

'Putin tours' retrace Russian leader's life in Saint Petersburg



A picture shows people walking outside the Spaso-Preobrazhensky (Transfiguration) Cathedral, where Vladimir Putin was baptized, in central Saint Petersburg. — AFP photos



Photo shows a woman as she crosses the courtyard of a building where Vladimir Putin lived in central Saint Petersburg.

Rounding a corner in central Saint Petersburg with a group in tow, Georgy Rusanov stops in front of the grey building of the city's oldest maternity hospital—the first attraction on his Vladimir Putin walking tour. "This is where Vladimir Putin was born on October 7, 1952," he announces to the small crowd, a mix of curious Russians and a Russian-American couple. "Volodya was not a model child," Rusanov continues using the diminutive version of Vladimir, to giggles from his audience, as he walks along Baskov Street, the stomping ground of the Russian president in his early years.

Saint Petersburg is known for its White Nights when the sun never fully sets, gilded

palaces and elegant parks, but the 63-year-old Russian leader and native of Russia's second largest city has created a market of his own. Putin was born and lived in the city previously named Leningrad for some 40 years, excluding his time as a KGB officer in East Germany, before moving to Moscow in the mid-1990s. Rusanov launched his Putin tour several years ago. Since then he has seen more foreigners turn up, he says, while colleagues are planning Putin tours of their own.

"It is popular, especially with foreign tourists," he says. His tour promises to show a courtyard where the president "chased rats" as a boy and another where he had his "first date" with his

now ex-wife Lyudmila. Rusanov insists the tour has no political affiliation but paints an unequivocally positive picture of Putin, whose ratings have soared above 80 percent since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. "This is the local headquarters of the FSB, the former KGB, where Vladimir Putin was recruited in 1975 after being one of the best students at the Saint Petersburg University law faculty," Rusanov says at the foot of the imposing building. Putin decided to become an agent after watching a spy film as a boy, he says.

'Enigmatic' Putin

In his 16 years in power, Putin has remark-

ably managed to keep his private life a tightly-guarded secret, despite allegations of high-level nepotism and corruption. Publications that dared to investigate the activities of his two daughters, Yekaterina and Maria, or his love life, have been shut down or seen major staff shakeups, though the Kremlin always denies any meddling. Putin's impenetrable secrecy is part of the allure that keeps Rusanov's business going. "The tour lets people see a more human side of him, beyond official business," he says. "Putin is an enigmatic person," said Sam Roberts, a 45-year-old American who came on the tour with his Russian wife Galina to better understand the Russian leader and his politics,

which often leave the West guessing. "He interests me a lot, and he interests the United States, where we don't know much about him," he said. A surge in interest from foreign tourists is encouraging other guides to launch Putin tours of their own. "I want to try leading these tours for Chinese tourists, I'm sure this will be a hit," said Ilya Ivannikov, 28, who came on Rusanov's walk to gain experience in Putin geography. Russian visitors to the city also said they enjoyed the walk. "My friend and I are fans of our president," said Anna Kuznetsova, a visitor from the town of Kaluga southwest of Moscow. "I share many of his views," she added. — AFP

Airbnb event to feature Paltrow, Kutcher



In this file photo, actor Ashton Kutcher attends the Museum of the Moving Image's 2016 Industry Tribute in New York. — AP photos

Gwyneth Paltrow, Ashton Kutcher and "Eat Pray Love" author Elizabeth Gilbert are scheduled to speak in November at a three-day event sponsored by Airbnb in Los Angeles. Last year, the Airbnb Open drew 5,000 Airbnb hosts from 110 countries. The event, scheduled Nov 17-19, will be the company's third annual gathering. The company says it's expanding the scope of the Open to welcome hosts and guests who use Airbnb as well as locals from Los Angeles. The forum is designed to explore the future of travel and hospitality, including topics like making connections and tips for successful hosting.

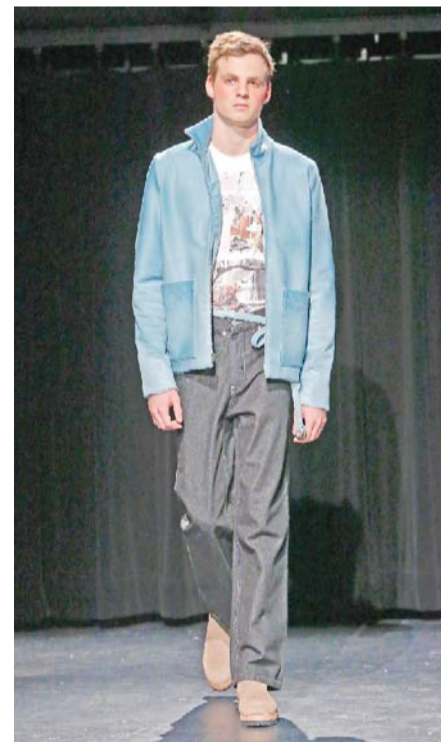
Other speakers include film producer Brian Grazer, who won an Oscar for "A Beautiful Mind"; Toms shoes founder Blake Mycoskie; and restaurateur Danny Meyer, along with Airbnb's founders. Kutcher is an investor in Airbnb and a number of other tech startups. Paltrow has stayed in glamorous high-end Airbnbs while traveling. The Open will also include a closing event with live music and a market, with limited tickets for the public to attend.

Details of the event were announced as Airbnb has come under fire in cities ranging from New Orleans to Chicago to New York. Critics say short-term vacation rental sites like Airbnb are helping to drive up housing costs because landlords can make more money renting by the night than renting long-term residential housing. Airbnb insists that most of its hosts are individuals making ends meet by occasionally renting out a room or their homes. Some critics also complain that tourists hurt the quality of life in residential neighborhoods by throwing rowdy parties and taking up parking spots. Anaheim, California, home to Disneyland, recently decided to ban short-term rentals like those on Airbnb. — AP



Actress Gwyneth Paltrow poses for photographers before Chanel's Spring-Summer 2016 Haute Couture fashion collection in Paris.

Men's fashion week kicks off third season in New York



Men's fashion week in New York kicked off its third season Monday with a presentation by Perry Ellis, whose athletic, casual take is expected to mark a number of spring-summer 2017 collections. Dozens of designers from Michael Kors to Tommy Hilfger will present creations over the course of around 60 catwalk shows and presentations, which are expected to conjure a minimalist, relaxed and utilitarian look. Not all designers will be participating, however. Steven Cox and Daniel Silver, the creative duo behind

Duckie Brown, will be sitting out the season, after presenting a mere six-look collection in February.

"I think it's great that New York can have its own fashion week for men's, or men's and women's together," Silver told The New York Times. "But we did two shows a year



for 13 years... we just decided this is maybe a moment for us not to do a show," he said, lamenting that during fashion week, "we nurture business, we don't nurture creativity." Below are some of the week's expected presentations and shows: Tuesday: Joseph Abboud, Tim Coppens, Garciavelez, Stampd, Michael Kors, Loris Diran, Robert Geller, Carlos Campos, Cadet, Gypsy Sport, Brett Johnson and Ovidia & Sons.

Wednesday: Passavant and Lee, Nick Graham, Kenneth Ning, John Elliott, Nautica, Assembly New York, Rochambeau and Tommy Hilfger. Thursday: Todd Snyder, Palmiers du Mal, Katama, Timo Weiland and John Varvatos. — AFP

Fashion from the Linder 2016 collection is modeled during Men's Fashion Week in New York. — AP photos