

Creatures Great and Small: 7 Places For City Kids to Meet Animals

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Cat Cafe 'Kotiki i Lyudi'

Pet therapy

Since their start in Japan in the late 1990s, cat cafes have become a worldwide phenomenon. Kotiki i Ludi, which has two Moscow locations, adopts homeless cats with particularly docile temperaments and charges 400-500 rubles (\$7-8.50) for visitors to hang out with them. The felines can depart to a quieter back room at any point.

Moscow Zoo

A traditional zoo in the city center

The Moscow Zoo opened in 1864, and since then it has offered Muscovites a chance to see the world's wild animals with their own eyes: giraffes, elephants, polar bears, a

reptile house and wildebeest from the savannah. It also offers birthday parties, guided tours, and an interactive lecture on Thursdays at 1 p.m.

The Children's Park of Wonders

Kids to the petting zoo, parents to the mall

There are petting zoos tucked into many city parks. But the Retail Park shopping complex on Varshavskoye Shosse offers an enormous wooden playground and “mini-zoo” resembling a Russian folk village. Kids can feed goats, pigs, lambs, poultry and white rabbits that would have populated the courtyards (and dinner tables) of villages long ago.

Grandpa Durov's Circus Theater

You can train a cat to dance?

This theater was founded in 1912 by Vladimir Durov, a circus performer and trainer who developed his own zoo-psychological techniques. At “Grandpa Durov's Corner,” actors sing, dance, and clown around the stage. Each delightful play features trained animals: exotic elephants and seals, domestic cats and poodles, even lemurs, raccoons and donkeys.

Voroby Bird Park

Camp out at the zoo

If you're up for a daytrip to the Kaluga region, the Voroby Bird Park combines a stay in a national park with a zoo. Only in its second year of operation, it has 484 species of birds, fish, reptiles. Guests can stay in the park hotel, rent riverside cottages and even fish in a small pond. Guests can hang out for a weekend, or at least long enough to visit the “night pavilion” full of nocturnal birds and rodents one might otherwise never see.

Moskvarium

An ocean in the capital city

At Moscow's “Sea World,” visitors can see more than 8,000 animals and fish from small coral inhabitants to three-meter-long sharks. There is a show with dolphins, seals and an orca, and also a touch-pool zone, where kids can feel starfish and other sea life.

Horse Rides in Izmailovsky

Park stables in a city park

A small recreational stable in Izmailovsky Park offers horse and pony rides for families. You can even take a donkey or camel for a spin if you call ahead. A one-hour ride on a horse costs 1,500 rubles (\$26) on weekdays, and 2,000 rubles on weekends. The Izmailovsky stable also offers lesson packages (4,800–8,400 rubles). Those nervous about saddling-up can glide around the park in a carriage or a sleigh during winter. The youngest children can take a tour around the stable and interact with horses without riding them.

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