About Russian culture and family customs.

Russia is a multinational country, inhabited by over 160 nations. According to the population census in 2002, there are 116 million ethnic Russians and in addition, there are six nations, each of them with a population over a million people, living in the Russian Federation. All nations in Russia are divided into four language families: Indo-European, Altaic, Caucasian and Uralic. The main religions in Russia are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. Already these statistics show that there are many cultures and religions in Russia, and that it is impossible to talk about a continuous folklore of the population in Russia. However, it is possible to talk about widely shared customs, because the Russian language and most of the Russian culture build bridges between different nations in Russia.

Russian customs are diverse, like the customs of any other nation. They include the customs and habits of every individual and family that may differ a lot from each other. However, all nations have some typical features of how they act in different situations, even though individuals have different ways of showing them. The range of customs is definitely as wide as the range of people. This applies especially to Russia, because its culture is formed by 160 nations. Influences have come from many directions. Despite of this, there are many common features in the Russian culture that do not exist in the Finnish customs.

Ideas about the Russian personality.
Characteristics of the Russian personality – emotional, happy, open, hospitable, sociable...

Sociability. A Russian does not want to be alone. They usually seek the company of others. Long and open conversations are possible anywhere and anytime. Small talk isn’t mastered or much respected in Russia. According to the Russian people, a good conversation is open, and you can talk about private issues, politics as well as philosophy and metaphysical issues. These conversations can be started at train station, airport, taxi, airplane and train, even at bus stop or in the waiting room of a health care centre. People often give advice, make critical remarks or recommend this and that in public places. For example, it is interesting to see how people act when waiting in line. If those who are present think that someone is breaking the rules, he will be criticised, pointed out or even accused. This indicates that there still are some rather strong patriarchal features and ways of social controlling in the Russian society.

Emotionality. Finnish researchers mention the role of a smile. Why do people from Western Europe think that a group of Russian people often seems unhappy and unfriendly? This is because people make a clear distinction between the public and personal zone in Russia. You don’t necessarily have to be polite or smile in a public place. A smile expresses a real emotion. It shows the emotions of true joy, warmth and friendship. The impression of unfriendliness vanishes after the first personal contact. The lively, emotional and open personality of Russian people is shown on a personal level. Expressing emotions is characteristic of Russian people. Both negative and positive emotions are shown in a conversation.

Hospitality. Russian hospitality is known all over the world. Guests are given something to drink and eat. Perhaps not as much as before, but also food is offered,
even though a guest would have been invited for a cup of tea or coffee. A foreigner may feel a bit uncomfortable, but hospitality is part of the Russian culture.

**Time concept in Russia.**
Time is spent rather freely. Unfortunately not just your own time, but also time of other people. Russian people are not very precise and don’t always keep their promises. Fortunately, this annoying feature usually applies only to small things. Russian people may forget to write or call back, can be late and forget what they have promised more often than Finnish or German people. However, they tend to keep promises and stay in schedule when it comes to important and serious matters.

**Nonverbal communication.**
The way the Russian act while socializing or being in public places, tells a lot about their habits. In Russian culture you are close to each other, and touching other people isn't something that people are afraid of. A Finn notices that Russians pursue to place themselves much closer to their interlocutor than it is appropriate in Western Europe and United States. The distance between people during the conversation is quite short (in Finland it is about a meter). In a queue, Russians tend to stand head to head to each other. They stand so close, that there's often touching involved. One can say that the Russians' private area is much smaller than the private area of Finnish people. Compared to Finns', Russian nonverbal communication is much wider. People touch each other when they want attention. In school a teacher might touch or hug their pupils. Regardless of one's sex, friends can walk arm in arm.

**Greeting.**
Shaking hands is common between men. The same people can greet each other by shaking hands more than once during the day. Women greet by nodding. Good friends and relatives can also hug or kiss cheek to cheek.

**Dressing.**
Russians are rather conservative about the way they dress. Men generally wear a suite, both at work and leisure time? When they visit friends, they wear straight trousers and shirts (also in summer). In Finns' opinion, Russian women dress up festively to both work and leisure.

**Culture of communication.**
When Finns are having conversation, they don't mind pauses every now and then. It shows respect and readiness to listen to their interlocutor. Whereas Russians find pauses uncomfortable. At a quiet moment they try to come up with a new topic. To Finns that gives an impression that Russians want to dominate the conversation and talk without waiting for the others to reply.

**Compliments.**
The Russian word "please" is said almost as often as it's said in English culture. "Thank you" (spasibo in Russian) is also very important. Compliments are a part of Russian way of communication. Neat appearance is an important thing to women, therefore it is a thankful topic to give compliments about. This applies particularly to women-to-women compliments. Children are polite to teachers: children address teachers formally, by full names... Russian understanding of a "well-bred person" is still based on the old noble principles and habits. There are uncountable rules that a well-bred person must follow. For example you should always open a door for women, give a hand when she exits the
bus and so on. If a woman is standing, men should stand up too. If a woman is carrying a heavy bag, men should help her carrying it.

**Addressing.**
Russians address each other by their first names all the time. During a conversation you repeat your interlocutor's first name to draw attention. To Finns all the repeating seems a bit too much. In Russian culture drawing attention by the word "hey" is impolite. If you don't know one's name, you try to get an eye contact and start with "Excuse me".

**Russian family.**
Grandparents belong to a nuclear family unit. The youth works and earns money. Grandparents are retired and help with raising children: meet them from school and look after them until their parents come home from work. Today many Russian families live with their grandparents. That kind of cooperation is like insurance in case of sickness, old age and accidents.