

Tips for Russians Working Abroad

By [Luc Jones](#)

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The current expat exodus from Moscow is well-known, yet the subject of Russians leaving Russia has received little attention from the media. Our recent salary survey and market study for Russia (with more than 5,000 white-collar candidates interviewed) showed that 58 percent would consider a move abroad for a better job, which is 21 percent higher than the number who would relocate within Russia for a more attractive opportunity.

Many multinationals in Russia are using the current downturn to send their prized local employees to other destinations when there is a shortage of work for them locally. There are a number of advantages to this, namely that they can hold on to the people they value most by offering them an assignment abroad with the opportunity to simultaneously develop their skills in an international environment.

If you are a manager considering sending an employee off on such a secondment, or if you are a Russian thinking of taking your firm up on the offer, it is worth bearing several points in mind before signing on the dotted line:

1. Life in Western Europe is expensive. You will give almost half of your salary up in income

tax, and about half of what's left will go on rent. Moscow hit the headlines a few years ago as being the world's most expensive city for visiting businesspeople, but for native Muscovites who own their own apartment, it isn't. Public transport and utilities cost peanuts in Russia compared with what Westerners are used to paying, and now might be a good time to quit smoking!

2. In Russia, work is generally considered a place where you go, whereas work in Europe is something that you actually do. Arriving late — particularly in Germanic countries — is almost unheard of. Chatting over cups of tea in the kitchen is uncommon and many corporations ban non work-related websites such as social networks.

3. Unless you are working on a Russia desk or on a CIS-focused project, your colleagues are likely to know little about Russia apart from what they have gained from the international media, and this is unlikely to be particularly positive. They are even less likely to have ever visited Russia and may have little desire to do so — it's nothing personal. Russia doesn't feature highly on foreigners' bucket lists, at least for now.

4. Moscow may feel like a cosmopolitan city (and compared to most other Russian cities, it is) but feels almost homogenous if you move to Singapore, Paris, New York or Dubai, which are truly cosmopolitan. While it is not common for you to be judged on your origins, on the flip side don't expect much more than occasional, mild curiosity as to where you come from and how your life is back home.

5. Competition is fierce in more established markets. You might be in the top 10 retail experts in Russia but in any Western country you will be just one of hundreds, if not thousands. It's hard enough to differentiate yourself if you have worked in a particular country for your entire career, yet is even tougher for those recently arrived.

6. Regardless of how good your English is, you are unlikely to receive any compliments on your linguistic skills when moving abroad. In the same way as Russians expect Armenians, Uzbeks or Moldovans to speak Russian fluently, the same is the case with anyone speaking English outside of the CIS region. On top of this there are the various accents and dialects to get your head around; if anything it won't be boring!

Please do not take any of this as a sign that you should stay put — quite the opposite! If you do take the plunge, make the most of it; have a great time and you'll come back richer (at least in terms of experience, if not in actual cash)!

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