

The Tickly Issue of Wearing Fur

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Fur coats: now there's a divisive issue. Or, at least, there's a divisive issue until you come and live in Moscow for a winter or two.

Growing up, and in my twenties and thirties, I was adamant that I would never wear a fur coat. All those supermodels claiming "I'd rather go naked than wear fur" had it spot on as far as I was concerned. "Why oh why would you wear the skin of an animal when there were perfectly good man-made alternatives available?" was my take on the matter, and I stuck to that argument. It wasn't hard, mind you; not only was there next-to-no fur available in the shops I frequented in London, but it's easy to be holier than thou about these issues in a climate where it rarely gets colder than minus 2 Celsius.

And then we moved to Moscow in January 2010, slap bang into the jaws of the coldest winter in a decade.

Oh boy.

Unsurprisingly, I found my attitude to fur shifting. Not only does it do the job nature designed it to do — keeping the wearer warm as toast — but you see it everywhere. This is surprising to me, because as anyone who has wandered through retailers selling them will know, a fur coat does not come cheap — a new one from a high-street store will set you back anything from \$1,000 to \$30,000, depending on the quality of fur you want. So, it's not a purchase to make lightly. Devotees will tell you of course that if you look after it properly, a fur coat will last you a lifetime, but doing that brings it's own set of additional costs — there's the cleaning, and then the storage in a special facility over the summer months. And yet, if you take a ride on the Moscow metro today, I guarantee that between 20% and 50% of the adults you see will be wearing fur.

So, repeated exposure to anything changes perception, and halfway through my third winter here I'm a lot less judgmental on other peoples' choices to wear a fur coat. Suddenly, the sort of comment a visitor to this city made to an acquaintance of mine on learning that the fur coat the latter was wearing was the real McCoy — "You should be ashamed of yourself!" — starts to sound not only incredibly rude but also more than a little blinkered. Live through a Russian winter yourself before judging other people's ways of staying warm, would be my advice to any new arrivals.

In the interests of full disclosure, I still don't wear a fur coat myself. This, however, is due as much to my inability to overcome my innate belief that, more often than not, they make the women wearing them look somehow middle-aged as it the result of any ethical reservations on my part. And I'm afraid to admit that if the sheepskin shearling coat of my dreams suddenly popped up in my price range, I too would be clad in the skin of an animal.

Obviously, my supporting rationalization for this purely hypothetical choice would be that since I eat sheep, I see no reason why I shouldn't wear it. It's just a shame that mink, sable or chinchilla pie aren't on menus too...

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