

Russia

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Best Places to Eat

- » Delicatessen (p753)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Metropol (p751)
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Why Go?

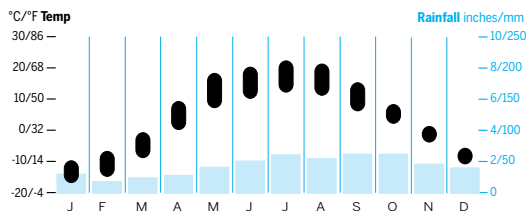
Could there be a more iconic image of Eastern Europe than Moscow's awe-inspiring Red Square? Intimately associated with this vision is the lingering impression that Russia (Россия) remains a closed-off, difficult and unfriendly place in which to travel. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Two decades on from the demise of the Soviet Union, an economically and politically resurgent Russia is a brash, exciting and fascinating place to visit. All the fruits of capitalism, including good hotels, restaurants and fully stocked shops, stand alongside things that the country has long got right, such as beautiful architecture and a vibrant cultural scene of classical music, theatre and art.

Outside the major cities covered in this chapter – Moscow, St Petersburg, Veliky Novgorod and Kaliningrad – there are also the simple pleasures of a countryside dotted with timeless wooden cottages and deserted beaches. Don't let the matter of a little red tape deter you.

When to Go

Moscow



May Big military parades and a public holiday mark the end of WWII.

Jun & Jul Party during St Petersburg's White Nights; bask on the beaches of Kaliningrad.

Dec & Jan Snow makes Moscow and St Petersburg look magical, while hotel rates drop.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Ruble (R)
- » **Language** Russian
- » **Money** Plenty of ATMs, most accepting foreign cards
- » **Visas** Required by all – apply at least a month in advance of your trip

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 16,995,800 sq km
- » **Capital** Moscow
- » **Country code** ☎7
- » **Emergency** Ambulance ☎03, emergency assistance ☎112, fire ☎01, police ☎02

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	R32.44
Canada	C\$1	R30.58
Euro Zone	€1	R39.69
Japan	¥100	R32.91
New Zealand	NZ\$1	R26.00
UK	UK£1	R46.99
USA	US\$1	R31.06

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** R3000 Moscow (R1000 elsewhere)
- » **Two-course meal** R400 to R1000
- » **Museum entrance** R350
- » **Beer** R50 to R120
- » **Metro ticket** R28

Resources

- » **Visit Russia** (www.visitrussia.org.uk)
- » **Russia Made Easy** (www.redtape.ru)
- » **Moscow Expat Site** (www.expat.ru)

Connections

Bordering Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, Russia has excellent train and bus connections with the rest of Europe. Be careful: many routes connecting St Petersburg and Moscow with points east – including Kaliningrad – go through Belarus, for which you'll need a transit visa. Buses are the best way to get from St Petersburg to Tallinn. St Petersburg to Helsinki can be done by boat, bus or train.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Spend three days in Moscow. See Red Sq, the Kremlin and the collections at the Tretyakov, New Tretyakov and Pushkin art museums. Journey to the magnificent Novodevichy Convent & Cemetery, and the revamped Gorky Park. Sweat it out in the Sanduny Baths or do a metro tour. Take the night train to Veliky Novgorod and spend a day exploring its ancient kremlin and churches. The last three days are reserved for splendid St Petersburg. Wander up Nevsky pr, see Dvortsovaya pl, and spend a half-day at the Hermitage. Tour the canals and the mighty Neva River by boat. Visit Peter & Paul Fortress, the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood and the wonderful Russian Museum.

Two Weeks

With two extra days in Moscow, explore Soviet landmarks like VDNKh (the All Russian Exhibition Centre), and take a day trip to charming Sergiev Posad. In St Petersburg, spend more time in the Hermitage and other museums, and tack on an excursion to Petrodvorets or Tsarskoe Selo. Then fly to Kaliningrad. Admire the capital's reconstructed Gothic Cathedral and wander along the river to the excellent World Ocean Museum. The Amber Museum is also impressive. Enjoy either the old Prussian charm of the spa town of Svetlogorsk or the sand dunes and forests of the Kurshskaya Kosa National Park.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Soups** Try lemony, meat *solyanka* or hearty fish *ukha*.
- » **Bliny** (pancakes) Served with *ikra* (caviar) or *tvorog* (cottage cheese).
- » **Salads** A wide variety usually slathered in mayonnaise, including the chopped potato one called Olivier.
- » **Pelmeni** (dumplings) Stuffed with meat and eaten with sour cream and vinegar.
- » **Central Asian dishes** Try *plov* (Uzbek pilaf), *shashlyk* (kebab) or *lagman* (noodles).
- » **Vodka** The quintessential Russian tippie.
- » **Kvas** A refreshing, beerlike drink, or the red berry juice mix *mors*.