



Russian Far East

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Gatsby (p522)
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- ➔ Shinok Pervach (p537)
- ➔ Chochur Muran (p543)
- ➔ Cafe No 1 (p549)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Boutique Hotel (p521)
- ➔ Optimum Hostel (p529)
- ➔ Bed & Breakfast Bravo (p542)
- ➔ Hostel 24 (p555)
- ➔ Grushanka (p560)

Why Go?

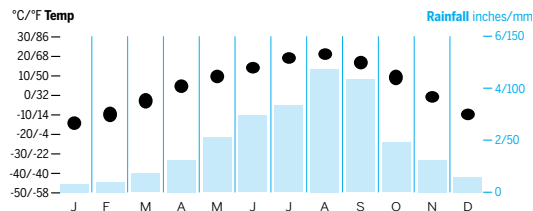
Russia's distant end of the line, the wild wild east, feels like its own entity. 'Moscow is far' runs the local mantra, and trade and transport connections with Asian neighbours are growing fast.

For those who've not been there, the Russian Far East (Дальний Восток) seems impossibly forbidding and it's often mistaken for Siberia (it was considered part of Siberia in precommunist times). The truth is it's bigger, more remote and, in winter, even colder. Areas of snowcapped mountains and taiga (northern pine), bigger than some European countries, separate former Cossack fort towns, old Gulag camps, decaying Soviet towns along railways heading nowhere special, towns raised on stilts over permafrost and once-closed Soviet ports roaring with new business.

Many travellers skip the Far East entirely, cutting south from Lake Baikal to China – but that's all the better for those who make it. Elbow room is definitely not in short supply.

When to Go

Vladivostok



Feb & Mar Still the season for snowy delights, only not dark or slushy.

Jun Essentially midspring, with all the beauty that entails (minus mosquitoes).

Sep & Oct Better weather and more autumn foliage than anywhere else on earth.

History

The Far East is Russia's 'wild east', where hardened Cossacks in the early 17th century – and young Soviets (and Gulag-camp prisoners) in the 20th – came to exploit the region's untapped natural resources, such as gold of the Kolyma, diamonds of Sakha and oil off Sakhalin Island. It was just a big

chunk of Siberia until the Soviets anointed it a separate administrative entity in the 1920s. Geographers still consider most of the Far East part of Siberia. Yet it has always felt more distant, more challenging, more godforsaken than points west.

Locally, much ado is made of Anton Chekhov's trip through the Far East to Sakhalin



Russian Far East Highlights

1 Climb a volcano around **Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky** (p551) on the wild Kamchatka Peninsula.

2 View sublime Golden Horn Bay in mountain-spiked **Vladivostok** (p524).

3 Go exotic with horse meat, reindeer and frozen fish meals in fascinating **Yakutsk** (p538).

4 Take in exquisite tsarist-era buildings along the Amur River in **Blagoveshchensk** (p514).

5 Hike amid sublime scenery followed by a soak in a geothermal pool in **Esso** (p559), Kamchatka.

6 Take a cruise to see the magnificent **Lena Pillars** (p541), amid the vast

wilderness of the Sakha Republic.

7 Take a scenic riverside stroll, admire grand architecture and enjoy the nightlife in hip **Khabarovsk** (p518).

8 Revisit Soviet power by taking a Gulag-camp tour at **Komsomolsk-na-Amure** (p535).