

Russia Parties at London Olympics

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LONDON — Russia wants to knock your socks off. Denmark is stylish and sophisticated. Ireland is up for a party — on a budget.

There are more than 200 countries at the Olympics, and they have two ways to stand out. One is on the medal podium; the other is by partying.

Dotted across London, national hospitality houses offer a base for a country's athletes, officials and occasional celebrities.

Here's an eclectic, unscientific guided tour:

Russia: 2014 Is Ours

Russia, home to the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, has pulled out all the stops with two open-air attractions, Russia Park and Sochi Park, set in London's Kensington Gardens.

Russia Park is a vast sea of Astroturf dotted with bean bags, ping pong, chess and mini-golf.

Medal winners and artists share the stage, with entertainment ranging from Central Asian throat singers to jazz bands to mini-rock festivals.

Inside scoop: Admission is free. Blinis and beef stroganoff are available but alcohol is not, and you must be able to stomach an endless loop of Queen's "We Are the Champions."

Winter Palace

A 10-minute walk away, Sochi Park is the showcase for the Russian city and region that will host the next Winter Games, with attractions including virtual skiing and a nightly ice dancing show featuring big-name Russian skaters.

Scoop: Ouch on the admissions price: 18 pounds (\$28) in advance, 20 (\$31) at the door. Adding to the pinch, the ice show is extra.

Samba, Baby

Brazil, home to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, has transformed Somerset House, a sprawling edifice beside the River Thames, into Casa Brasil.

The courtyard has been taken over by Brazilian bands, including Sargento Pimenta (Portuguese for Sgt. Pepper), a popular Carnival ensemble that takes a samba approach to Beatles classics. The bar serves up a mean caipirinha, a popular Brazilian cocktail.

Scoop: Brazil is a vast, varied and vibrant country, so bring on the 2016 games! But who forgot to sell any Brazilian food?

Cheap Yet Cheerful

Recession-hit Ireland has installed its national house — inevitably, perhaps — in a pub. In the King's Cross area, close to the Javelin trains that run to the Olympic Park, it sprawls over three floors, from a basement bar styled on a British comedy to a main floor with live music to a roof terrace and bar.

Scoop: Debt crisis, what debt crisis? Financial woes are not going to stop this party, but the menu offers more burgers than truly Irish fare.

The Big Orange

The dedicated party crowd heads to the Netherlands' Heineken House, legendary for its festive vibe and free-flowing beer. It has taken over Alexandra Palace in north London, which has many areas in which to eat, drink and relax.

Scoop: Party, party, party! But that orange color is bright and it's a slightly out-of-the-way location. Tickets must be purchased in advance.

Small Is Beautiful

Denmark has turned a yacht-fringed marina, St. Katharine Docks, into a little corner of Scandinavia. There is music, hotdogs and beer, Scandinavian designs, meaty food and big

screens showing Olympic highlights including handball — a Scandinavian obsession.

Scoop: Cool and relaxed. Pork neck marinated in beer with rosehip compote, anyone? Admission is free, but bring raingear, most activities are outdoors.

Alpine Treats

Nearby, Austria House offers bratwurst with sauerkraut and Stiegl beer on a ski chalet-style terrace with views of the Tower of London.

Scoop: Sporty and fun but celebrity potential is limited.

Czech Mate

Some houses, including Jamaica's, have yet to open, but so far the gold medal goes to the Czech House, which has transformed a conference venue in north London's Islington neighborhood into a giant party playpen.

We're talking indoor basketball, pool tables, foosball, a chill-out zone and plenty of Pilsener.

Outside is a large sculpture by Czech artist David Cerny of a London double-decker bus doing push-ups. Inside, an inflatable version floats surreally over the heads of partygoers.

Scoop: Fun and wacky, but does Czech food really need to cost 17 pounds (\$27) for goulash and bacon dumplings?

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