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Festival Shows Moscow Is New Foodie Paradise, With Sky-High Prices to Match

By Sarah Crowther

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One of the ice cream temptations.

To see Moscow's rapid transformation into a foodie haven, one need only look to the very first O, Da! Eda! (Oh Yes, That's Food!) festival held in the capital.

The festival, which took place in Gorky Park this past Saturday and Sunday, was made up of kiosks from over 100 restaurants, food shops and private vendors, and comprised two full days of activities, including master classes, games, children's activities and a food-movie tent.

Moscow restaurants like Saperavi, Fresh — and let's not forget Hooters — were well represented, but the festival really shone in its display of smaller, private vendors like Cezve Coffee, which makes their brew Turkish style with flour-fine coffee heated in a copper pot. Flavored with raspberry or honey-laced "Winnie-the-Pooh's daydream" syrup, it was a delicious pick-me-up, though a bit dear at 275 rubles ($5) a cup.

Even pricier, but a definite highlight, were the ice cream cones from Super Skazka ("Super Story"). The homemade ice cream, in inventive flavors like kiwi and blackcurrant was scooped out of hard-plastic containers into handmade waffle cones.

The final hipster cherry on top was the red-bearded ice cream vendor, who had a massive tattoo of a fire-breathing skull on his left bicep, as well as the yuppie prices. 300 rubles ($5.40) for ice cream — milk, sugar and eggs, let's recall — is a bit much, particularly after a 350 ruble entrance fee.

Also in the ice cream circuit was El Cartel, which despite some faux-Mexican branding, must have the market cornered on alcoholic ice creams like the "Pancho Villa" (lime and tequila) or the delicious "Pineapple Express (pineapple, coconut and rum), all for 150 rubles a scoop.

The festival got off to a slow start on Sunday, perhaps due to intermittent rain; a master class scheduled for 11 a.m. never began. At the 1 p.m. master class, however, every seat was taken and visitors were straining to get a view of the latest master chef. That said, scheduled chef Andrei Shmakov, from Moscow's new Estonian restaurant Savva, seemed to have been replaced in favor of molecular gastronomist Fyodor Zharinov, who prepared venison sous-vide with a tomato gelee and cream.

The movie tent proved one of the most popular venues of all, with more avant-garde favorites on Saturday (the Chinese classic "Eat Drink Man Woman" and French comedy "The Wing or the Thigh") and lighter picks on Sunday ("Waitress," and Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon's "The Trip").

Also on show, of course, was "Ratatouille," which the audience must have been clamoring for since it was screened a full two hours before its scheduled time. In the end, though, it seemed a good uniter for food lovers both young and young at heart.

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