

Moscow Lifehack: So What's the Deal With Russians and Spitting?

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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What's the deal with Russians and spitting?

TMT: Well, there's spitting and there's spitting. The hack-it-up-and-spit-it-out-on-the-street kind of expectoration is not all that common in Russian urban settings, but is still practiced out in the countryside. Practitioners are of the "better out than in" school of thought. Enough said.

The other kind of spitting is a ritual of three spits over the left shoulder to keep from jinxing something. In Russian this is expressed as "tfu-tfu-tfu" and is done either literally — if you have good aim and won't cover your shoulder with spittle — or by saying "tfu-tfu-tfu." You do this, or are strongly encouraged by your Russian friends and family to do this, whenever you are hoping for something good. In the Russian metaphysical world, saying "I'm going to get that great job" is the kind of hubris that annoys God and the saints — and delights the devil — and is therefore guaranteed to produce the opposite outcome. If you slip up and talk about your happiness or good fortune out loud, go through the spitting ritual

to cancel out your momentary lapse into irresponsible optimism and self-confidence.

Why do you spit over your left shoulder? Because that's where your personal devil sits. He's the one who leads you into temptation and fills you with hubris, but spitting on him three times — in remembrance of the Trinity — silences him.

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