

Russian Caucasus

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Why Go?

In the southwestern corner of Russia lies the Caucasus (Кавказ), an enchanting and ethnically rich region that's home to awe-inspiring mountains, relaxing mineral-spa towns and old-fashioned resorts dotting the sunny shores of the Black Sea.

In the past, few foreign travellers made their way here, discouraged by the conflicts in the breakaway republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. Big changes, however, are in store for the Caucasus, as Sochi and neighbouring towns gear up to host the 2014 Winter Olympics. Fantastic skiing on world-class slopes is just one of many ways to experience the great allure of the region. There's also superb trekking and horseback riding amid soaring peaks, as well as climbing the granddaddy of them all, Mt Elbrus, Europe's highest mountain. Black Sea resort towns offer coastal intrigue – sun and sea, festive nightlife – while pretty spa towns like Pyatigorsk and Kislovodsk make for some memorable exploring.

Best Places to Eat

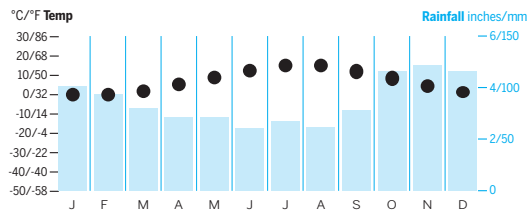
- » Brigantina (p420)
- » Restoran Zamok (p434)
- » Shalashi (p431)
- » U Zuli (p440)

Best Places to Stay

- » Grand Hotel Polyana SAS Lazurnaya (p419)
- » Grand Hotel & Spa Rodina (p419)
- » Grand Hotel Polyana (p425)
- » Solnechnaya Dolina (p439)

When to Go

Sochi



Jan Ski season kicks off at resorts in Krasnaya Polyana and Mt Elbrus.

May Enjoy sunny days and lower prices at Black Sea resorts and spa towns.

Jun-Sep Best time for climbing and hiking in the mountains. Peak season on the Black Sea.

History

The Caucasus has stood at the crossroads of Asian and European cultures since the Bronze Age. The result is an extraordinary mix of races with three main linguistic groups: Caucasian, Indo-European and Turkic. The Caucasus has suffered many invasions and occupations, having been

squeezed between rival Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arab, Ottoman and Russian empires.

LIFE BEFORE THE RUSSIANS

Earliest human traces in the Russian Caucasus date from Neolithic times, when farming was replacing hunting and gathering. The first communities evolved in Dagestan's



Russian Caucasus Highlights

1 Frolic in the Black Sea followed by dinner and dancing in everlively **Sochi** (p415)

2 Carve up Olympic ski slopes, followed by a *banya* in **Krasnaya Polyana** (p424)

3 Hike or ski amid the dramatic peaks of **Dombay** (p435)

4 Take a walk past waterfalls and up to sublime panoramas in the verdant **Agura Valley** (p422)

5 Reach the summit of Europe's highest peak on **Mt Elbrus** (p443)

6 Stroll the tree-lined streets of peaceful **Pyatigorsk** (p428) followed

by a visit to the site where Lermontov perished in a duel

7 Drink the carbonic Narzan spring waters, then take to the pristine hilly slopes of **Kislovodsk** (p432)

8 Absorb the mellow setting and historic buildings of former Don Cossack capital **Starocherkassk** (p411)