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Skip the Lines at Pushkin Museum as a 'Friend'

By Natalia Bokareva

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Visitors on a guided tour of the Pushkin Museum. The fine arts museum on Ulitsa Volkhonka was founded in 1912.

If you are looking for an unusual Christmas present, you could head to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, which has introduced its first membership program.

Membership programs, which allow visitors discounted or free access to exhibits in exchange for an annual fee, are common in Europe and North America but a rarity in Russia.

The Pushkin Museum, which calls its members "friends," had considered introducing a membership program for two decades but only finally committed to it this year.

"Museum friends are our regular visitors who should be comfortable visiting the museum at any time, whom we are striving to accommodate because they are our constant audience and we share this common interest in the arts," said Nora Tyang, coordinator of the Pushkin

Museum's membership program.

Members "want to know more about the museum and get involved, and that seems a key motivation behind it — though we will know better after this first year of the program."

The Pushkin program has different levels of privileges, with prices ranging between 6,000 and 300,000 rubles a year.

All of the options allow "friends" to skip the queues and gain instant access to the museum. Anyone who has seen the lines to the museum — winding around the building on weekends or during a particularly popular show — will understand what a boon that can be. Friends skirt the lines by getting in via Entrance No. 5.

All friends can also priority book subscriptions for lectures and sign up to classes in kids' study groups at the museum's educational center. At the "silver" level, they also get priority booking for excursions outside the general schedule, invitations to special museum programs and annual events for the friends' community. One popular option at all levels is admission to the museum in the morning, one day a month, when the museum is closed to the general public.



Wikicommons

The museum considered a membership program for over two decades.

"The essence of the classic friends' cards is about convenience for regular visitors, and we seem to have offered good value for money," said Suriya Sadekova, head of public relations for the museum. The museum also says it should only take 15 minutes to sign up to the scheme.

Such schemes have long been popular at museums abroad, and the Pushkin Museum had been considering such a scheme for the last two decades before finally launching the scheme this year, she said. "In essence, it is a classic scheme. We did not reinvent the wheel."

"We had not only to assess the needs of the museum, but the interest of the society as well, and judging by subscription trends, the timing was right," Tyang said, adding that there was now a class of people who would like to visit exhibitions but are really busy and short of time.

"They are willing to spend more money to save time. I think that 10 years ago, people would have been reluctant to pay in advance for the year ahead, but now that loyalty card systems are well-established in many spheres, this has become a credible option for many people."

At the "platinum" level, which costs 300,000 rubles, free admission is also available for seven guests along with the membership holder, invitations to special friends' events plus three guests, invitations to exhibition openings (plus two guests) and to the annual friends' meetings (plus three guests).

The top level also allows members to priority purchase tickets to the Sviatoslav Richter music festival "December Nights," which is organized by the museum, get access to tours of other museums and exhibitions organized by the Pushkin in Russia and abroad, meet museum director Marina Loshak once a year and get individual consultations on particular art pieces.

The Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg has a similar membership scheme, which starts at $100 and will get you free access to the museum all year. If you pay $2,000 you can bring in as many guests as you want.

See arts-museum.ru/friends *for more information about the Pushkin Museum's membership program. The page is currently only in Russian but promises to be in English soon.12 Ulitsa Volkhonka. Metro Kropotkinskaya. Tel. 495-697-9578.*

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