian film more than 70 years old, the cinema's technical director Dmitry Chekalov said.

The position with British and American films is more ambiguous.

"We certainly understand that no one in England knows that somewhere in Moscow, a small movie theater showed a film," said Chekalov, adding that "the responsibility rests with those hiring the venue, but few would sue because of one or two showings."

Zvezda cinema. 18/22 Zemlyanoi Val. Metro Kurskaya. Tel. 916-2805.  
[www.moskovskoe-kino.ru](http://www.moskovskoe-kino.ru)

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