The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Tourism + Technology = New Moscow Attraction

Test-driving a cinema-walk around Moscow

By John Rogers

August 07, 2019



Following a fictional tour guide around Moscow **In.Visible Moscow**

Moscow has a new tourist attraction. Called In.Visible Moscow, it is described on the company's website as "an authentic cinema-walk through the streets of Moscow."

As it turns out, In.Visible Moscow is a walking tour reimagined. The technology is like any guided walking tour: a pair of headphones and a guide. The difference is that the guide is the fictional character of Sasha, a journalist stood up by her friends. Unbeknownst to her, we tourists follow her as she looks to fill her time in Moscow. As she chats to herself, the headphones relay Sasha's stream of consciousness – available in Russian, English, German and French – directly into the visitors' ears.

It is surprisingly effective. It's not hard to imagine that the actress with the red backpack

playing Sasha is genuinely pondering which way to turn as we leave the GUM shopping arcade or later noticing her old university accommodation in Kitai-Gorod. She even indulges in some self-reflection on occasion, like asking herself some challenging questions on the stairs of the charming Gorka Park: "Can I come to terms with my inner critic?"; "Do I like the way I look today?" When she asks herself, "Do I have a plan for the next five years?" a narrator chimes suggesting that we answer the question, too.

This is not the only interactive element to the tour. At one spot we were arranged into a circle and asked to participate in group stretches to a classical soundtrack. Normally I would find this type of public display somewhat embarrassing, and indeed we were subject to some bemused looks from passers-by, but at this point we were all so immersed in the experience that none of us cared.

I did, however, cringe a little at the dance sequences – yes, there's more than one. Sasha several times prances away down the street to various soundtracks, notably on one occasion to Fatboy Slim's "Weapon of Choice" on Khokhlovsky Pereulok, where she awkwardly avoids pedestrians in her way.

But these lighter moments do serve to break up the exposition that makes up the bulk of Sasha's internal monologue. The result is a good balance of fact and fiction, and I found some of the detail fascinating. We see where Leo Tolstoy went shopping for watches in GUM and discover how St. Basils Cathedral ended up on the Tetris logo. The story of how the 16th century Old English Court ended up in what is now Zaryadye Park was also truly interesting. Sound effects brought this information to life: church bells toll in our ears as we walk past the 14th century Church of All Saints in Slavyanskaya Ploshchad, only to be cut off as Sasha recalls that the bell was removed for safety reasons because of its Pisa-like leaning bell-tower.

The walk is between four and five kilometers long, although the two-hour length ensures for a leisurely pace and even allows a five-minute complementary finger-buffet midway. The tour ends at the Illuzion cinema, set in one of Stalin's famous high-rises, the Kotelnicheskaya Embankment Building.

The experience as a whole was undeniably engaging and insightful, if a little pretentious at times. I was never bored despite its extended length. And it was safe, since we were accompanied by a staff member, who made sure we didn't get lost in our headphones.

At 3,500 rubles, the experience is expensive, but if you have the money, stamina and some good weather, it is a genuinely fun and original way to explore the city.

Starting point at GUM, 1st line, 2nd floor (upstairs next to Breguet boutique). See the site *for more information and reservations.*

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/07/tourism-technology-new-moscow-attraction-a66750