

Experience report

I admit that my decision to come to Moscow to study at МГУ (the Russian abbreviation for Moscow State University) was based mainly on a quick research on the university, during which I found a picture of the main building. But also apart from that, МГУ has a very good reputation and is nowadays regarded the best university in Russia. So even though most people in Germany would probably consider Moscow as a rather exotic choice, my mind was made up, and I do not regret my decision. In the following I will share some of my experiences with you to give a better idea what it is like to study in Moscow.



Before departure, Victoria Grishina, the international coordinator of МГУ, will send out a google form with courses to choose from. Not all the courses listed on the website are included in this list, and only those that enough students are interested in will be offered. A final decision about that will only be made several weeks after your arrival, but there is no need to worry, ultimately plenty of classes were offered and Victoria made sure everyone was happy. Accommodation is also very conveniently organised by the МГУ international coordinators. You will either live in the main building, or in DSK or DSV, two dormitories which are one metro stop away from the Faculty of Economics.

Most people will need an official invitation letter from МГУ in order to apply for the visa. This can take quite a while, some students only got it a week before the official beginning of the term. Still this normally is no problem, since the visa application itself is a quick process and classes don't start until several weeks after your arrival anyway. If you have any question during this preparation period, you can always contact Victoria and her office team. She always replied to my emails almost instantly, and did her best to help me with everything.

During the **introduction days**, local students organised a series of events for the internationals from all the МГУ departments, for example visits to bars etc. They also offer trips to other Russian cities such as Murmansk or Saint Petersburg, but due to Corona and lockdown, most of them were cancelled. The Faculty of Economics is having an introduction programme of its own for its students, during which they will hand out your student ID and set you on the right way regarding all the paperwork for the dormitory, student registration etc. (there always is a lot of paperwork in Russia). You will be given information about МГУ and the faculty in general, and they'll make sure you get to know your fellow international students over some pizza and games. Since I came for the summer term, there also were "veteran" internationals who had been there for the previous term already, and

were happy to show us around the city and provide us with useful tips in person and through a WhatsApp group.

The **Faculty of Economics** is located a five-minute walk away from the main building, inside a modern structure with lots of panorama windows, so it's very light inside. Everything is surrounded by parks and generally very green and perfectly maintained. Entry is only possible with your student ID or the visa in your passport indicating that you were invited by MГУ. It is common to leave your coat in a cloakroom next to the main entrance. There is one big canteen and two small cafeterias along with some vending machines located all over the floors. The food served is traditionally Russian and reasonably priced. If you don't speak Russian you'll have a blind tasting every meal since the staff doesn't speak English and the labels are all in Russian, but at least in that way you get to try new things. The international office where you can find Victoria and her colleagues are also in this building, but they'll tell you everything you need to know about the faculty during introduction days.

Regarding **accommodation**, there are three options: Single rooms in the main building, or double rooms in either DSK or DSV, both located at metro station Prospekt Vernadskogo or a 20-minute walk from the Faculty of Economics. I lived in DSK, which is at around 10.000 Rubles per month a little cheaper and also smaller than DSV. As far as I know students do not get to choose the dorm, and depending on the contract your university has with MГУ, you might be charged less.

In DSK, two double rooms form one block, and each block has its own shower and toilet (in separate rooms). So in total, you'll be living with three other people. A small towel and sheets are provided by the dormitory and can be exchanged twice a week. There are kitchens on every level, though apart from three stoves, three sinks and two tables, they provide no cooking equipment, so students have to organise / buy that for themselves. But the veteran internationals maybe can help out with that as well and give you stuff left by former students. On ground floor, there is a small store that sells some drinks, foods, detergent and so on. There is also a small "gym", which basically is an empty room with a ping pong table and three very old pianos. Washing machines can be used free of charge pretty much all day long.

Directly across the street, Yarche is a small convenience store that has the most essential things, and a 5-minute walk towards the train station there is a 24/7 supermarket called Viktoriya. In this area you can also find a pharmacy, Burger King and others, and towards the Faculty, the shopping centre Kapitoliy has a big Ashan, fashion stores, a food court etc.

The entrance of the dormitory is guarded around the clock and without your Propusk (entry pass), you'll have a hard time to get in unless you are friends with the guards, and they know you well. You should also be aware that while everything is kept spotlessly clean and well maintained, you cannot expect some luxury accommodation as you might know it from your home country. And you should make sure to get along well with the Babushky, they essentially rule the dormitory and can make your life there either very pleasant, or rather difficult (no need to worry, just stay friendly even when they have a bad day).

Your choice of **courses** probably depends on the requirements of your university, but here are those that I chose. It should be mentioned though that due to Corona, no lessons in the faculty building were possible. Anyway, Victoria and her team together with the professors made sure online classes went as smooth as possible.

Bachelor level:

- Management (Prof. Ulianova): The teacher uses teaching methods that actively include the class, which was very nice. Examples are group works, games, questionnaires.

- Technical Analysis (Prof. Starkov): A rather easy class with a teacher who has a lot of inside knowledge to share if asked the right questions.
- Labour Economics (Prof. Razumova): A bit more challenging, but all questions asked are thoroughly answered. A 15-pages essay is mandatory.
- International Economics (Prof. Chikhun): One of the two most challenging classes. The teacher expects ongoing active participation, there is homework (calculations mainly) after every class, and the exams are rather challenging. On top there is a 10-pages essay. But the grading is very fair, and you'll learn a lot. Plus, you'll get personal feedback for everything.

Master level:

- International Business (Prof. Chikhun): Same as was said about International Economics. Just that here, you can easily write a 50-pages paper that in the end, you'll have to present and defend. One of the two most challenging classes. Yet valuable lessons to be learnt.
- Start Up and International Venture Development (Prof. Tishchenko): Very interesting and requires your own research, since you'll plan and calculate the launch of your own business. Teacher has a lot of knowledge to share and will provide you with valuable hints and ideas throughout the class.
- Business and Marketing Strategy (Prof. Oleynik): This professor has an impressive collection of professional experience that he will share with you, which teaches you much more than any theory in a book could. Make sure to listen, just the presentations from classes won't be enough to do well in the exam.

You can read up all the details about the course content in the descriptions. The requirements vary from teacher to teacher, and so does the effort you have to put into each class. Since Corona was a challenge for all of us, I guess in-person teaching usually is quite different from my experience.

Yet I still found the relation to the professors to be much more personal than what I know from my home university. They know your name, and you can always approach them via email, call or even WhatsApp if you have any questions. It is common to get personal feedback and have a teacher telling you from his or her private life and experiences. On the other hand, your active participation in class is expected and your absence will be noticed, since the groups are rather small (hardly ever more than 30 students). There are numerous essays to be handed in and presentations to be prepared, which all count toward your final grade, apart from midterms and final exams.

Most bachelor-level classes are held exclusively for exchange students, at least those in English. If you speak Russian you can also attend classes for local students. Apart from them, there is also the option to pick up master courses in both Russian and English, though this requires some more efforts to organise since most of the information is only available in Russian on a rather complicated, Russian-only website. Victoria has a manual how to find those classes. Bachelors are usually for 5 ECTS and masters for 3 ECTS each, though most teachers won't accept if you hand in an extra essay in exchange for receiving more ECTS.

Lastly, the faculty also offers free Russian classes. You will take an assessment test, based on which you are placed in either the beginner, intermediate, or advanced group. Lessons take place three times a week for three hours each, but are voluntary yet very helpful.

Because of Corona and the lockdown, I cannot tell much about **what to do in Moscow and surroundings**. You'll find out about enough options during introduction days, and Google has got you covered anyway. I still highly recommend Russian Railways and especially the night trains. They are a cheap and very comfortable means to travel even long distances, and are a great experience for themselves.

Some other useful things to know include that cashless paying is very common in Russia and on the university premises. Prices are often very low compared to Western European standards, especially when it comes to eating out or taking a cab. Supermarkets and fashion on the other hand can be just as expensive. There are some major network providers, of which I chose Megafon, simply because they got a small shop in the arrival area of Moscow Sheremetyevo. A prepaid SIM card with unlimited internet cost me around 500 Rubles a month, which also makes organising WIFI in the dorm redundant, since you can simply hotspot yourself. I recommend registering for a social card to get discounts in public transport and cheaper or free entry to museums etc., though processing all this paperwork takes a while.

One thing I cannot stress enough you need to be aware of is that English is by far not as widely spoken as I had expected after a quick search on Google before my arrival. At МГУ, students and teachers will generally speak it reasonably well, but staff in the cafeterias and guards won't. The people running the dorm do not speak English at all, and in daily life when going to the supermarket, eating out etc. chances are very low you'll find someone who speaks at least some English. I do not speak any Russian on the other hand, which made a lot of things very complicated, and me very dependent on other internationals to constantly help me out and translate for me. It is possible to get by, but very inconvenient.

In conclusion, I am very happy that I could spend one term at МГУ. Because of the Corona Crisis, most things did not at all go as planned, but everyone at МГУ went out of their way to make the best out of it. Having at least some basic Russian skills is highly recommended, but even without you'll have a great time. Students come from all over the world, and you'll make interesting new acquaintances and friends that make your stay what it is. Russian mentality and paperwork can be challenging, but with some patience and a bit of humour everything can be managed, and after some time you'll simply accept that for every little thing, there is a motion to be filed that requires at least three stamps from five different people. Victoria and the international office are there every step along the way and happy to help out. And if everything seems to go wrong, just remember, это Россия, it's Russia, that serves as an explanation for just about everything.