

St Petersburg

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Why Go?

Beautiful, complex and imperious, with a hedonistic, creative temperament, St Petersburg (Санкт-Петербург) is the ultimate Russian diva. From its early days as an uninhabited swamp, the 300-year-old city has been nurtured by a succession of rulers, enduring practically everything that history and nature's harsh elements could throw at her. Constantly in need of repair but with a carefree party attitude, Piter (as she's affectionately known by locals) still seduces all who gaze upon her grand facades, glittering spires and gilded domes. Such an environment has inspired many of Russia's greatest artists, including Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich.

The long summer days of the White Nights season are particularly special – the fountains flow, parks and gardens burst into colour and Piter's citizens hit the streets to party. With a little preparation, though, the icy depths of winter have their own magic, and are the perfect time for warming body and soul in all those museums and palaces.

Best Places to Eat

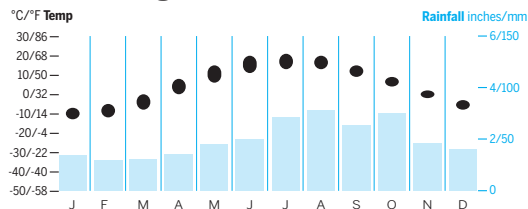
- » Dom Beat (p213)
- » Botanika (p213)
- » Kompot Café (p213)
- » Teplo (p214)
- » MiX in St Petersburg (p212)

Best Places to Stay

- » W Hotel (p207)
- » Rachmaninov Hotel (p207)
- » Rossi Hotel (p207)
- » Hostel Ligovsky 74 (p210)
- » Casa Leto (p207)

When to Go

St Petersburg



Mid-May–mid-Jul

The White Nights, when the sun never truly sets, is the most popular time to visit.

May & Sep A

great time to visit St Petersburg while avoiding the crowds of the peak months.

Nov-Jan

Freezing, dark and blanketed in snow, winter in St Petersburg is quite magical.

Art Attack

St Petersburg, long Russia's artistic engine, has recently seen the opening of several new museums and galleries that are really putting the city on the international modern art map. As well as the incredible world-class collections at the Hermitage and the Russian Museum, the recent opening of the Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art, Russia's largest private art museum with over 2000 modern Russian works, has made St Petersburg about far more than classical art. Add to that two very interesting contemporary galleries, Loft Project ETAGI and the Rizzordi Art Foundation, and you'll find plenty to keep you occupied while you're in town.

PALACES UNDERGROUND

The St Petersburg metro isn't quite as palatial as Moscow's, but you shouldn't miss the stations on the southern half of Line 1 (that's the red line on the official metro map). Some highlights:

- » **Avtovo** Don't miss the Babylonian lavishness of the marble and cut-glass columns holding up the roof, the relief of soldiers in the ticket hall and the temple-like entrance.
- » **Narvskaya** A fantastic sculpted relief of Lenin and the rejoicing proletariat hangs over the escalators, and carvings of miners, engineers, sailors and teachers grace the platform columns.
- » **Ploshchad Vosstaniya** Lenin and Stalin are depicted together in the roundels at either end of the platform, as well as Lenin on a tank, Lenin alone and the Kronshadt sailors.

Bridges Up!

From the end of April to November, all bridges across the Neva River rise at around 1.30am nightly to let ships pass through the city and on to the rest of the world, or into Russia's deep interior. The spectacle is well worth seeing, but it's also well worth planning for – don't find yourself on the wrong side of the water when the bridges go up, or you'll have a long night ahead of you until they go back down again at around 5am. See p224 for times.

NEED TO KNOW

While the majority of St Petersburg's museums close on a Monday, potentially any day of the week can be their day off – always check with the listings before you head off somewhere.

Fast Facts

- » **Telephone area code**
☎812
- » **Population** 4.8 million
- » **Number of metro stations** 65
- » **Name changes** 3
- » **Number of bridges** 342
- » **St Petersburg Time**
🕒Moscow (GMT/USC +4 hours)

Don't Drink the Water

Tiny traces of *Giardia lamblia*, a nasty parasite that causes stomach cramps, nausea, bloated stomach, diarrhoea and frequent gas, have been found in St Petersburg's water. There's no preventative drug so the best advice is not to drink straight from the tap.

Resources

- » **St Petersburg Tourist Information** (<http://eng.ispb.info>)
- » **St Petersburg Times** (www.sptimes.ru)
- » **In Your Pocket St Petersburg** (www.inyourpocket.com/russia/st-petersburg)
- » **Way to Russia** (www.waytorussia.net)