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Say Cheese

There's one thing arts guru Ruth Addison can't get enough of

By Alastair Gill

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Ruth Addison says she has acculturated in Moscow and has no plans to leave. **RUTH ADDISON / PERSONAL ARCHIVE**

Brought up in a working-class family in northeast England, Ruth ☒Addison spent five years working for the British Council in Cairo. She ☒moved to Russia to become deputy director of the organization's Moscow ☒branch in 2002. after completing a part-time MA in art History, she ran a☒ gallery. Since 2015 she has been Chief Editor for Garage Museum of ☒Contemporary Art.

When I first came to Moscow I hated it, I absolutely hated it. I☒ didn't want to leave Cairo, so that was part of the issue, and I kind ☒of knew some Russian but not very much. It was strange because I came ☒from a developing country to a European country. In Egypt, people speak a☒ little bit of English. I came here and was really surprised that people☒ don't really speak English, so it was a real struggle. I was here on my☒ own and I felt quite isolated.

If you're here for a while, you have to try to get out of purely expat circles. As soon as I made some Russian friends, then I made some more. At first sight they're quite dour and unfriendly, but they're not really, you just need to make one friend, and then you've got a thousand.

I get friends to bring cheese, it's the best ever gift. If anyone's traveling and they say "What do you want us to bring?" – bring us cheese! I don't even need anything like salami, but parmesan, cheddar, I just ask friends to bring it. Or bring it myself. I always bring in slightly under the five kilos that are allowed. I've had lots of very heavy suitcases recently.

I've only been to Danilovsky Market once, I didn't really like it. I tend to go to Dorogmilovsky, which is a bit closer to home for me. And there I usually buy Georgian cheeses, so sulguni, and chanakh, smelly sheep's cheese.

The city's always been pretty clean from my point of view. Russians might disagree with that, but I always tend to see Moscow as a clean city if you compare it to London. I'm not going to compare it to Cairo, because Cairo's not a clean city.

I like being right in the center because you can walk everywhere. In the summer there are lots of places with terraces, so I can take the dog and have a cup of coffee. I used to go a lot to Coffeemania on Nikitskaya, but now I just get too tense about how expensive it is. So across the road from there is a place called Prostiye Veshchi. It's small, but it's a nicer terrace because you're in a garden.

Karetny Dvor is fantastic. They have an amazing terrace: In the summer you can go and sit there and have dinner. It's open 24 hours, so if you have a hankering for kebabs at 3 o'clock in the morning, you can go there. The clientele is quite mixed, so from the people-watching point of view it's interesting. We quite often go in a biggish group, so you just order a load of [Turkish/Greek appetizers] meze and then kebabs, and it's just a nice social way of eating, because you're all sharing food.

I really like what's known as the Gorky House. [Writer Maxim] Gorky lived there for a while, though it's actually the Ryabushinsky House. It was built by Fyodor Shekhtel, the Russian Art Nouveau architect. When Gorky was persuaded that he needed to return to the USSR, he got this beautiful house that had belonged to the merchant Ryabushinsky. Plus I'm interested in Gorky as a personality. He's a very ambiguous character. He's one of those people that's really easy to think, "If it was me I'd have done it differently" – but would you have done it differently? He's a fascinating character for me.

I think contemporary art is still a bit of an acquired taste here. If you compare visitor numbers to the kind of exhibitions that the Manezh does on history – the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, of which there have been a whole series – there were massive numbers at those exhibitions. And I don't think you would get those kind of numbers for a contemporary art exhibition.

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