

Summertime - and the Living Is Easy...

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The holidays are slowly drawing to a close, and all summer we've been doing the expat shuffle — moving from pillar to post across Northern Europe via various friends and family to pass the time until the next school term starts and Moscow's mobile population in general return from their holiday destinations. In essence, wandering the planet in search of someone else for my sons to play with.

We could, of course, have stayed put in Moscow this summer. But leaving aside the collective gasp of horror that would have ensued from grandparents disappointed by the removal of little-angel quality-time privileges and the similar sharp intake of breath that would be heard from me at the prospect of missing out on the opportunity to benefit from the summer sales "back home," there is one big problem with toughing out over the summer months in Moscow, and it's not the excessive heat without access to air-conditioning, the possibility of smog, or the fact that actually, quite often it's cheaper to go "home" than to stay put in Russia.

No, the real reason that so many expat families clear off the moment the last school bell is

rung at the end of term is that if they don't, they will be marooned on the child-free island that is Moscow in July and August.

I get that if you are a singleton or without kids, this may well be an immensely attractive option. However, when you have two young sons who — while they get on with each other in the normal sibling way — need outside stimulation from other kids as much as we adults do from each other, the prospect of a summer without play dates is somewhat daunting, especially if your Russian is not that good.

It's not even as if we could have circumvented this problem at a much earlier stage by having put our sons in Russian schools, thus ensuring a much wider group of local friends for them; as I understand it, Russian kids clear off to the dacha or to their grandparents for the summer, too.

Last summer, our first in Moscow, we did try to do things differently. We hung around a little longer after school ended to give us the chance to chill out here for a while before heading off. Good plan, you might say. Why not make the most of the lighter traffic, less busy attractions, good weather? Great plan, in fact — except, remember last summer? Yes. Excessive heat, fires, smog. The best-laid plans in this instance turned out to be toast — almost literally. So this year, we gave it the princely total of six days after the final school bell rang before joining the exodus and heading for the airport.

But we're back now, to make the most of what's left of the summer before the school run starts again. And it's good to be home, but after a few weeks away it's sensible to remind oneself of the ground rules for day-to-day living in Russia. In my case, most recently, that includes remembering that while it's perfectly all right to create a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh or even eighth lane on a three-lane highway during rush hour, under no circumstances must your children raise their voices or appear to be having any fun in the supermarket. Or, indeed, must their mother walk the wrong way through an empty checkout when bringing her children back onto the shop floor to recover her trolley from where she had to abandon it — full of shopping — to allow for an unscheduled loo-stop.

I think I might retitle this post, actually. "Back on the Chain Gang," perhaps?

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