The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Snowbound

By Julia Phillips

December 01, 2011



Winter is coming to the peninsula. In the past couple of weeks, the sky here has lowered and started shining orange at night. Three blizzards have settled on the city so far. Car brakes are becoming useless, and the sidewalks are sealed with ice. Last Tuesday, temperatures in central Kamchatka finally held around minus 20 degrees Celsius, cold enough for reindeer herders near the village of Esso to slaughter hundreds of their animals and preserve the meat. Deep freeze won't hit here until January or February, but the storms, the snow, the black sand scattered on pedestrian paths all show that winter is indeed on its way.

And so the winter sports season has started up again in earnest. Kamchatka is surrounded by mountains and spends most of the year encased in snow, so winter sports are regarded as not only means of recreation but necessities for maintaining sanity. If you don't skate, ski or snowboard here, you'll hardly be able to move from October to June.

On a clear morning these days, you can find women belted into yellow snowsuits and holding cross-country skis on any bus heading for the city outskirts. Weekday nights offer chances for snowboarding enthusiasts to gather in Petropavlovsk clubs and watch short films or

discuss their upcoming trips. The Kamchatka Freeride Community, dedicated to those who love to ski or snowboard, has hundreds of followers on its social networking page. Followers post messages about equipment for sale or pictures of their last snowmobiling adventure.

The city's winter sports fans turned out in force on Saturday night for a screening of "The Art of Flight," a new American film featuring professional snowboarder Travis Rice. Everyone in the crowd was young, trim and sure-footed. When the movie began, showing Rice dropping out of helicopters or skimming over avalanches in slow motion, audience members screamed in appreciation. One section of the film was set in Alaska. It was impossible to watch those folded black peaks and meters of soft snow and not think of Kamchatka, set across the Bering Strait like a distant reflection. People were whooping at every swell in the soundtrack. Sitting in the middle of such a crowd made the movie seem like an incomplete thrill: How could its makers visit far-off Chile but not the snowboarder's paradise outside our theater's doors?

The girl in the seat beside me left the movie theater trembling with adrenaline. Holding a business card from a local ski school that she'd picked up in the lobby, she said, "This winter, I'll finally learn to ski and snowboard. I can't believe I haven't learned already!" The air outside bit at our cheeks. "To live 20 years on Kamchatka," she said, "and not know how to ski!" Her words stretched out with longing, making the injustice — the impossibility — of such an existence clear.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/01/snowbound-a34713