

## Wanted: Aeroexpress Tickets

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Natalya has something that will reduce the budget of any traveler: tickets to the Aeroexpress trains that shuttle back and forth between Moscow airports for a bargain price. The tickets that Natalya, last name not mentioned, was advertising on classified ad web sites ordinarily cost 350 rubles (\$12.50) but are going cheap from her at only 200 rubles, a bargain.

She has 21 tickets left at the moment, valid for a month, and which have to be sold before May 1. A traveling football team could be up more than 1,000 rubles instantly if they buy every member a ticket.

As innocently as possible, the question was asked to Natalya: Where the hell did you get the tickets and how come you can sell them so cheaply? Natalya giggled charmingly and said, “How else do you get something like this in Russia?”

After the above giggle, there was no doubt that the tickets were real — Russian innovation at its purest was in action.

Natalya was not going to give any details, so unless she writes in with a better explanation,

I'm going with the obvious that she is a) a ticket saleswoman who slips one in 10 tickets into her bra to sell for a bit of money on the side; b) the lover of a travel agent whose company supplies tours with paid transport to the airport but who keeps the tickets by getting his no-good unemployed brother-in-law to take them in his minivan instead so he can pass the tickets on to his Natulichka; or c) the godmother of Moscow scalpers who takes in a billion rubles a day in selling tickets stolen by a group of scruffy if charmingly cheeky ruffian runaway orphans.

Aeroexpress, it seems, was losing a slice of its revenue, but sympathy here was muted considering that the company, in a very Russian way, is also involved in its own scam.

Look at the unspoiled Moscow visitor arriving in the fair capital — he manages to avoid going with the taxi driver who has parked his cab nearby, a mere two miles' walk from the airport, and reaches the Aeroexpress ticket counter, notes the woman with something sticking out of her cleavage, and then buys the special-rated ticket that throws in two tickets on the metro.

Happily satisfied that he has saved a bit of money, he then is refused permission to bring his trolley onto the Aeroexpress platform and a few minutes later slumps sweatily into the seat, having dragged his luggage down the platform. The seatback at this point collapses backward.

On arrival in Moscow, he realizes that Aeroexpress has charged him 30 rubles for a metro ticket instead of the 28 rubles it normally costs. Welcome to Moscow. He tips no one for the whole trip and rings Natalya on the way back so Aeroexpress loses 150 rubles.

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