Kaliningrad Region

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» Chaika (p289)
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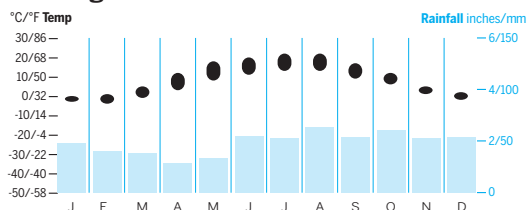» Hotel Bekker (p295)
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Why Go?

Bordered by Poland, Lithuania and 148km of Baltic coast-line, Russia's smallest territory, the Kaliningrad Region (Калининградская Область), is both isolated from and intimately attached to the motherland. All the traditions of the big parent can be found here, alongside plenty of fine hotels and restaurants, welcoming locals, beautiful countryside, splendid beaches and fascinating historical sights.

The Teutonic Knights ruled the Baltic in the Middle Ages from Königsberg (now the region's capital, Kaliningrad), in a land once known as Prussia. After WWII, Stalin ethnically cleansed the region of Germans, but centuries of Germanic culture and architecture were not as easily removed. From the pine forests and Sahara-style dunes of Kurshskaya Kosa National Park to charming seaside resorts such as Svetlogorsk, this 'Little Russia' is easy to get around and offers a youthful outlook.

When to Go

Kaliningrad

Jul Russian Navy Day – a chance to visit Baltiysk, usually off limits to tourists.

Aug Don Chento Jazz Festival in Kaliningrad.

Sep Chernyakhovsk hosts an international horse show-jumping event.

History

The region has been famous since Roman times for its amber deposits. Ruled by Teutonic Knights since the 13th century, in 1525 the area became the Duchy of Prussia, Europe's first Protestant state, with Königsberg as its capital. The city's liberal atmosphere attracted scholars, artists and entrepreneurs from across Europe; in 1697 Peter the Great visited as part of Russia's Grand Embassy and the 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant lived all his life there.

For four years of the Seven Years' War (1756–63), East Prussia became part of the Russian Empire and, later, during the Napoleonic Wars, Russia and Prussia were allies. After WWI, East Prussia was separated from the rest of Germany when Poland regained statehood. The three-month campaign by which the Red Army took it in 1945 was one of the fiercest of WWII; there were massive casualties on both sides and Königsberg was left in ruins.

In 1946 the region was renamed Kaliningrad in honour of Mikhail Kalinin, one of Stalin's more vicious henchmen. In a highly effective ethnic-cleansing campaign the surviving German population was relocated to far-flung corners of the Soviet Union, deported or killed. The Russian Baltic fleet was headquartered in Baltiysk, making the region a closed one to foreigners for over 40 years.

Like much of Russia, Kaliningrad struggled through extreme economic difficulties in the early 1990s. The discovery of oil off the coast and the granting of special economic zone status has helped it turn the corner. One of the venues for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Kaliningrad is also among a handful of Russian regions permitted to develop a casino; the proposed location is near

Kaliningrad Highlights

1 Pay your respects at the grave of philosopher Immanuel Kant, then listen to an organ concert in **Kaliningrad Cathedral** (p284)

2 Learn about Russian maritime history on former expedition vessels and a submarine at Kaliningrad's fascinating **Museum of the World Ocean** (p284)

3 Soak up the natural beauty of **Kurshskaya Kosa National Park** (p297), where the forest dances and the dunes roll on as far as the eye can see

4 Splash in the Baltic from the beautiful beach at **Yantarny** (p295), then visit the local amber mine

5 Stroll along shady forest lanes in the relaxing resort of **Svetlogorsk** (p293), discovering old German villas and the statues of Herman Brachert

6 Explore ruined castles and saddle up at the Georgenburg Stud Farm in **Chernyakhovsk** (p297)