

# Volga Region

## Includes ➔

Nizhny Novgorod ...	320
Gorodets .....	326
Kazan .....	326
Sviyazhsk .....	333
Ulyanovsk .....	333
Samara .....	335
Samara Bend .....	339
Shiryaev .....	339
Saratov .....	340
Volgograd .....	341
Astrakhan .....	345
Volga Delta .....	348
Elista .....	349

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Kafe-Bar Sasha (p338)
- ➔ Priyut Kholostyaka (p331)
- ➔ Staraya Kvartira (p337)
- ➔ Restoratsia Pyatkin (p324)
- ➔ Sharlay (p348)

## Best Natural Settings

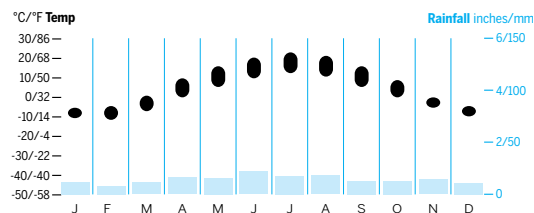
- ➔ Volga Delta (p348)
- ➔ Kalmykia (p349)
- ➔ Samara Bend (p339)
- ➔ Shiryaev (p339)

## Why Go?

The Volga (Волга), one of Europe's great rivers, winds for some 3530km through Russia's heartland and has been a part of the continent's longest 'highway' since time immemorial. The stretch of the Volga between Nizhny Novgorod and the Caspian Sea forms a rich and fascinating cultural region with over a dozen different ethnic groups, most notably the Volga Tatars. Travelling along or alongside the river you encounter spectacular hilltop kremlins in Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan and Astrakhan, bombastic architecture in Volgograd, numerous lively provincial capitals and picturesque stretches such as the Samara Bend. This natural beauty culminates in the magnificent Volga Delta south of Astrakhan, a vast region of reeds and waterways. West of the Volga River, Kalmykia takes in a windswept area of steppe that is home to the Buddhist Kalmyks, who originate from western Mongolia.

## When to Go

### Astrakhan



**Feb** Much of the Volga River is frozen over and draped in a winter landscape.

**Late Apr–late May** Spring sun warms the air and accommodation is plentiful.

**Late Jul–Sep** Navigation season is in full swing and lotus flowers bloom in the delta.

## History

Since ancient times, the Volga has supported agricultural settlements and served as a main link in transcontinental commerce. More than 1000 years ago, the Vikings plied its waters, establishing a trade route between Baghdad and the Baltic.

## Medieval Volga

In the Middle Ages, the Lower Volga was dominated by the Khazars, a Turkic tribe whose leaders converted to Judaism. The Khazar capital stood at Itil (present-day Astrakhan). The Middle Volga was the domain of another Turkic tribe, the Bulgars. Descendants of the Huns and distant relatives of the Balkan Bulgarians, they migrated eastwards, mixed with local Finno-Ugric



VOLGA REGION

## Volga Region Highlights

- 1 Explore the waterways of the **Volga Delta** (p348).
- 2 Climb the stairs and paths of **Mamaev Kurgan** (p342), Volgograd's magnificent memorial to the Battle of Stalingrad.
- 3 Sail the **Volga River** (p339) on a short excursion or a fully cruise ship, taking in the major stops and sights.
- 4 Stroll through multicultural **Kazan** (p326), one of Russia's most dynamic cities and home to a picturesque kremlin.
- 5 Rattle in a *marshrutka* across the grassy steppe to **Elista** (p349), capital of Europe's only Buddhist republic.
- 6 Take the spectacular **cable car** (p323) on a 13-minute ride across the Volga River in Nizhny Novgorod.