

Life, Laundry

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It's a wonderful thing, this expat lifestyle. It causes you to cross paths with people from so many different backgrounds and cultures in a way that you might never have done if you'd stayed put in your country of origin.

After a while, you notice certain similarities in lifestyle and expectations between different nationalities and begin to understand some of the reasons behind them. The French, for example, really do eat a more civilized diet than some of the rest of us. The Italians really do have a flair for interior design. And the North Americans often have a way of doing barbecues that those of us who grew up in slightly rainier climates can only look upon and marvel.

Now, I like to believe that family life in Western Europe is equipped with the majority of the modern conveniences a 21st-century family would need, from Wi-Fi in every room through increasingly huge fridge-freezers to 200 channels on the TV (very few of which carry much worth watching). And Moscow life, in most expat homes, is much the same. Sure, there may be a higher level of dirt to clean up (inescapable when there are power stations inside

the city and so many cars on the roads), and it may take longer to get things done simply because this is such an enormous city, but overall the home-based domestic burden is not so dissimilar here to the one I coped with back in London.

Take the laundry, for example. "Back home" we have what I would call perfectly acceptably sized washers and driers, and the same is true here. Or at least, they seem so, to those of us who have never lived in the U.S.

But North Americans seem to have something of an obsession with the laundry facilities here in Moscow. New arrivals — if the subject comes up — express disbelief at the size of the drums in washing machines and tumble dryers that are standard in Moscow homes, complaining that they have to do the laundry every day just to keep up with their family's demands.

I was always confused by this particular complaint because, well, yeah. That's what you do — what you have to do — with two or more children, isn't it? It was only when a (non-North American) friend told me of her experiences in the U.S. this summer, when she came face-to-face with the laundry facilities in some average American homes, that it finally started to make sense to me. These machines, she tells me, are so big that most families can do an entire week's colored wash in one go. So big, in fact, that her 6-year-old son could fit inside. (Don't try this at home, folks.)

Which, I have to admit, does rather put the daily juggling act that those of us living in Moscow need to do with our whites, coloreds and darks, into perspective.

OK, North American brethren. Finally, I get it. You are officially allowed to be flummoxed by the laundry situation.

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