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A New Moscow Restaurant With a Balalaika Theme

By Fraser Barr

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The Balalaika bar is set to participate in the Moscow festival “Cocktail Mania,” May 16 to June 16. This year, bars will create cocktails inspired by legends of international cinema.

With its open plan and minimalist design, Balalaika offers a refreshing break from the Arbat's usual coffee chains, souvenir shops and kebab kiosks.

The brainchild of Valerie Dorodnykh and Yekaterina Nesterova — the same duo responsible for Ukulele on Ulitsa Pokrovka — this designer den of exposed wiring and bare lightbulbs uses balalaikas as wall decorations. Musicians take note: The instruments are available to purchase.

Head barman Dmitry Urusov has a wide variety of infused vodkas, spirits and specialty cocktails. For beer lovers there's a range on offer from Russian craft brewery Jaws, able to hold its own against international brews in taste and design.

Head upstairs into the vaulted mezzanine dining area and you'll be able to peruse the menu. Balalaika specializes solely in Russian cuisine and offers hungry diners a plethora of traditional, high-quality dishes. Hearty salads with simple hors oeuvres make an appetizing starter or a light bite for tourists on the run. While the mains are hardly the most exciting or inventive dishes in Moscow, they are full of flavor and proudly Russian. Be wary, however, the waiters' keen desire to offer you tea before you glance at the menu is not necessarily good customer service, but perhaps to stop you noticing it is by far one of the more expensive options on the drinks menu.

Balalaika

With its clean and trendy interior, Balalaika doesn't offer any innovative décor. If not for the balalaikas mounted on the wall, it would be indistinguishable from the array of new eateries in the capital attempting to channel the latest in European hipster chic. It is the authentic Russian menu that sets it apart, and with its central location, Balalaika gives visitors and Muscovites a perfectly pleasant place to have either a meal or a drink with little pretense of offering otherwise. Who its clientele will be remains to be seen, but for anyone wishing to escape the generic burger joints of Moscow and get a real taste of what Russian cuisine has to offer, this place will be nothing less than perfectly satisfactory.

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