

PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT
 Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
 to help you put together your perfect trip

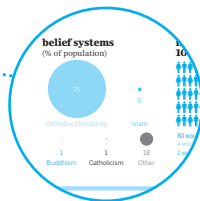
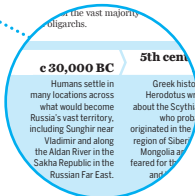
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UNDERSTAND RUSSIA

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP
 Learn about the big picture, so you
 can make sense of what you see

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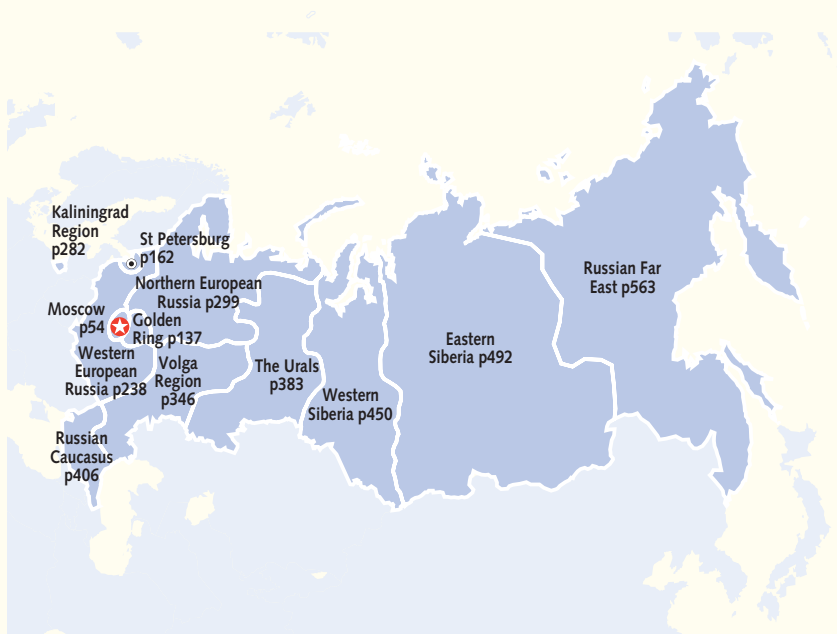
ISBN 978-1-74179-579-0



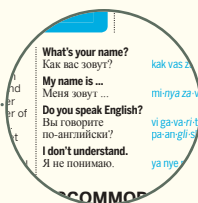
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➤ **Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first**

➤ **Look out for these icons:**



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



No payment required

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Home to the incomparable Hermitage (p168)

Kizhi
Amazing wooden church on an island (p307)

Veliky Novgorod
Ancient churches, magnificent kremlin (p262)

Suzdal
The quintessential idyllic village (p142)

Moscow
Be surrounded by history on Red Square (p72)

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Toms
Splendid architecture, culturally cool vibe (p464)

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Russia's nature paradise supreme (p471)

Top Experiences >





OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Simon Richmond

Coordinating Author; Western European Russia, Kaliningrad Region After studying Russian history and politics during university, Simon first visited the country in 1994 when he wandered goggle eyed around gorgeous St Petersburg and peeked at Lenin's mummified corpse in Red Square. He's since travelled the breadth of the nation from Kamchatka in the Far East to Kaliningrad in the far west, stopping off at many points between. An award-winning writer and photographer, Simon is the coauthor of Lonely Planet's *Trans-Siberian Railway* editions 1, 2 and 3; *Russia* editions 3, 4 and 5; and many other titles for the company, ranging from Cape Town to Korea. Read more about his travels at www.simonrichmond.com.

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Western Siberia Marc moved to Russia in 1997 and immediately fell in love with the country's pirate CD markets. Since then, he has written about Russian spies, Chechen football and Soviet psychics for a variety of national newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Times*. In 2008 his book *Football Dynamo: Modern Russia and the People's Game* was released. He is currently working on a book about Russia's fascination with the occult. Contact him at marcbennetts@yahoo.com.



Greg Bloom

Russian Far East Greg cut his teeth in the former Soviet Union as a journalist and later editor-in-chief of the *Kyiv Post*. He left Ukraine in 2003 but returns frequently to the region. In the service of Lonely Planet, he has been detained in Uzbekistan, taken a *shlagbaum* to the head in Kyiv, swam in the dying Aral Sea, snowboarded down volcanoes in Kamchatka and hit 100km/h in a Latvian bobsled. These days Greg lives in Cambodia. Read about his trips at www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs.

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Marc Di Duca

Eastern Siberia Marc has spent nigh on two decades criss-crossing the former communist world, the last seven of them as a travel guide author. Stints on previous editions of Lonely Planet's *Russia* and *Trans-Siberian Railway* were preceded by other guides to Moscow, St Petersburg and Lake Baikal. Motor boating around the Selenga River Delta, stalking Decembrists across 4 million sq km and munching through perilous amounts of Buryat *pozi* all formed part of research in his beloved Siberia this time round.

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OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

6th edition – Mar 2012

ISBN 978 1 74179 579 0

© Lonely Planet 2012 Photographs © as indicated 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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Anthony Haywood

Volga Region, The Urals Anthony was born in the port city of Fremantle, Western Australia, and pulled anchor early on to hitchhike (mostly) through Europe and the USA. He later studied comparative literature in Perth and Russian language in Melbourne. In the 1990s he moved to Germany. Today he works as a freelance writer and journalist and divides his time between Göttingen (Lower Saxony) and Berlin. His book, *Siberia, A Cultural History*, was published in 2010.



Tom Masters

St Petersburg Tom first came to St Petersburg in 1996 while studying Russian at the School of Slavonic & East European Studies in London. He loved the city so much that he came back after graduating and worked as a writer and editor at the *St Petersburg Times*. Since then he's been based in London and Berlin, but returns regularly to Piter to take on documentary work, and to write freelance articles and Lonely Planet guides. You can see more of Tom's work at www.tommasters.net.

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Leonid Ragozin

Golden Ring Leonid Ragozin devoted himself to beach dynamics when he studied geology in Moscow. But for want of really nice beaches in Russia, he helped gold miners in Siberia and sold InterRail tickets before embarking on a journalist career. After eight years with the BBC, he became a foreign correspondent for the *Russian Newsweek* – the job that took him to such unlikely destinations as Bhutan and Ecuador. Now back at the BBC, he has plunged into the turbulent sea of TV news.



Tamara Sheward

Northern European Russia After years of freelance travel writing, journalism and authorhood, Tamara leapt at the chance to join the Lonely Planet ranks as presenter of LPTV's *Roads Less Travelled: Cambodia*. Following a Lonely Planet stint in Serbia for the *Eastern Europe* guide, Tamara again returned to her Slavic roots to write this book's Northern European Russia chapter. As a result, she now counts Arctic backwater-hopping, raucous *platskart* journeys and drinking in the park among her favourite pastimes, which will no doubt thrill her Russian mother.

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Regis St Louis

Russian Caucasus An early fan of Gogol and Dostoevsky, Regis spent his university years in the US and Moscow immersed in the world of Rus, in pursuit of a rather impractical degree in Slavic Languages and Literatures. On this trip into the Caucasus, Regis drank *kvas* copiously, hiked over dramatic mountain peaks and joined in political discussions at a youth conference in Karachay-Cherkessia. A full-time travel writer since 2003, Regis has contributed to more than 30 Lonely Planet titles. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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Mara Vorhees

Moscow Mara has been travelling to Moscow since it was the capital of a different country. The pen-wielding traveller has worked on dozens of Lonely Planet titles, including *Moscow*, *St Petersburg* and *Trans-Siberian Railway*. When not roaming around Russia, Mara lives in a pink house in Somerville, Massachusetts, with her husband, two kiddies and two kitties. Follow her adventures at www.maravorhees.com.

Read more about Mara at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/mvorhees

itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks Russian Capitals

The awe-inspiring cities of **Moscow** and **St Petersburg** encompass the country's turbulent past and glittering present. Moscow has its historic **Kremlin**, glorious **Red Square**, classic **Tretyakov Gallery**, renovated **Bolshoi Theatre**, exciting contemporary arts scene and extensive metro system with stations that are a sight in themselves.

In St Petersburg don't miss the incomparable **Hermitage** and the **Russian Museum**, or cruising the city's **rivers and canals**. Enjoy some of Russia's top restaurants and bars, and attend first-rate performances at the **Mariinsky and Mikhailovsky Theatres**.

St Petersburg is ringed by grand palaces set in beautifully landscaped grounds such as **Petrodvorets, Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk**. From Moscow it's easy to make trips to the historic Golden Ring towns of **Sergiev Posad, Suzdal and Vladimir**, where you will be rewarded with a slice of rural Russian life far from the frenetic city pace.

Between the two big cities, tourist-friendly **Veliky Novgorod** deserves a couple of days, too. It's home to an impressive riverside kremlin, ancient churches and a wonderful open-air museum of wooden architecture.



Three to Four Weeks Trans-Siberian Odyssey

The classic Russian adventure is to travel the **Trans-Siberian Railway**, an engineering wonder that spans and holds together the world's largest country. So you can finish up with a grand party in either **Moscow** or, better yet, **St Petersburg**, go against the general flow by commencing your journey at **Vladivostok**. Situated on a stunningly attractive natural harbour, the Pacific coast port is newly spruced up for its hosting of the 2012 APEC summit.

An overnight journey west is **Khabarovsk**, a lively city with a lingering tsarist-era charm located on the banks of the Amur River. Two more days down the line hop off the train at **Ulan-Ude**, the appealing capital of Buryatiya where Russian, Soviet and Mongolian cultures coexist; from here you can venture into the steppes to visit Russia's principal Buddhist monastery, **Ivolginsk Datsan**.

The railway then skirts around the southern shores of magnificent **Lake Baikal**. Allow at least three days (preferably longer) to soak up the charms of this beautiful lake, basing yourself on beguiling **Olkhon Island**; also check out historic **Irkutsk** on the way to the lake or back.

Flush with oil wealth, happening **Krasnoyarsk**, on the Yenisey River, affords the opportunity for scenic cruises along one of Siberia's most pleasant waterways. Detour slightly from the main Trans-Sib line to **Tomsk**, the 'cultural capital of Siberia', to hang with its lively student population and admire the city's treasure trove of wooden architecture.

Crossing the Urals into European Russia, spend a day or so in **Yekaterinburg**, a historic, bustling city well stocked with interesting museums and sites connected to the murder of the last tsar and his family. **Perm** is also doing an excellent job of reinventing itself as a cultural centre; use it as a base from which to make trips to an ice cave at **Kungur** and the Gulag labour camp **Perm-36**, preserved as a museum.

Finally, fortify yourself for the bustle of Moscow by taking a reviving break in the Golden Ring towns of **Yaroslavl** or **Vladimir**, which is also the access point for the idyllic village of **Suzdal**: all are stacked with beautiful, old, onion-domed churches.



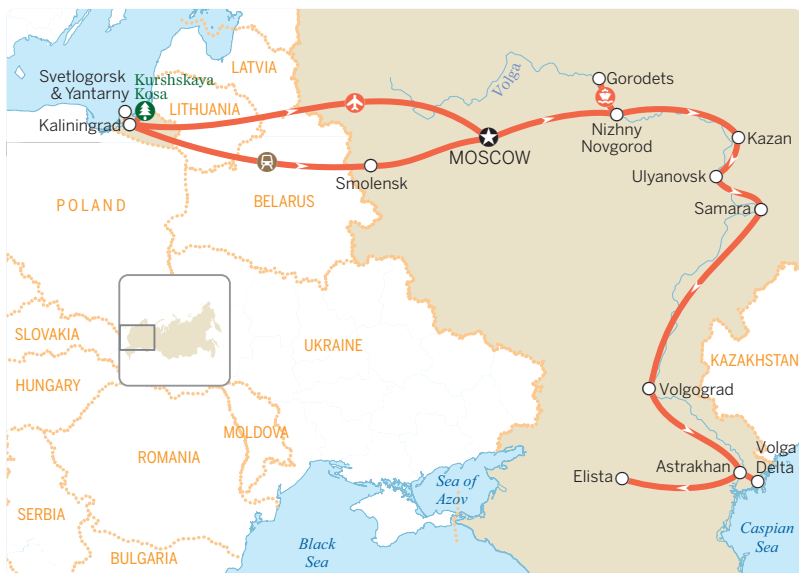
One Month White Sea to Black Sea

This offbeat itinerary runs from the frigid climes of the Arctic Circle to the sun-kissed Black Sea lapping at the foothills of the Caucasus. Start by paying your respects to the giant concrete soldier 'Alyosha' who overlooks **Murmansk**, the world's largest Arctic city. Here you can board a decommissioned nuclear icebreaker and breathe the air that inspired the creator of Chanel No 5. In the summer, the sun never fully sets, while in winter look out for the colourful northern lights.

Take a train directly south through the Kola Peninsula, heading for **Kem**, access point for the **Solovetsky Islands**; the beautiful landscapes and monastery here were also the setting for some of the most brutal scenes in Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Back on the mainland keep south towards appealing **Petrozavodsk** where you can board a hydrofoil that will zip you across Lake Onega to another island – **Kizhi**, home to an architectural reserve that includes the astounding Transfiguration Church, a symphony of wooden domes, gables and decoration. Continuing the islands-in-lakes theme, **Valaam** in Lake Ladoga is the mystical location of a beguiling monastery and can also be reached via Petrozavodsk.

Top up on big-city culture and fun in **St Petersburg** before boarding one of the many overnight trains that head south to the Black Sea resorts. Note that several of these services skirt through Belarus, thus requiring a transit visa and Russian double-entry visa. To avoid this, make your way south via **Moscow**, perhaps pausing at **Tver**, another appealing historic town that Catherine the Great also used to pause in.

If you don't relish spending more than a couple of nights on a train, break your journey at the metropolis of **Rostov-on-Don**, from where you can make a side trip to the old Don Cossack capital of **Starocherkassk** and tour the remains of the Ataman Palace. As host of the 2014 Winter Olympics, the sprawling Black Sea coast resort of **Sochi** is where all the action is. From here, you can visit Stalin's former dacha **Zelenaya Roscha**, take in the stunning waterfalls and vistas of the verdant **Agura Valley** and relax amid the towering peaks of **Krasnaya Polyana**, where soon-to-be world-class resorts are being built for Olympians.



Three Weeks

The Amber-Caviar Route

Ease yourself into Russia by exploring the geographically separate Kaliningrad Region, Russia's far-west outpost that's the source of 90% of the world's amber. Four to five days is sufficient to get a taste of the historic city of **Kaliningrad**, the delightful seaside resorts of **Svetlogorsk** and **Yantarny**, and the 'dancing forest' and sand dunes of **Kurshskaya Kosa**, a World Heritage-listed national park.

With a transit visa to Belarus and a double-entry visa to Russia it's possible to take a train through Lithuania and Belarus to reenter 'big Russia' at **Smolensk**. The skyline of this historic city, partly surrounded by the impressive remains of its kremlin walls, is dominated by the Assumption Cathedral, a place of worship so grand Napoleon gave orders that his invading armies protect it from harm. From here you can connect by train or bus to **Moscow**. Alternatively, there are plenty of flights from Kaliningrad to the capital.

With its magnificent cliff-top kremlin overlooking the mighty Volga River, laid-back **Nizhny Novgorod** is your next stop. Spend a day or so here enjoying the town's museums and its 'Food and Culture' movement, and making a short trip by hydrofoil to the small town of **Gorodets**, known for its folk arts. Further along the river you'll get your first taste of East-meets-West culture at the intriguing Tatarstan capital of **Kazan**. The highlight here is the World Heritage-listed kremlin that includes an enormous mosque and small satellite branch of St Petersburg's Hermitage.

The Volga continues to guide you south past Lenin's birthplace of **Ulyanovsk** and **Samara**, from where you could go hiking in the rocky Zhiguli Hills or search out the town's several offbeat design and cultural sights.

An amazing 72m tall statue of Mother Russia wields her sword over **Volgograd**, a city entirely rebuilt after Russia's bloodiest battle of WWII. Follow the river to its mouth into the Caspian Sea and the ancient city of **Astrakhan**, jumping-off point for exploring the glorious natural attractions, including rare flamingos, of the **Volga Delta**, home to the endangered sturgeon, the source of Beluga caviar. Finally, turn west to the fascinating Buddhist enclave of **Elista**, graced with Tibetan-style temples and possibly the world's highest density of street sculpture.



One Month Siberia's Deep South

For a journey covering some of Siberia's lesser-known locations begin in the oil-rich city of **Tyumen**, which includes several picturesque areas of traditional architecture. Journey northeast in the footsteps of the Siberian conqueror Yermak Timofeevich, the exiled writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and the last tsar to **Tobolsk**, whose splendid kremlin lords it over the Tobol and Irtysh Rivers. Next, head south to **Barnaul**, gateway to the mountainous Altai Republic. Here you can arrange a white-water rafting expedition or plan treks out to beautiful **Lake Teletscoe** and the pretty village of **Artybashi**. Drive along the panoramic **Chuytsky Trakt**, a helter-skelter mountain road leading to yurt-dotted grasslands, first stopping in **Gorno-Altai** to register your visa. Return to **Biysk**, take a bus to **Novokuznetsk** then a train to **Abakan** to arrange onward travel to Tuva. This remote and little-visited region, hard up against Mongolia (with which it shares several cultural similarities), is famed for its throat-singing nomads and mystical shamans. **Kyzyl** has a good new National Museum and Cultural Centre and can be used as a base for expeditions to pretty villages and the vast Central Asian steppes.

One Month Russian Far East Circuit

From the 'wild east' port of **Vladivostok** head via **Khabarovsk** to lively **Blagoveshchensk** with its splendid tsarist architecture. Take the overnight train to **Tynda**, the main hub on the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), from where there's a choice. Tough-travel fanatics can train it to **Neryungri** then endure a very bumpy all-day ride in a Russian UAZ jeep to **Yakutsk**, the extraordinary permafrost-bound capital of the Sakha Republic. Alternatively, board the BAM through to the attractive city of **Komsomolsk-na-Amure** and back to Khabarovsk, from where there are flights to Yakutsk. Once in Yakutsk, visit the city's eccentric Permafrost Kingdom and Mammoth Museum. If it's the summer sailing season, cruise to the scenic **Lena Pillars** on the Lena River. Backtrack to Khabarovsk or Vladivostok from where you can fly to spectacular Kamchatka, to cap off your adventures by climbing one of the snow-capped volcanoes rising behind the rugged peninsula's capital, **Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky**. Or make your way north to **Esso**, newly friendly to independent travellers with cheap guesthouses, public hot springs and well-mapped trails for trekking.

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