

To Africa with love come positive Russians

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93
SAM SOLE

Weekend Argus Correspondent

DURBAN. — At a time when many South Africans are pessimistic about their country, two young Russians are infectious positive about their new life here.

Serge and Svetlana Mejouev arrived in Durban from Russia seven months ago and this week applied for permanent residence.

"I believe there is a very good future here," says Serge, 25.

"The people are friendly and strong and I think the violence will stop, though maybe not so soon. I see many more opportunities here than in Russia."

Serge, an electronics technician from the small town of

p. 6
Kaluga (200km from Moscow) and Svetlana, 22, an architectural draughtswoman, became interested in South Africa through a shared enthusiasm for their radio hobby.

Bouncing their shortwave transmissions across the globe, they became firm friends with several South African hams. With Russia opening up to the world they decided to follow their sense of adventure and see another side of the world.

Money was a problem, however, until South Africans they had spoken to but never seen clubbed together to buy them tickets to travel.

Now they both have jobs and have bought a second-hand car, a luxury they only dreamed of in Russia.

"I have a nice job as a ship's chandler, working with Russian ships in Durban," says Serge, whose command of English and Russian has made him an ideal go-between.

"Our families miss us and worry about us," admits Svetlana, "but we get to talk to them regularly on radios belonging to South African friends. As soon as we have money we will invite them to visit us."

South Africa is even better than he expected, says Serge. "We didn't want to go to Europe or the United States. It would have been too much like Russia. South Africa, with its warm weather and beaches and animals, is like magic to us."