

5 Free Things to Do, In the Oligarch City

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The front gate of the Tsar's yard on Izmailovo's Silver Island. Peter the Great learned to sail on this estate. **Jim Heintz**

The Russian capital's hotel prices are exorbitant enough to make an oligarch cry, but the city has some fine free sights that may dry up a tourist's tears.

Lenin Mausoleum

Two decades after the Soviet Union died, a visit to the mummy-under-glass of its founder is more about creepy kitsch than political pilgrimage, but still a potent view into the totalitarian psyche. Open 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and Saturday-Sunday. Entrance is free, but bags, cameras and phones must be checked for a fee. To make this a true freebie, go with a companion who can hold your gear.

Winzavod

This former winery on a careworn industrial street has been turned into Moscow's modern art

nexus. A dozen galleries, including that of internationally known art impresario Marat Guelman, an array of modish shops and a cafe draw the young and stylish on weekends — a way to get to this crowd without paying a cover charge at a club. Take a map; though it's near the Kursky railway terminal, the neighborhood is confusing and the street's name, Chetverty Syromyatnichesky Pereulok, is a tongue-twister

Yauza Valley

No one comes to Moscow to get close to nature, but if you need to get away from its dirt and din, a walk through the wetlands of the Yauza River, a tributary of the Moscow River, is a pastoral idyll. Well-maintained paths and boardwalks lead through marshes and woods, past a 350-year-old country church, ending at a former nobleman's estate. The 21st century may seem a bit jarring when the three-kilometer walk is over. The trail starts a couple of blocks from the Babushkinskaya metro stop.

Silver Island

Although tourists jam the Izmailovsky souvenir market's ersatz czarist-era buildings, few venture to the real thing right next door. This island in a small manmade lake was a royal estate when Peter the Great was a boy and contains a soaring church with peculiar peacock-eye friezes and a fearsome three-story structure dating to his time (he died in 1725), along with a sprawling 19th century ensemble. Peter learned to sail here and credited it as the beginning of his drive to make Russia a great naval power. The island is visible from the market area, but the buildings are hidden by thick trees, so coming upon them feels like discovering a lost village.

All-Russia Exhibition Center

Larger than the country of Monaco, this complex originally built to laud Soviet achievements features Stalinist Gothic architecture (don't miss the pavilion with a gargantuan bull charging off the roof), exuberant fountains, a Vostok rocket like the one that put the first man into orbit, and usually a few thousand Russians strolling, flirting and scarfing down shish kebabs and beer.

Some of the massive pavilions that once housed Communist propaganda exhibits have been given over to capitalism, filled with warrens of tiny kiosks selling everything from medical devices to luminescent panties; others are falling into picturesque disrepair.

It's a vivid summary of the Soviet Union's ambitions and disintegration, especially the onetime space exploration building, now selling gardening supplies, where a giant, ghostly portrait of Yury Gagarin watches over sellers of petunia seedlings. Take the metro to VDNKh and follow the crowd.

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