

► James Bond. Mel Gibson. Rock star Ronnie Wood ► Men of all varieties enjoy the company of beautiful Russian women, and the women aren't exactly passive ► These days, they're hunting for a man from the West

Starving for love ... in Russia

ELISABETH BRAW
METRO WORLD NEWS

Tatiana Kalchuk wants a husband. But the 26-year-old Odessa resident despairs of finding a suitable man in her home country. She's hunting for a Western man.

"Some women are just looking for a man from the West because they want to move abroad," says Kalchuk.

"But I'm looking for the perfect husband.

Men from the West are more gentleman-like and romantic."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, thousands of women have marketed themselves through "mail-order bride" agencies.

"There are more women than men in former Soviet republics," says Dr. Olga Nikitinaden Besten, a Russian sociologist in Paris. "Alcoholism and illness is a huge problem among the men, and the men who aren't sick or dead are often already taken.

"A woman who doesn't marry in her 20s is likely to date a married man, which is obviously not a good prospect. So women look abroad."

Today, an increasing number of highly educated young ex-Soviet women resemble Kalchuk, who has a master's degree and speaks five languages.

"Russian women in particular have a high level of initiative," notes Nikitina-den Besten.

"And now their computer and language skills have increased so they can try to find men on their own."

The dating company Anastasia, launched in 1993, arranged "romance

tours" for Western men to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Today, the tours go to 13 ex-Soviet cities.

"Women in Russia and Ukraine also flock to venues frequented

by westerners," explains Anastasia managing editor Larry Cervantes. "And speed-dating parties are all the rage. Speak in English and you'll see heads turn."

The company also runs dating giant Anastasia-date.com, which has 100 million visitors a year.

Women insist their fervent mate-searching isn't just about money.

"Ex-Soviet women are very interested in relationships, but men have to understand that these women want to get married," says Cervantes.

"I've gone on dates with lots of Western men, but my impression is that they aren't very serious. They come here and go on dates with several women."

TATIANA KALCHUK



► Tatiana Kalchuk, 26, wants to marry a gentleman from the West.



► Viktoria and Orris

A PARTNER FOR LIFE, NOT JUST SEX

Russian-American couple Viktoria and Orris Strickland discuss their relationship:

Why did you look for a Russian wife?

Orris: At first I was "just looking" and not really serious about finding a wife. I wrote letters to a few different women and then Viktoria and I

60 seconds

started writing letters. Our relationship has worked out better than I had ever hoped. I am the happiest I have ever been. Viktoria is now pregnant.

What's your advice to other couples?

Viktoria: Be in love with

each other and don't marry only because you want to go to America. Men in the U.S. want a wife and partner in their life, not just someone for sex. American men ... like to take care of me and help me. My Orris helps me clean our house and even sometimes cooks meals and I can relax.

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