

Expats Join Up to Create Postcards for Moscow

By [Maximilian Gill](#)

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Lopes set up postcard company Imagin'Elles with friends Rey de Rovere and Depeille.

Finding a postcard in Moscow that captures the atmosphere and delights of living in Russia is almost impossible, even among the myriad souvenir shops that line Arbat. At best, an uninspiring shot of Red Square or Christ the Savior Cathedral will be settled for in an attempt to dispel impressions at home that Moscow is no more than a gray Soviet wasteland.

Imagin'Elles is a new venture spearheaded by expats that aims to transform this stagnant market, selling images that show Russia at its very best with an eclectic mixture of quirky photography, drawing and graphic design.

Images range from collages of Moscow's church cupolas to Warhol-esque montages of clapped up Ladas to a quintessential babushka reading Pravda in the park. Only established this summer, the company has enjoyed growing success selling their wares in various

locations across Moscow, including Arbat and the Radisson hotel Ukraina.

Sara da Costa Lopes, a Portuguese expat who has been in Moscow for over six years, started the company with French friend Sandrine Rey de Rovere, whose photos are used in a number of cards, and Russian Yelena Depeille.

"In the U.K. you get whole shops that only sell cards, here in Moscow there is no real market at all," Lopes said. "Russians are very happy to see our designs; they consider that foreigners see Russia as dark and unappealing and so they're happy to see their lives presented in a nice way, wherever it is we are from."

"They are very appealing and present Russia in an attractive but realistic way, which is important," said Natalya, who works in an Arbat souvenir shop.

An initial investment of several thousand euros has seen over 1,000 sales in the first two months, and they expect the numbers to grow. The cards cost between 30 and 80 rubles.

Finding the right designer took a long time, Lopes said, but eventually Portuguese artist Bruno Ferreira da Silva was found.

While some of the photographs used are from archives, many are original, and Lopes stressed that Photoshop is never used to enhance the features of their subjects in any way.

Lopes said that she and her partners are "motivated by our interest and curiosity in Russia and by the use of a small piece of paper to attract other tourists to come to Russia."

Native Russians are responsible for the majority of Imagin'Elles' sales so far, although there have been some complaints about the images chosen for the postcards.

What may appeal to a tourist can to a Russian be perplexing and even upsetting, said Lopes. A number have been unsettled by one image of an old woman holding up a photograph of Stalin. A postcard of Moscow's controversial statue of Peter the Great also faced scrutiny.

For Lopes, who also runs a construction management company, starting up a new business as a foreigner hasn't been as problematic as one might imagine. "If you have a brain and some ideas, you can do whatever you want here."

Imagin'Elles postcards are sold along Arbat, French tourism agent Tsar Voyages, hotel Radisson Ukraine and in CPrint, located in the Aeroexpress station at Sheremetyevo, Paveletskaya train station, Komsomolskaya stations and Cash&Carry.
Contact: imaginelles@hotmail.com

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