Kaliningrad Region

Best Places to Eat

➡ Fish Club (p271)
➡ Zarya (p270)
➡ Korvet (p274)
➡ Prichal (p270)

Best Places to Stay

➡ Skipper Hotel (p269)
➡ Dom Skazochnika (p274)
➡ Galera (p275)
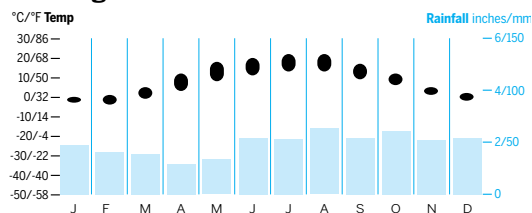➡ Hotel Paraiso (p270)
➡ Koshkin Dom (p276)

Why Go?

On paper, the Kaliningrad Region seems ripe for an identity crisis. Its eponymous capital was the medieval seat of Prussia and an important port that was fought over for centuries. Today, less than 500,000 people visit each year. Until the 1940s, the province was almost entirely German; bratwurst made way for borsch as Stalin repopulated the region with Russians and Ukrainians. And though it's geographically separated from Russia by Lithuania and Poland, the exclave is intimately attached to the motherland.

Yet for all of its chaotic history and cultural foibles – or perhaps because of them – 'Little Russia' is a fascinating place to visit. The city of Kaliningrad teems with interesting sights and surprisingly sophisticated accommodation and dining options; seaside towns Svetlogorsk and Zelenogradsk dish up old-world charm by the spadeful; sparkling Yantarny is the world's amber capital; and the dunes, pine forests and tranquil villages of Kurshskaya Kosa National Park make for a serene sojourn.

When to Go

Kaliningrad

Jul Russian Navy Day in Baltiysk, HQ of the Baltic fleet.

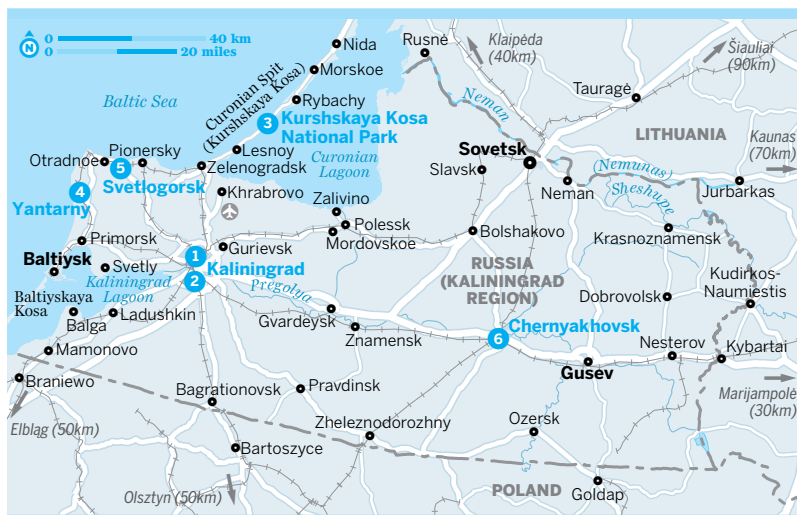**Aug** Yantarny celebrates Amberfest.

Sep Kaliningrad's Baltic Season performing arts festival kicks off.

History

The region has been famous since Roman times for its amber deposits. Ruled by Teutonic Knights since the 13th century, the area became the Duchy of Prussia, Europe's first Protestant state, in 1525 with Königsberg as its capital. The city had been founded in 1255 and joined the Hanseatic League in 1340. From 1457 to 1618 Königsberg was the residence of the grand masters of the Teutonic order and their successors, the dukes of Prussia. Prussia's first king, Frederick I, was crowned in 1701 in the city's castle. Königsberg's liberal atmosphere attracted scholars, artists and entrepreneurs from across Europe, and for the next couple of centuries the city flourished – in 1697 Peter the Great visited as part of his Grand Embassy and the 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant lived there all his life.

For four years of the Seven Years' War (1756–63), East Prussia – as the Duchy became known as in the early 18th century – 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 East Prussia in 1945 was one of the fiercest battles 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, and the capital was rebuilt in grand Soviet concrete style, albeit tempered by parks, ponds, waterways and Kaliningrad Lagoon. The surviving German population was relocated to far-flung corners of the Soviet Union, deported or killed. The Russian Baltic fleet was

Kaliningrad Region Highlights

1 Pay your respects at philosopher Immanuel Kant's grave, then attend an organ concert in **Kaliningrad Cathedral** (p265).

2 Explore Russia's maritime history on former expedition vessels and a submarine at Kaliningrad's **Museum of the World Ocean** (p265).

3 Soak up the beauty of **Kurshskaya Kosa National Park** (p276), where the forest dances and the dunes roll on as far as the eye can see.

4 Splash in the Baltic at **Yantarny** (p275), then visit the amber mine.

5 Stroll the shady lanes of **Svetlogorsk** (p273), discovering old German villas and the sculptures of Herman Brachert.

6 Explore ruined castles and saddle up at the Georgenburg Stud Farm in **Chernyakhovsk** (p272).