The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

What To Do With the Kids Over the Vacation?

The winter break in Moscow is heaven for children

By The Moscow Times

December 28, 2018



Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency

Yolka (ёлка) is a fir tree, a New Year's or Christmas tree. But it is also a children's holiday party: an event with a big decorated tree, Grandfather Frost and the Snow Maiden, games, dances, theater or puppet shows, and plenty of sweet treats. It's hard to go wrong with a Yolka because: Grandfather Frost, the Snow Maiden and lots of sweets. But there are a few spectacular ones in Moscow every year. Here are some of our picks, for kids from the age of just-walking to almost-not-interested.

Kremlin Yolka

This Christmas-New Year's party takes place in the Mirror, Crest, and Parquet Halls of the Kremlin Palace with a show on stage. Although the details of the event are being treated as a

state secret, it has been revealed that it's called "The Secret of the Planet Earth" and involves dastardly space pilots who want to steal New Year's. Grandfather Frost and the Snow Maiden are aided by characters from Russian folk lore. Space ships, exciting sword fights, treasure and victory – all wrapped up in games, story-telling and performances by singers, actors, and dancers.

From Dec. 24 through Jan. 8. Kremlin Palace halls, entrance from Manege Square. Metro Alexandrovsky Sad. Tickets through Ticketland*.*

Gostiny Dvor

The New Year show at Gostiniy Dvor called "The City of Magic" promises to be not just a regular winter holiday event, but a modern musical with a combination of classical music, acrobatic stunts and dancing. The show is centered around the themes of kindness, empathy and mutual respect with a hint of humor. If your kids are into musicals, this is the tree party for them.

From Dec. 30 through Jan. 5. Gostiny Dvor. 4 Ulitsa Iliinka, Metro Ploshchad Revolyutsii. Tickets can be purchased here*.*

Nikulin Circus on Tsvetnoi Bulvar

If your kids love animals, acrobats, and silly clowns -- and if you're okay with circuses -- the show at the most famous circus in Moscow is where you have to be. There will be clowns, acrobats, performers and, of course, circus animals who, according to the script, will try to save the celebration of the New Year. Plenty of excitement, music, lights and ponies – not to mention plenty of sweet holiday treats.

Until Jan. 13. Nikulin Circus. 13 Tsvetnoi Bulvar. Metro Tsvetnoi Bulvar. Tickets can be purchased here*.*

Experimentarium

At this unusual yolka party, kids with a science bent will be given the task from scientists to change the future of the field. Grandfather Frost comes back from the future with not very optimistic news: it turns out that everything has been already invented and discovered and that stops science from development. Every child at the show will have a chance to demonstrate his or her talents and make their own small scientific discoveries.

Through Dec. 30. through 30 December Experimentarium. 80/11 Leningradsky Prospekt. Metro Sokol. Tickets on the venue site*.*

Nutcracker on Ice

If your kids are too little for a stage production – or really into ice skating – they might like the ice dance version of this Christmas classic. The lead roles are performed by some of the country's best skaters, including Tatyana Totmyanina and Alexei Yagudin in the role of the Mouse King. Vibrant costumes and sets, dazzling choreography, and all kinds of special effects – let's just say the Mouse King goes out in a blaze of glory.

Through Jan. 7. TsSKA Ledovoi Dvorets. 23A Ulitsa Avtozavodskaya. Metro Avtozavodskaya. Tickets available through this site.

Swan Lake on Ice with Yevgeny Plushchenko

If your children are a little older and like a bit of darkness, this Swan Lake might be just the thing. This ballet on ice was choreographed by Sergei Filin, a dancer and head of the Bolshoi Theater for many years, and it stars one of the world's most charismatic, artistic and powerful skaters – Yevgeny Plushchenko -- and skaters from Canada and the U.S. in the main roles. Expect special effects, spectacular costumes, and great dancing.

Through Dec 31. VTB Arena Dinamo. 36 Leningradsky Prospekt. Metro Dinamo. Tickets available here.

Christmas at Arkhangelskoye

Arkhangelskoye is the former estate of the Yusupov princes on the banks of the Moscow River, just a few miles outside the city. It is a lovely place any time of year: a stately pale yellow manor house, statuary, a plethora of little buildings, a cozy church and beautiful views of the river from the woods and fields. This year they are holding a winter festival with special events for Christmas on Jan. 6 and 7. Amid the snowy woods, decorated buildings and trees, ice palaces and paths, you will be entertained with concerts, master classes for kids, all kinds of games – plus tubing, ice slides, sledding and ice skating – not to mention wandering minstrels, plays, Grandfather Frost, food courts and souvenir stands, and even lessons in the old Russian tradition of fortune telling with mirrors. But best of all – huskies and samoyeds, ready to be petted, played with and surreptitiously fed treats.

From 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Ilinskoye Shosse. By car via Novaya Riga or Rublyovo-Uspenskoye Shosse. From Metro Tushinksaya, take Bus 549 or 541 to the stop Arkhangelshoye or the minivan ("marshrutka") 151 to the stop Sanatoria. For more information, see the site.

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On stage for little ones

Moscow's theaters are filled with special holiday shows for children – and for their accompanying adults. If you and your kids would like a classical experience, from Dec. 28 to Jan. 4 (except Jan. 1), and then Feb. 1 and 2, the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Music Theater has a lovely production of "The Nutcracker" ballet. Their production of "The Snow Maiden" ballet set to the music of Tchaikovsky will be performed for children 6 years and older at the on Jan. 6. You can find more information about the schedule and purchase tickets on the theater site.

Another great place for "The Nutcracker" is Novaya Opera, which also puts on a charming show called "The Clock Strikes at Twelve" of "light music" to keep you and your family in the mood. More information and ticket purchase can be found on their site.

The Moscow Puppet Theater has three shows a day of different performances, from

“Pinochio” to “The Nutcracker” and “Snowman School.” Tickets and information are on their site.

The Obraztsov Puppet Theater is also running three and four shows a day, and there are still some tickets left here.

And if you and your family are into circuses, the “old” Nikulin Circus has tickets available for their New Year’s show. The “new” circus has a special show called UFO that is being put on at Luzhniki stadium. You can read about it and buy tickets on their site.

Everything else

If the days drag on and cabin fever sets in, head out to Moscow parks. VDNKh, Gorky Park, Hermitage Garden, and Sokolniki all have plenty of activities and events for children of every age. But every park, big or small, is sure to have ice slides, tubing hills, or winter playgrounds.

The estate museums all have special programs, especially Kolomenskoye, Izmailovo and Lublino, which all have events for kids from about age 5 to early teens. See more about them and order tickets here.

Museums also have special kids' programs over the vacation, such as the group of museums that are part of the Museum of Moscow.

And don't forget Kidzania and Masterslavl.

For up-to-date information about events, see our listings***.***

For information about performance venues, restaurants, clubs, stores, cinemas, museums, and other attractions and places of interest, see our guide***.***

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/12/28/what-to-do-with-the-kids-over-the-vacation-a63988