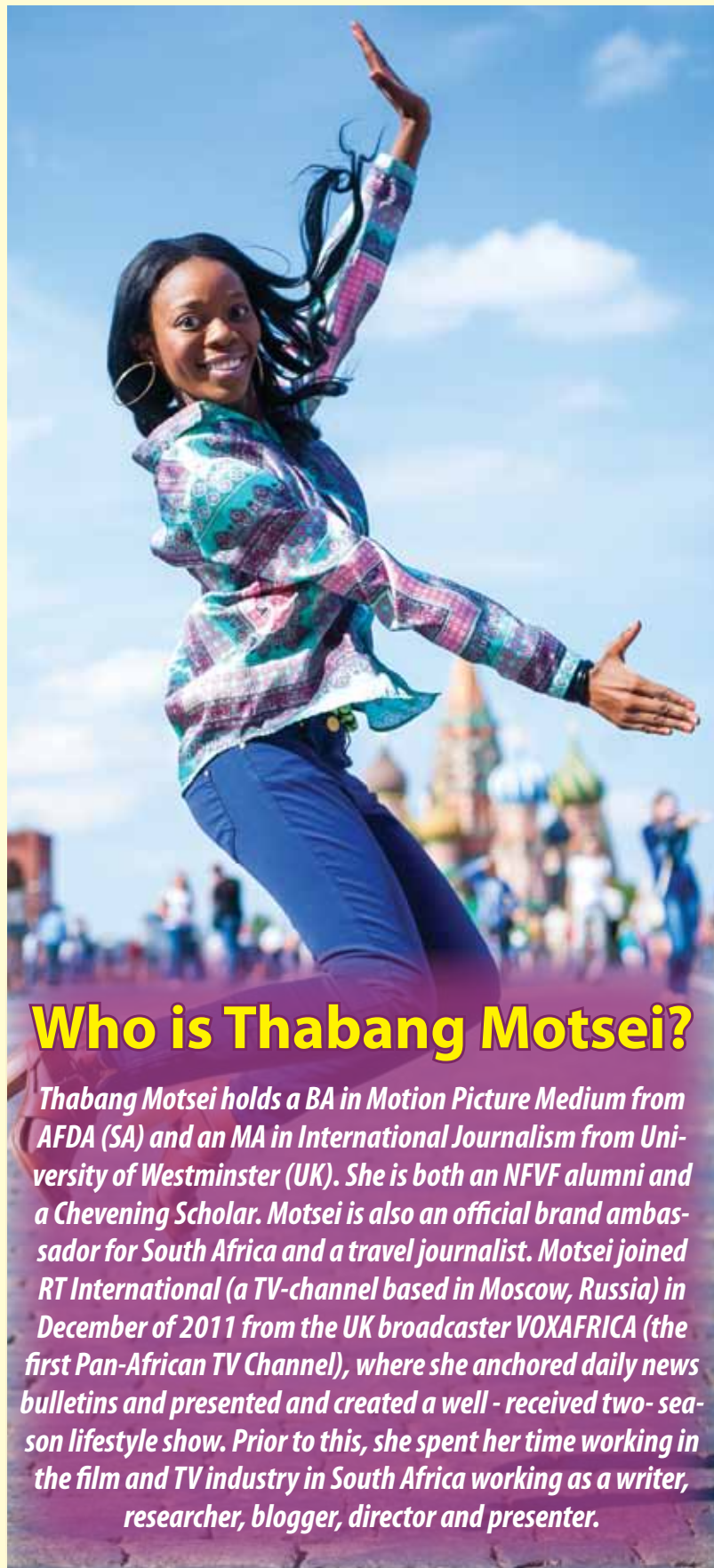


Travelmagsa interviewed South African **THABANG MOTSEI** to find out more about living and travelling in Russia.



Who is Thabang Motsei?

Thabang Motsei holds a BA in Motion Picture Medium from AFDA (SA) and an MA in International Journalism from University of Westminster (UK). She is both an NFVF alumni and a Chevening Scholar. Motsei is also an official brand ambassador for South Africa and a travel journalist. Motsei joined RT International (a TV-channel based in Moscow, Russia) in December of 2011 from the UK broadcaster VOXAFRICA (the first Pan-African TV Channel), where she anchored daily news bulletins and presented and created a well-received two-season lifestyle show. Prior to this, she spent her time working in the film and TV industry in South Africa working as a writer, researcher, blogger, director and presenter.

TRMSA: Where in South Africa is home?

TM: "I was born in Soweto in 1981, with my childhood split between Soweto and Mmabatho in the North West."

TRMSA: What do you miss most, and how often do you return for a visit?

TM: There is a saying that goes, "there's no place like home" and that saying bears truth to its every word and to me. As a proudly South African, going abroad has been the one thing that has helped cement my love and admiration for South Africa and its people and has helped elevate my patriotism to my country. It's not until you step out of the comfort zone of your neighborhood that you realise the importance of where you come from, who you are and you truly learn to celebrate that. I have been away from South Africa for seven years and have lived in London and now in the exceptionally dynamic and extreme world of Moscow in Russia. This city wasn't even in on my bucket list, but having been out here for seven months, I'm in awe of how far my country has come in the last 20 years and Moscow reminds me of that progress as it too is going through a phenomenal social and hopefully a political evolution. I see Moscow as I saw South Africa in 1994. Although not a smorgasbord of the "United Benetton" yet, it is indeed a city and a country on the brinks of metamorphosis and I'm proud to be at the epicenter of this "new world". However having said, I miss South Africa for so many reasons and others are pretty obvious. My family and friends are still out there and they are my biggest cheerleaders! Home is where you feel safe, where you don't have to juggle different visas to get from one place to another and you don't have to have your passport to show your status. I miss walking the dusty streets of kwa-Thema and Soweto knowing I'm just another one of the amazing, strong and hard working rainbow nation citizen and the sense of Ubuntu that you get from neighbors. More than anything I miss the kindness of the people and the food cause no one makes braai's/bbq's like South Africans. I always try to get a piece of this essence at least twice a year but with demanding schedules I sadly only get to go home once a year. I hope to change that.

TRMSA: What are the benefits of living in Russia?

TM: I call Moscow the Wild-Wild West because it really is; it's a place where if you have enough chutzpah and tenacity you can achieve anything. Moscow is not the easiest place to fit into but there are benefits of being in a different country and being different

especially one like Russia. In the last seven months I have shown that black people are not the stereotypes of savage, boar hunting people that are sometimes epitomized in movies (ala Russia) but that there's more to us, we have style, are smart and are a beautiful people. So in retrospect the benefits of being out here are showing people the other side of African's. I feel that I represent a new kind of African. As a journalist its part of my job and it's always rewarding to be asked by other news agencies to come in and talk about South Africa and where it is economically, socially and politically. So in a way I have become an international expert on Africa and it has forced me to keep myself educated and informed about South Africa and Africa as a whole. I get to be an ambassador for my country, and being one of the Brand South Africa ambassadors it's important for me to represent the country in the best way that I know how. Everywhere I go little kids and adults stop me to take pictures or talk to me about where I come from. I'm breaking the mould. I'm educating without even knowing it. I'm breaking ignorance and racism. That is the best part about being out here. I'm smart and at the risk of sounding really full of myself fairly not bad looking so people feel they can walk up to me and chat and ask questions. That is power!

TRMSA: What valuable lessons have you learned along the way?

TM: The biggest lesson I've learned in my journey so far is that I need patience. You are reminded when you're in a foreign land that you really are an individual; that you are your best friend and your harshest critic. You really find out what you're made of when you live in a foreign land because you're challenged and you are forced to KNOW WHO YOU ARE. I'm a work in progress but I know for sure I'm on the right track and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

TRMSA: What inspires you to travel?

TM: I'm inspired by life to travel because I understand that

through travel, the lessons of life that may take years to learn, if you allow it can be learnt in a single journey. I also travel because it makes me happy! If I'm honest, it's because I love to jump! My jumps are literally a story in one snap, they always tell how happy I am to be where I am. They're my TRAVEL MO!

TRMSA: Do you have any travel tips for our readers?

TM: Do your homework! Get off the tourist routes and get on the off-beaten tracks. Check and double check your visa and expiry dates. Photo copy all necessary documents and get at least two different travel guides. If traveling alone, be wise and practice the same routine you would practice at home. Let go and have fun! Speak to locals, dance, enjoy the country's cuisine and culture, just bury yourself in the experience because it goes by so fast.

TRMSA: Is it easy for South Africans to visit Russia and what are the top spots they definitely have to visit?

TM: South Africans can come out to Russia but they need a visa, and Russia is very particular about their visa process, so start the process earlier. They don't usually give more than 30 days for a tourist visa and if you're travelling around Russia remember to tell the embassy during your visa application. You also have to register yourself in Russia and if you're staying in one place for more than seven days then you have to register at the local registration offices. If you don't you might get into trouble if stopped by the police randomly.

TRMSA: Is there a lot to do and see when in Moscow and around Russia?

TM: Moscow of course is home of the Kremlin a must see and visit and the legendary Red Square and is the city that inspired dozens of spy novels. It's also the city where the father of Communism, Lenin, whose sallow embalmed body, has laid in the Square's eerie mausoleum since his death in 1924. You can't take pictures of the Lenin corpse but it's a must see. The 24 hour nightlife and restaurant scene is the best in

the world, to be honest, Moscow is the city that never sleeps. Every bar, restaurant and club you go to is unique and the ambience, food and great drinks menu make up for the sometimes slow service. St Petersburg – is the quintessential Russian city, the Imperial Crown Full of history and elegant buildings. It's formed around a series of canals. Summer days are the best as the city stays light past midnight. Vladimir, founded in 1108, was Russia's capital for nearly two centuries before giving way to Moscow. It forms part of the 'Golden Ring' of ancient towns, dating back from the 12th to 17th Century, that have great historic, architectural, and religious significance in Russia. Karelia is rich and lush in landscape and makes it possible to enjoy a whole host of outdoor activities - hike, bike ride, sail, white water raft, swim, it is perhaps one of Russia's best kept hideaways. Nothing pleases me more than seeing South African's from all walks of life representing our country overseas and doing great things. It was J.F.Kennedy who once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country". That is the motto that every South African must live by. Because even if you come from humble beginnings, it does often happen, and I'm an example of that, that life can be an amazing and rewarding journey full of surprises.

