

"You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore..."

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Back in the mid 1990s when I first visited Moscow, I was struck by the number of florist stands in evidence. Although things have changed in Britain on this front by now, back then there might have been one "proper" florist on most U.K. high streets, along with a green grocer selling tulips or daffodils, depending on the season. There was rarely more than that, unless you counted the sad-looking carnations piled into buckets in front of garages — and I didn't, back then.

But in 1995 Moscow, there were tsveti kiosks on every corner and outside every metro station — tiny, admittedly, but still there, beacons of color and cheerfulness amongst what seemed at the time to be rather a lot of grey. I was touched by the number of girls on dates who proudly carried a single flower for the evening, if perhaps a little puzzled that more substantial bouquets weren't seen much. I imagined the reason for this would be the sheer inconvenience of carrying a bunch of flowers around with you. Yes, they're lovely to look at, but have you ever tried to get one home undamaged on the metro?

Ah, the sweet innocence of youth. Fast-forward 15 years to 2010 and it was my first

International Women's Day, or March 8, in Russia. Like any good wife, I made it clear to my husband that flowers were expected — no, mandatory — on this day of days. And so, not wanting to disillusion me quite so soon after we had arrived here, he delivered. A very lovely bouquet it was, too, and, out of interest, I asked him what it cost. When he told me, the penny finally dropped: The reason those girls walked around holding a single rose as if it was worth it's weight in gold? Well, it more or less was.

On learning this, I promptly announced that whilst I loved flowers, I liked trips "home" more, so we've not had so many flowers adorning our house here in Moscow over the last couple of years. I'm guessing the reason they're so expensive is the cost of shipping them in from warmer climes or Dutch hothouses — although Russian friends of mine disagree, muttering darkly about middlemen and greed. Whatever the reason for it, I hadn't realized how much I missed having that splash of color around the place, especially during the colder months, until this weekend when we had some friends over for dinner and one of them brought us the most beautiful bunch of tulips.

So, whilst looking at them nodding cheerfully at me over my laptop screen as I write this post, as they take over our dining room table (did you know that tulips continue to grow once cut?), I wondered: In these credit-crunched times, are flowers so much more expensive here than back in the U.K.? I decided to do a little comparative price research. A bunch of 15 tulips from our local tsveti stand versus the same back in the U.K.: In which country would they cost more?

The verdict? Let's just say that whenever we get home, I'm not sure my husband will be bringing me many more bunches of flowers than he does now...

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