

Landmark Metropol Hotel Sold at Auction

By [The Moscow Times](#)

August 30, 2012



Azimut, the current managing company, won ownership of the Metropol. **Igor Tabakov**

Michael Jackson slept there. Vladimir Lenin harangued Bolsheviks there. Over the past century, the Hotel Metropol has seen the extremes of Russian life, from austere revolutionary fervor to flashy pop indulgence.

The hotel was sold Thursday for \$275 million — slightly more expensive than the starting price of \$272 million — after an auction organized by the Moscow city government as part of its privatization program.

The buyer was Azimut, a major hotel chain that rented the Metropol from the Moscow city government, Russian media reported.

Moscow, with a perpetual shortage of hotel rooms and a business culture that adores ostentation, is an attractive market for high-end hoteliers and the Metropol offers plenty

of curb-flash.

Situated catty-corner from the Bolshoi Theater and an easy stroll from Red Square, the location is prime for any guest who wants to feel in the very center of the city's heaving action.

It's one of Moscow's most distinctive buildings as well, a cheery Art Nouveau confection in a city where buildings mostly seem to glower. Although at six stories it's one of the city center's more low-rise structures, it stands out with sinuous curves, friezes of women en deshabille and bands of brightly colored majolica tiles. Several elaborate mosaics top the building, the most notable being Mikhail Vrubel's "Princess of Dreams," showing a dying knight sailing through a crashing sea to a vision of his beloved.

Then, there's the historical cachet. When it opened in 1901, it was a paragon of Russians' growing prosperity and confidence, but 17 years later took on a far different role. When Bolsheviks decided to move their government from St. Petersburg to Moscow, the hotel was appropriated to become the Second House of the Soviets.

A large plaque on the exterior notes that in 1918 to 1919, Lenin "many times gave reports and speeches at sessions and party congresses" in the hotel and chatted there with members of the "prodotryad," armed squads of workers who forcefully appropriated food from the bourgeoisie. Another plaque commemorates a 1921 meeting in the hotel that resulted in a friendship agreement with Mongolia.

In the chaos of World War II, the Metropol became home and office for almost all the foreign journalists allowed to work in the Soviet Union. "Gloomy and cavernous, Mother Metropol was like a college fraternity house" during that time, Whitman Bassow wrote in his book "The Moscow Correspondents."

The auction winner will get all that, but won't get the hotel's elaborate array of antique furnishings and paintings. How much of that might be available for separate purchase is unclear. Natalya Bocharova, head of the city property department, said this month that an array of objects from the hotel will be turned over to museums.

The furnishings are a major part of the hotel's appeal. Jackson, during a 1993 stay, reportedly was so enamored with a lamp featuring a bear figure that he agitated unsuccessfully to buy it.

Despite its storied history and reputation, hotel review websites suggest the Metropol's rooms often are in need of spiffing up. Tikova said privatization should ensure that the hotel gets an upgrade.

"It allows for more efficient management, it allows for timely renovations," she said.

Related articles:

- [Sochi and Soccer Drive Hotel Boom](#)
- [Morgans to Open Hotel](#)
- [5 Free Things to Do, In the Oligarch City](#)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/30/landmark-metropol-hotel-sold-at-auction-a17407>