

Welcome to Russia

The world's largest country offers it all, from historic cities and idyllic countryside to artistic riches, epic train rides and vodka-fuelled nightlife.

Historic & Contemporary

If ancient walled fortresses, glittering palaces and swirly-spired churches are what you're after, focus on European Russia. Here Moscow and St Petersburg are the must-see destinations, twin repositories of eye-boggling national treasures, political energies and contemporary creativity. Within easy reach of these cities are charming historical towns and villages, such as Veliky Novgorod, Pskov and Suzdal, where the vistas dotted with onion domes and lined with gingerbread cottages measure up to the rural Russia of popular imagination.

Arty & Adventurous

Whether you're a culture vulture in search of inspiration from great artists and writers or an adventure addict looking for new horizons to conquer, Russia amply delivers. Tread in the footsteps of literary greats, including Tolstoy and Pushkin, on their country estates. Arrange a ski holiday in Krasnaya Polyana, newly spruced up for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, go trekking in the Altai, or even climb an active volcano in Kamchatka – the varied possibilities will make your head spin.

Off the Beaten Track

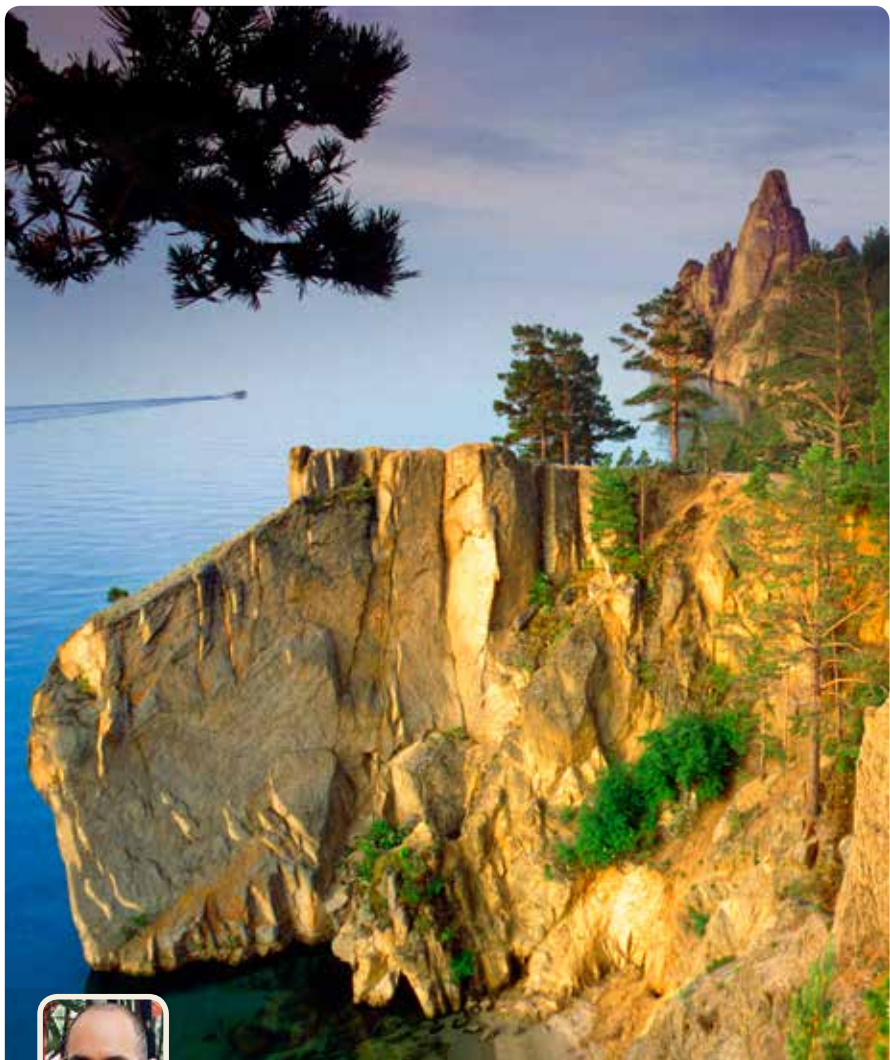
Russia's vast geographical distances and cultural differences mean you don't tick off its highlights in the way you might those of a smaller nation. Instead, view Russia as a collection of distinct territories, each one deserving separate attention.

Rather than transiting via Moscow, consider flying direct to a regional centre such as Irkutsk, Novosibirsk or Yekaterinburg and striking out from there. With a welcome spread of Western-style hostels along the Trans-Siberian route and the ease of booking trains and flights online, it's never been easier to organise this kind of trip.

A Riddle Worth Solving

We won't lie: tolerating bureaucracy, corruption and occasional discomfort, particularly away from the booming urban centres, remains an integral part of the Russian travel experience. However, a small degree of perseverance will be amply rewarded and one of the great joys of travel in Russia is being swept away by the boundless hospitality of the people.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it best when he talked about Russia's 'ancient, deeply rooted autonomous culture...full of riddles and surprises to Western thinking'. You, too, will be beguiled by the beauty of its arts and the quixotic nature of its people.



Why I Love Russia

By Simon Richmond, Author

A traveller's relationship with Russia is never an easy one, but over two decades of exploring this multifaceted country, I've yet to tire of it or be disappointed. It's a thrill to discover the latest on the dynamic and liberal art scene in the major cities and I particularly relish the serene countryside, with Lake Baikal a favourite location. Above all, it has been encounters and passionate conversations with warmly welcoming, highly educated and hospitable Russians that have made the most lasting impression on me.

For more about our authors, see page 696.