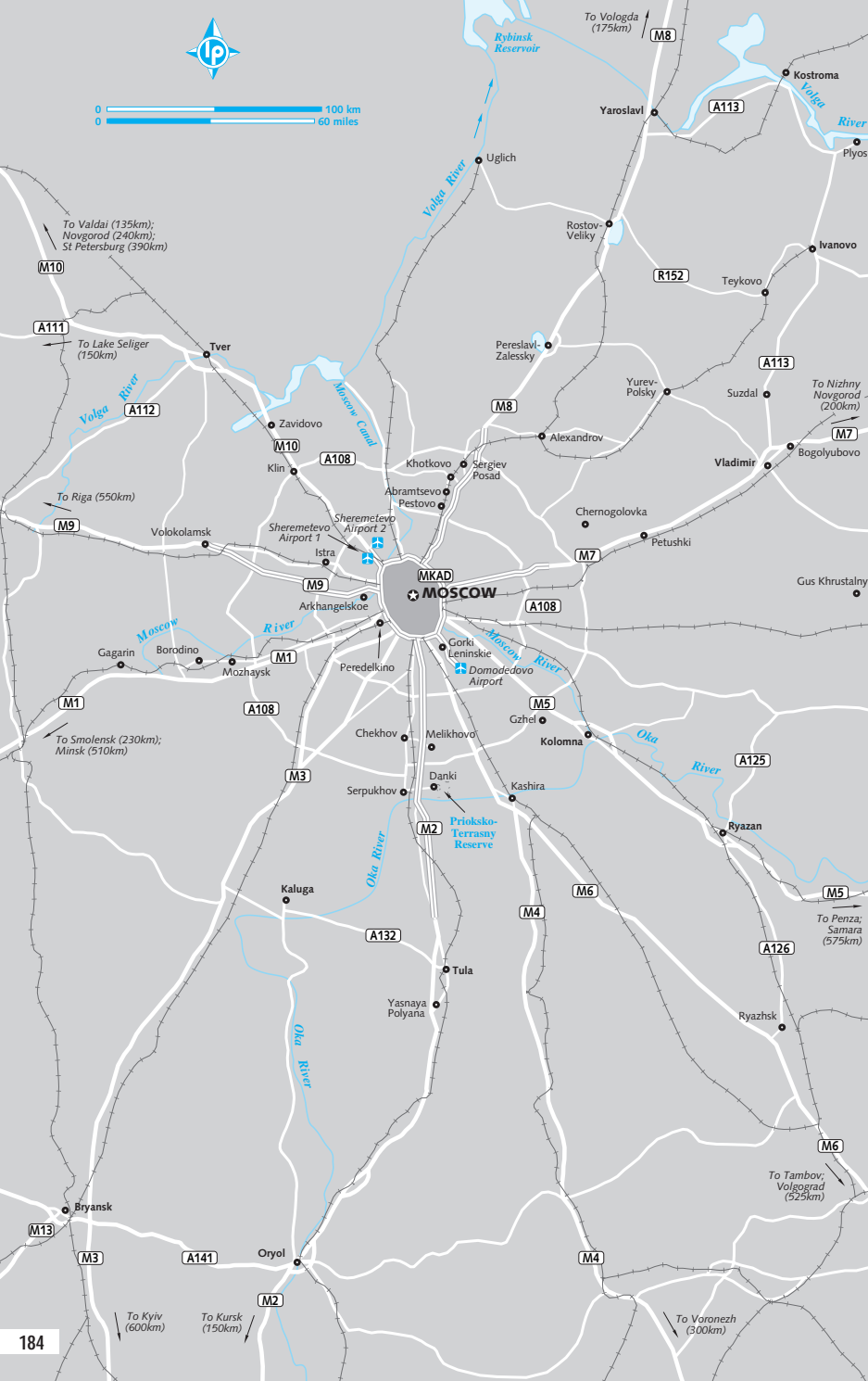


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Excursions



Excursions

As soon as you leave Moscow, the fast-paced modern capital fades from view, while the slowed-down, old-fashioned countryside unfolds around you. The subtly changing landscape is crossed by winding rivers and dotted with peasant villages – the classic provincial Russia immortalised by artists and writers over the centuries.

Ancient Rus grew up in the clutch of towns northeast of Moscow that is now known as the Golden Ring. In many cases the whitewashed walls of these once-fortified cities still stand. The golden spires and onion domes of monasteries still mark the horizon, evoking medieval Rus. Bells ring out from towering belfries; robbed holy men scurry through church doors; historic tales recall mysterious, magical times.

Moscow's elite have long escaped the heat and hustle of city life by retreating to the surrounding regions. Old aristocrats used provincial Russia as a location for grand palaces, extensive gardens and extravagant art collections. Artists and writers also sought inspiration in the countryside, usually in less extravagant quarters. Many of these retreats, from dacha to mansion, now house museums to inspire visitors.

These days, most Muscovites do not have country estates, but they still need an occasional break from the urban madness. The lovely lakes district northwest of the capital provides plenty of opportunities for swimming, sunning and soaking up the tranquillity of rural Russia.

GOLDEN RING

The Golden Ring is the circle of ancient towns northeast of Moscow – so called for its wealth of architectural and artistic riches. Some of these spots are accessible from Moscow by day trip. But, if you have a few days to spare, it's worth leaving behind the big-city bustle to immerse yourself in the age-old allure of the Golden Ring.

The most visited destination in the Golden Ring is Sergiev Posad (p194), for its accessibility from Moscow and for its atmosphere of history and holiness. If you're willing to spend the night, you can continue north to Pereslavl-Zalessky (p196) and Rostov-Veliky (p198), charming villages with their own rich histories.

The Golden Ring's most enchanting destination is undoubtedly Suzdal (p190). The

TELEPHONE CODE CHANGES

In late 2005, the Russian Communications Ministry announced plans to change the area codes for 19 regions across Russia, including many towns in the Golden Ring. All codes that used to start with '0' should now start with a '4' instead, although be aware that there may be teething problems with this change. Also there are rumours that entirely new codes will be introduced for some localities. The new numbers are reflected in this chapter.

Should the planned changes be not operational when you use this book, the old telephone codes are: Abramtsevo % 8254, Arkhangelskoe % 095, Gorki Leninskie % 095, Kostroma % 0942, Moscow % 095, Pereslavl-Zalessky % 08535, Plyos % 09339, Rostov-Veliky % 08536, Sergiev Posad % 8254, Suzdal % 09231, Uglich % 08532, Vladimir % 0922, Yaroslavl % 0852, Yasnaya Polyana % 087, Zavidovo % 095.

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GETTING BACK TO NATURE

At least one-third of all Russian city dwellers own a small country home, or *dacha*. Often little more than a wooden hut, these retreats offer Russians refuge from city life. Dachas don't usually have electricity or running water, but they always have a fertile spot that's far away – at least psychologically – from the city. On weekends from May to September, many cities empty as people head for the country.

The *dacha*'s most remarkable feature is its garden, which is usually bursting with flowering fruit trees and veggie plants. Families still grow all manner of vegetables and fruit, which are sold at the market or preserved for winter. Throughout winter, city dwellers can enjoy strawberry *kompot* (canned syrupy fruit) or pickled mushrooms, and fondly recall their time in the countryside.

After playing in the dirt, the next stop is undoubtedly the *banya*. While bathhouses exist in the city, the countryside *banya* experience cannot be replicated. Crowding into the tiny, wooden hothouse; receiving a beating with fragrant *veniki* (birch branches) straight from the forest; cooling down with a dip in the pond or – more extreme – a roll in the snow... now *that's* getting back to nature.

Nothing piques hunger like the Russian *banya*, and what better way to enjoy the fruits of your labour than with a hearty meal? *Dacha* cuisine evokes the peasant's kitchen: tasty soups that are the highlight of Russian food: *kasha*, or porridge, which sates any appetite; and coarse, black Russian bread. These dishes often use ingredients straight from the garden, coop or pasture. Simple to prepare, rich in flavour and nourishing to body and soul, *dacha* fare is exemplary of how Russians return to their rural roots for replenishment.

For an authentic *dacha* experience, visit **Uncle Pasha's Dacha** (☎ 910 932 5546, 916 117 1527; www.russian-horse-rides.com; d with meals R750) in the tiny village of Dubrovki (near Tver). The setting on the Volga is magnificent. The accommodation is rustic, as it should be (read: with outside toilet). Meals are included but leave something to be desired; guests are welcome to use the kitchen facilities to make their own. This place is hard to reach, so be sure to contact Uncle Pasha in advance.

distance from Moscow is best broken by stopping in historic Vladimir (opposite), the capital of ancient Rus. This excellent itinerary requires two or three days to do it justice.

The towns of the Upper Volga (p200), Yaroslavl and Kostroma, are obligatory destinations if you take the time to make a more complete circle around the ring. In its entirety, the Golden Ring could fill as much as a week, allowing time for some detours along the way.

COUNTRY ESTATES

The quintessential aristocratic getaway is Prince Nikolai Yusupov's palatial estate at Arkhangelskoe (p205). On a more modest scale, many artists, writers and musicians sought inspiration in the countryside around Moscow: Count Leo Tolstoy, at Yasnaya Polyana (p208); Pyotr Tchaikovsky, in Klin; and Anton Chekhov in Melikhovo (p207); not to mention the countless painters and sculptors that retreated to the artists' colony at Abramsevo (p193). Even Lenin maintained a country estate on the outskirts of Moscow, at Gorki Leninskie (p206). All of these properties are now museums, accessible from Moscow by day trip.

HISTORIC SITES

The medieval towns of the Golden Ring and the country estates of the prerevolutionary elite are your main choices for historic sites around Moscow. If you easily overload on ancient churches and opulent art collections, however, you may prefer an excursion to the Borodino Battlefield (p205), the site of turning-point battles in the War of 1812 as well as WWII. Literary buffs will also appreciate this destination, which features prominently in *War & Peace*.

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

For outdoor activities for all seasons – from swimming to skiing – you can't beat the lakes district northwest of Moscow. Resorts such as Zavidovo (p203) and Istra (p203) are beautifully located and easily reached from Moscow. You can go for a day, but will want to stay longer. Providing a unique variation on the nature theme, the Prioksko-Terrasny Nature Reserve (p207) will delight animal-lovers of all ages. For a truly Russian experience, see the boxed text, above.

VLADIMIR ВЛАДИМИР

☎ 4922 / pop 360,000

High up the slope from the Klyazma River sits the solemnly majestic Assumption Cathedral, built to announce Vladimir's claim as capital of Rus. These days, Vladimir – 178km east of Moscow – feels more like a modern, provincial town than an ancient capital. Nonetheless, the grandeur of medieval Vladimir shines through the commotion of this busy industrial town. The exquisite examples of Russia's most formative architecture, along with some entertaining museums, make Vladimir one of the jewels in the Golden Ring.

In the early 12th century, Prince Vladimir Monomakh founded the fortress city of Vladimir as the eastern outpost of his domain. He entrusted these lands to his youngest son, Yury Dolgoruky; when Yury became Grand Prince, the region emerged as the political centre of the northern Slavs. In 1157 Yury's son, Andrei Bogolyubsky moved the throne from Kyiv to the city-state of Vladimir. Andrei and his brother Vsevolod III (1176–1212) brought builders and artists from as far away as Western Europe to give Vladimir a Kyiv-like splendour.

The city recovered from devastating attacks by nomadic raiders in 1238 and 1293. But its realm disintegrated into smaller principalities, with Moscow (then called Muscovy) increasingly dominant. The head of the Russian Church resided in Vladimir from 1300 to 1326, but then moved to Moscow. Worldly power finally shifted to Moscow around this time too. Even so, the rulers remained nominally Grand Princes of Vladimir until the 15th century.

Vladimir's main street is Bolshaya Moskovskaya ulitsa, although it sometimes goes by its former name, ulitsa III Internatsionala. To make matters more confusing, other segments of the street go by different names, including simply Moskovskaya ulitsa, which is just west of the Golden Gate. Bolshaya Moskovskaya ulitsa is where you'll find the city's main attractions such as the Golden Gate and the Cathedrals of the Assumption and St Dmitry.

TRANSPORT

The daily express train between Moscow's Kursky vokzal (Kursk station; R208, 2½ hours) and Nizhny Novgorod (R290, 2½ hours) stops in Vladimir, as do many slower trains. Privately run buses (R100, three hours) also leave regularly from Kursky vokzal and Kazansky vokzal (Kazan station) to Vladimir. They do not run on a timetable, but leave as they fill up.

There are also scheduled buses to/from Moscow's Shchyolkovsky bus station (Shchyolkovsky avtovozal), beside the Shchyolkovskaya metro station to Kostroma (R150, five hours, three daily), Yaroslavl (R160, 5½ hours, twice daily), and Suzdal (R20, one hour, half-hourly). There are also six buses a day to Nizhny Novgorod (five hours).

VLADIMIR

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1 To Moscow (180km)
2 To Bogolyubovo (11km); Suzdal (35km)

3 Golden Gate Золотые ворота.....5 A1
History Museum
4 Исторический Музей.....6 C1
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St George Church Георгиевская Церковь.....12 B1
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14 Old Town Старый Город.....14 C1

15 Golden Gate Hotel Гостиница У Золотых Ворот.....15 B1
16 Hotel Vladimir Гостиница Владимир.....16 D1

17 Bus Station Автовокзал.....17 D1

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Cathedral of St Dmitry Дмитриевский собор.....2 C1
Chambers Палаты.....3 C1
Crystal, Lacquer Miniatures & Embroidery Exhibition Выставка хрусталя, лаковой миниатюры и вышивки.....4 A1

EATING

SLEEPING

TRANSPORT

The train and bus stations are on Vokzalnaya ulitsa at the bottom of the slope and 500m east of the cathedrals.

Begun in 1158, the Assumption Cathedral is a white-stone version of Kyiv's brick Byzantine churches. Its simple but majestic form is adorned with fine carving, innovative for the time. The cathedral was extended on all sides after a fire in the 1180s, when it gained the four outer domes.

The cathedral used to house the *Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God*, brought from Kyiv by Andrei Bogolyubsky. A national protector bestowing supreme status to its city of residence, the icon was moved to Moscow in 1390 and is now kept in the Tretyakov Gallery.

Inside the working church, a few restored 12th-century murals of peacocks and prophets holding scrolls can be deciphered about halfway up the inner wall of the outer north aisle; this was originally an outside wall. The real treasures are the *Last Judgment* frescoes by Andrei Rublyov and Daniil Chyorny, painted in 1408 in the central nave and inner south aisle, under the choir gallery towards the west end.

The church also contains the original coffin of Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod, the 13th-century military leader who was also Prince of Vladimir. He was buried in the former Nativity Monastery northeast of here, but his remains were moved to St Petersburg in 1724 when Peter the Great allotted him Russian hero status. Adjoining the cathedral on the northern side are an 1810 bell tower and the 1862 St George's Chapel.

A quick stroll to the east of the Assumption Cathedral is the smaller Cathedral of St Dmitry (1193–97), where the art of Vladimir-Suzdal stone carving reached its pinnacle. The church is permanently closed, but the attraction is its exterior walls, covered in an amazing profusion of images.

The top centre of the north, south and west walls all show King David bewitching the birds and beasts with music. The Kyivan prince Vsevolod III, who had this church built as part of his palace, appears at the top left of the north wall, with a baby son on his knee and other sons kneeling on each side. Above the right-hand window of the south wall, Alexander the Great ascends into heaven, a symbol of princely might; on the west wall are the labours of Hercules.

The grand building between the cathedrals is known as the Chambers, containing a children's museum, art gallery and historical exhibit. The former is a welcome diversion for the little ones, who may well be suffering from old-church syndrome on this trip. The art gallery features art since the 18th century, with wonderful depictions of the Golden Ring towns.

Across the small street, the History Museum displays many remains and reproductions of the ornamentation from the Assumption and St Dmitry cathedrals.

Vladimir's Golden Gate – part defensive tower, part triumphal arch – was modelled on the very similar structure in Kyiv. Originally built by Andrei Bogolyubsky to guard the main western entrance to his city, it was later restored under Catherine the Great. Now you can climb the narrow stone staircase to check out the military museum inside. It is a small exhibit, the centrepiece of which is a diorama of old Vladimir being ravaged by nomadic raiders. Across the street to the south you can see a remnant of the old wall that protected the city.

The red-brick building opposite was built in 1913 to house the Old Believers' Trinity Church. Now it is a Crystal, Lacquer Miniatures & Embroidery Exhibition, which features the crafts of Gus-Khrustalny and other nearby towns.

The red-brick water tower atop the old ramparts houses the Old Vladimir Exhibition, a nostalgic collection of old photos, advertisements and maps, including a photo of a very distinguished couple taking a ride in Vladimir's first automobile in 1896. The highlight is the view from the top. The nearby St George Church houses the Vladimir Theatre of Choral Music, where performances are often held on summer weekends.

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IN PICK & MIX

Sights & Information

Assumption Cathedral (☎ 325 201; Sobornaya pl; admission R100; 11 1.30–4.30pm Tue–Sun)

Chambers (☎ 323 320; Bolshaya Moskovskaya 58; admission R150; 11 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) Contains a children's museum, art gallery and exhibits.

Crystal, Lacquer Miniatures & Embroidery Exhibition (☎ 324 872; Moskovskaya ul 2; admission R50; 11 10am–4pm Wed–Mon)

History Museum (☎ 322 284; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 64; admission R50; 11 10am–4pm Tue–Sun)

Internet@Salon (cnr uls Gagarina & Bolshaya Moskovskaya; per hr R30; 11 9am–9pm)

Military Museum (☎ 322 559; Golden Gate; admission R50; 11 10am–4pm Fri–Wed)

Old Vladimir Exhibition (☎ 325 451; Kozlov val; admission R40; 11 10am–4pm Tue–Sun)

Post & Telephone Office (ul Podbelskogo; 11 8am–8pm Mon–Fri)

St George Church (Georgievskaya tserkov; ul Georgievskaya 2A)

Sberbank (Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 27; 11 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat) Has exchange facilities and ATM.

Sleeping & Eating

Golden Gate Hotel (☎ 323 116; www.golden-gate.ru; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 17; s/d with breakfast R1800/2300; 11 restaurant noon–midnight; meals R200–400) There are 14 spacious rooms, with large windows overlooking the activity on the main street – or a central courtyard if you prefer. The attached restaurant is among the town's best, and popular with tour groups.

Hotel Vladimir (☎ 323 042; tour@gtk.elcom.ru; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 74; s/d with bathroom & breakfast from R950/1300, r with shared bathroom per person from R350; 11) Has acceptable rooms at a range of prices, including upgraded singles/doubles for R1150/1600. It's a friendly place with lots of services, including a restaurant and bar.

Old Town (☎ 325 101; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 41; meals R300–400; 11 11am–2am) It's one of two side-by-side restaurants on the main drag. Choose from the cosy bar, the elegant dining room or – if weather is fine – the lovely terrace with views of the Cathedral of St Dmitry.

DETOUR: BOGOLYUBOVO (БОГОЛЮБОВО)

According to legend, when Andrei Bogolyubsky was returning north from Kyiv in the late 1150s, his horses stopped where Bogolyubovo now stands, 11km east of Vladimir. Apparently they wouldn't go another step, so Andrei decided to establish his capital in Vladimir, and not his father's old base of Suzdal.

Whatever the reasoning, between 1158 and 1165, Andrei built a stone-fortified palace at this strategic spot near the meeting of the Nerl and Klyazma Rivers. A tower and arch from Andrei Bogolyubsky's palace survive amid a dilapidated but reopened 18th-century monastery (by the Vladimir–Nizhny Novgorod road in the middle of Bogolyubovo). The dominant buildings today are the monastery's 1841 bell tower beside the road, and its 1866 Assumption Cathedral. Just east of the cathedral is an arch and tower, on the stairs of which – according to a chronicle – the much-disliked Andrei was assassinated by hostile *boyars* (nobles). The arch abuts the 18th-century Church of the Virgin's Nativity.

Nearby, Andrei Bogolyubsky built what is considered to be the most perfect of all old Russian buildings, the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl. To reach this famous little church, go 200m towards Vladimir from the monastery-palace complex and turn on to ulitsa Frunze, which winds downhill and under a railway bridge. Take the path to the left that runs along the side of a small wood. The church, built in 1165, appears across the meadows, about 1.3km from the bridge. This walk can be precarious in spring, when this area is often flooded from the rising river.

The church's beauty lies in its simple but perfect proportions, a brilliantly chosen waterside site (floods aside) and sparing use of delicate carving. If it looks a mite top-heavy, it's because the original helmet dome was replaced by a cushion dome in 1803.

Legend has it that Andrei had the church built in memory of his favourite son, Izyaslav, who was killed in battle against the Bulgars. As with the Cathedral of St Dmitry in Vladimir, King David sits at the top of three façades, the birds and beasts entranced by his music. The interior has more carving, including 20 pairs of lions. If the church is closed, try asking at the house behind.

The buildings in the village have been converted to museums.

To get to Bogolyubovo, take trolley bus 1 east from Vladimir and get off at Khimzavod. Walk along the main road for 100m to the bus stop, where you can catch a *marshrutka* (fixed-rate minibus) to Bogolyubovo (second stop). Drivers from central Vladimir should head straight out east along the main road. From Suzdal, turn left when you hit Vladimir's northern bypass and continue for 5km.

SUZDAL СУЗДАЛЬ

№ 49231 / pop 12,000

The winding Kamenka River, flower-drenched meadows and dome-spotted skyline make this medieval capital the perfect fairytale setting. Suzdal, 35km north of Vladimir, has earned a federally protected status, which has limited development in the area. As a result, its main features are an abundance of ancient architectural gems and a decidedly rural atmosphere. Judging from the spires and cupolas, Suzdal may have as many churches as people.

Although the town's history dates to 1024, Yuri Dolgoruky made Suzdal the capital of the Rostov-Suzdal principality in the first half of the 12th century. Andrei Bogolyubsky

moved the capital to Vladimir in 1157, from whence the principality was known as Vladimir-Suzdal. Set in a fertile wheat-growing area, Suzdal remained a trade centre even after the Mongol-led invasions. Eventually, it united with Nizhny Novgorod until both were annexed by Moscow in 1392.

Under Muscovite rule, Suzdal became a wealthy monastic centre, with incredible development projects funded by Vasily III and Ivan IV (the Terrible) in the 16th century. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, wealthy merchants paid for 30 charming churches, which still adorn the town.

The main street, ulitsa Lenina, runs from north to south through Suzdal. The bus station is 2km east along ulitsa Vasilevskaya.

The 1.4km-long earth rampart of Suzdal's kremlin, founded in the 11th century, today encloses a few streets of houses and a handful of churches, as well as the main cathedral group on Kremlyovskaya ulitsa. The Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral, its blue domes spangled with gold, was founded in the 1220s, but only its richly carved lower section is original white stone, the rest being 16th-century brick. The inside is sumptuous with 13th- and 17th-century frescoes and 13th-century damascene (gold on copper) west and south doors. Unfortunately, the cathedral was under restoration when we visited and has been closed indefinitely.

The Archbishop's Chambers houses the Suzdal History Exhibition. The exhibition includes the original 13th-century door from the cathedral, photos of its interior and a visit to the 18th-century Cross Hall (Krestovaya palata), which was used for receptions. The tent-roofed 1635 bell tower on the east side of the yard contains additional exhibits.

Just west of this group stands the 1766 wooden St Nicholas Church, brought from Glavtovo village near Yuriyev-Polsky. There's another St Nicholas Church, one of Suzdal's own fine small 18th-century structures, just east of the cathedral group.

The open-air Museum of Wooden Architecture & Peasant Life, illustrating old peasant life in this region of Russia, is a short walk across the river south of the kremlin. Besides log houses, windmills, a barn and lots of tools and handicrafts, its highlights are the 1756 Transfiguration Church (Preobrazhenskaya tserkov) and the simpler 1776 Resurrection Church (Voskresenskaya tserkov).

At the opposite end of town, the Saviour Monastery of St Euthymius was founded in the 14th century to protect the town's northern entrance. Suzdal's biggest monastery grew mighty in the 16th and 17th centuries after Vasily III, Ivan the Terrible and the noble Pozharsky family funded impressive new stone buildings and big land and property acquisitions. It was girded with its great brick walls and towers in the 17th century. Inside, the Annunciation Gate-Church houses an interesting exhibit on Dmitry Pozharsky (1578–1642), leader of the Russian army that drove the Polish invaders from Moscow in 1612.

A tall 16th- to 17th-century bell tower stands before the seven-domed Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour. Every 90 minutes from 10.30am to 4.30pm, a short concert of chimes is given on the tower's bells. The cathedral was built in the 1590s in 12th- to 13th-century Vladimir-Suzdal style. Inside, restoration has uncovered some bright 1689 frescoes for the school of Gury Nikitin from Kostroma. On summer weekends, a short but heavenly live a cappella concert takes place once an hour. The tomb of Prince Dmitry Pozharsky is by the cathedral's east wall.

The 1525 Assumption Church facing the bell tower adjoins the old Father Superior's chambers, which houses a display of Russian icons. The monks' quarters across the compound contain a museum of artistic history.

At the north end of the complex is the old monastery prison, set up in 1764 for religious dissidents. It now houses a fascinating exhibit on the monastery's military history and

SUZDAL

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SIGHTS & INFORMATION

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Archbishop's Chambers Архирейские палаты.....3 B4	Intercession Convent Покровский монастырь.....9 B1
Assumption Church Успенская церковь.....4 B1	Kremlin Kremlin Кремль.....10 B4
Cathedral Bell Tower Соборная колокольня.....5 B1	Kremlin Bell Tower Кремлевская колокольня.....11 B4
Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour Спасо-Преображенский собор.....6 B1	Monastery Bell Tower Монастырская колокольня.....12 C2
	Monastery of the Deposition of the Holy Robe Ризположенский монастырь.....13 B2

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Kremlin Refectory Трапезная в Кремле.....34 B4	Mead Tasting Hall Дегустационный зал Суздальского медоваренного завода.....35 C3
Slavyansky Bar Славянский бар.....36 B3	

SLEEPING

Glavny Turistsky Komplex Главный Туристический Комплекс (ГТК).....37 A1	Hotel Rizopolozhenskaya Гостиница Ризоположенская.....38 B2
Hotel Sokol Гостиница Сокол.....39 C4	Kuchkov's Tavern Трактир Кучкова.....40 A2
Likhoninsky Dom Лихонинский Дом.....41 B2	Pokrovskaya Hotel Покровская Гостиница.....42 A2

Monastery Prison Тюрьма.....14 B1

**Monks' Quarters
Братский корпус.....15 B1**

**Museum of Wooden Architecture & Peasant Life
Музей деревянного зодчества и крестьянского быта.....16 B4**

**Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral
Рождественский собор.....17 B3**

**Our Lady of Smolensk Church
Смоленская церковь.....18 B1**

**Post & Telephone Office
Почтамт и переговорный пункт.....19 C2**

**Predtechenskaya Church
Предтеченская церковь.....20 C3**

**Resurrection Church
Воскресенская церковь.....21 C3**

**St Lazarus' Church
Лазаревская церковь.....22 C3**

**St Nicholas Church (Wooden)
Никольская церковь (деревянная).....23 B3**

**St Nicholas Church
Никольская церковь.....24 C4**

**Saviour Monastery of St Euthymius
Спасо-Ефимьев монастырь.....25 B1**

Sberbank Сбербанк.....26 C2

**SS Kosma & Damian Church
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**Town House
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**Trading Arcades
Торговые ряды.....29 C3**

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Directions: To Ivanovo (78km), To Vladimir (35km), To St Basil's Monastery (2km), Bus Station (2km), Kideksha (4.5km).

TRANSPORT

Buses run every 30 minutes to/from Vladimir (R20, one hour). Otherwise, most of the buses to Suzdal originate elsewhere. Buses from Vladimir go to Yaroslavl (R164, five hours, twice daily) and Kostroma (R142, 4½ hours, daily), but it is often easier to go to Ivanovo (R80, two hours, four daily) and change there. One daily bus goes directly to/from Moscow's Shchyolkovskiy bus station (R145, 4½ hours).

Some long-distance buses continue past Suzdal's bus station, located on the east of town, into the centre; otherwise, a *marshrutka* will take you there.

prison life, including displays of some of the better-known prisoners who stayed here. The combined hospital and St Nicholas Church (1669) contains a rich museum of 12th- to 20th-century Russian applied art, much of it from Suzdal itself.

Across ulitsa Lenina from the southeastern corner of the monastery is the Our Lady of Smolensk Church (built 1696–1707), along with Suzdal's only surviving early-18th-century townhouse.

Southwest of the monastery, the Intercession Convent is once again home to a small community of nuns, after being closed during the Soviet period. The Intercession Cathedral (built 1510–18), with its three domes, holds regular services in the centre. Founded in 1364, the convent was originally a place of exile for the unwanted wives of tsars.

Among them was Solomonia Saburova, first wife of Vasily III, who was sent here in the 1520s because of her supposed infertility. The story goes that she finally became pregnant too late to avoid being divorced. A baby boy was born in Suzdal. Fearing he would be seen as a dangerous rival to any sons produced by Vasily's new wife, Solomonia secretly had him adopted, pretended he had died and staged a mock burial. This was probably just as well for the boy since the new bride, Yelena, did indeed produce a son – Ivan the Terrible.

The legend received dramatic corroboration in 1934 when researchers opened a small 16th-century tomb beside Solomonia's, in the crypt underneath the Intercession Cathedral. They found a silk-and-pearl shirt stuffed with rags – and no bones. The crypt is closed to visitors.

The little white Alexandrovsky Convent at the top of the river embankment stands out for its simple, quiet beauty. Reputedly founded in 1240 by Alexander Nevsky for noble women whose menfolk had been killed by nomadic raiders, its present Ascension Church (Voznesenskaya tserkov) and bell tower date from 1695.

Back on ulitsa Lenina, the Monastery of the Deposition of the Holy Robe was founded in 1207 but the existing buildings date from the 16th to 19th centuries. The monastery is now pretty dilapidated. Still, its two pyramidal entrance turrets (1688) on the south gate are exquisite. Suzdal's tallest structure, a 72m bell tower (built 1813–19), rises from the east wall. The central 16th-century Deposition Cathedral (Rizopolozhensky sobor) is reminiscent of the Moscow Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral with its three helmet domes.

Suzdal's Torgovaya ploshchad (Trade Sq) is dominated by the pillared Trading Arcades (built 1806–11) along its western side. Although the four churches in the immediate vicinity are closed, the five-domed 1707 Emperor Constantine Church in the square's northeastern corner is a working church with an ornate interior. Next to it is the smaller 1787 Virgin of All Sorrows Church.

Almost every corner in Suzdal has its own little church with its own charm. Some other gems include the simple Resurrection Church dating from 1719, on Torgovaya ploshchad; the shabby but graceful Predtechenskaya Church, built in 1720 on ulitsa Lenina; and the slender, multicoloured tower of St Lazarus' Church, from 1667, on Staraya ulitsa. The SS Kosma & Damian Church (1725) is placed picturesquely on a bend in the river east of ulitsa Lenina. Suzdal's fifth monastery is the 17th-century St Basil's (Vasilevsky monastery) on the Kideksha road. No doubt you will find your own favourite.

Sights & Information

Intercession Convent (% 20 889; ul Pokrovskaya; admission free; h 9.30am–4.30pm Thu–Mon)

Museum of Wooden Architecture & Peasant Life (ul Pushkarskaya; admission R50; h 9.30am–3.30pm Wed–Mon May–Oct)

Post & Telephone Office (Krasnaya pl; h 8am–8pm) Open 24 hours for phone calls.

Saviour Monastery of St Euthymius (% 20 746; ul Lenina; admission to exhibits R40–50 each or all-inclusive R280; h 10am–6pm Tue–Sun)

Sberbank (ul Lenina; h 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) Foreign-exchange office.

Suzdal History Exhibition (% 21 624; Archbishop's Chambers, Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral; admission R30; h 10am–5pm Wed–Mon)

Vneshtorgbank (Kremlyovskaya ul; h 10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 10am–3.30pm Sat–Sun) Centrally located bank with ATM.

Eating

Emelya (% 21 011; ul Lenina 84; meals R200–300; h 11am–midnight) Enjoy the lovely vista from the outside tables, especially at sunset.

Gostinny Dvor (% 21 778; trading arcades; meals R200–300; h 11am–midnight) A popular spot among locals to drink and socialise.

Kremlin Refectory (% 21 763; kremlin; meals R300–500; h 11am–11pm) An atmospheric location inside the Archbishop's Chambers. This place has been serving tasty, filling Russian favourites for 300 years.

Meat Tasting Hall (% 20 803; reading arcades; tasting menu R120–150; h 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat & Sun) Hidden in the back of the trading arcades, this hall is done up like a church interior – frescoes, arched ceilings and stained-glass windows. The menu features different varieties of *medovukha*, a mildly alcoholic honey ale that was consumed by the princes of old.

ABRAMTSEVO АБРАМЦЕВО

% 254 from Moscow, % 49654 from elsewhere

Artists' colony and country estate, Abramtsevo was a font of artistic inspiration for the renaissance of traditional Russian painting, sculpture and architecture.

In 1870 Savva Mamontov – railway tycoon and patron of the arts – bought this lovely estate 45km north of Moscow. Here, he hosted a whole slew of painters, who sought inspiration in the gardens and forests: the much-loved Ilya Repin (see p31); landscape artist Isaak Levitan; portraitist Valentin Serov; and the quite un-Slavonic painter and ceramicist Mikhail Vrubel. Other artists came to dabble at the woodworking and ceramics workshop, and musicians (including Fyodor Shalyapin, who made his debut here) performed in the private opera.

The Abramtsevo Estate Museum-Preserve (% 32 470; admission R100; h 10am–5pm Wed–Sun) is a delightful retreat from Moscow or addition to a trip to Sergiev Posad (see p194). Apart

Slavyansky Bar (% 20 062; Kremlyovskaya ul 6; meals R100–200; h 10am–8pm) A pleasant and convenient stop for a quick refresher.

Sleeping

Hotel Rizopolozheskaya (% 24 314; ul Lenina; s/d with breakfast R620/1000) Suzdal's cheapest place to stay, housed in the decrepit Monastery of the Deposition.

Hotel Sokol (Hotel Falcon; % 20 088; www.hotel-sokol.ru; Torgovaya pl 2A; s/d with breakfast from R1300/2200) This is an attractive new hotel ideally located opposite the trading arcades. Its 40 rooms are simply decorated and fully equipped with new wooden furniture and modern bathrooms. The elegant, bi-level restaurant is also recommended. Prices decrease significantly between October and April.

Hotel Suzdal (% 21 530; www.suzdaltour.ru; s/d with breakfast from R1580/1800; i s a) One of three hotels in the 'Hotel Tourist Centre' (Gostinichny Turistsky Kompleks), this place is low on charm but high on facilities: the complex includes a fitness centre, a bowling alley, several restaurants, and a cheaper 'motel' (s/d R1120/1340).

Kuchkov's Tavern (% 20 252; fax 21 507; ul Pokrovskaya 35; s/d with breakfast R1650/2000) On a quiet street opposite the Intercession Convent, this guesthouse has a 'New Russian' ambience that doesn't fit in with old-fashioned Suzdal, but it's not a bad option. Its 17 rooms are comfortable but overdecorated; it has a nice *banya* and an excellent restaurant.

Likhoninsky Dom (% 21 901; aksenova-museum@rnt.vladimir.ru; ul Slobodskaya 34; s/d with breakfast R1500/1800) Suzdal's most charming place to stay. The 17th-century merchant's house has five charming rooms and a pretty garden. This place feels like home, thanks to the kindly ladies that run it.

Pokrovskaya Hotel (% 20 908; www.suzdaltour.ru; s/d with breakfast R1820/2400) Offers cosy wooden cabins on the grounds of the Intercession Convent. The old-fashioned wooden furniture, rag rugs and fluffy quilts provide a welcoming atmosphere. A restaurant is also expected to open in the convent refectory.

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from the highlights below, arts and crafts exhibits occupy the other buildings on the grounds, which cost extra to enter.

Several rooms of the main house have been preserved intact, complete with artworks by various resident artists. The main attraction is the dining room, featuring Repin's portraits of the patron and his wife, and Serov's luminous *Girl with Peaches*. A striking majolica bench by Vrubel is in the garden.

The prettiest building in the grounds is the Saviour Church 'Not Made by Hand' (Tserkov Spasa Nerukotvorny). The structure epitomises Mamontov's intentions: it's a carefully researched homage by half a dozen artists to 14th-century Novgorod architecture. The iconostasis is by Repin and Vasily Polenov. The tiled stove in the corner, still working, is exquisite.

The Slavophile painter Viktor Vasnetsov conjured up the fairy tale of Baba Yaga the witch, with his rendition of her Hut on Chicken Legs.

SERGIEV POSAD СЕРГИЕВ ПОСАД

% 254 from Moscow, % 49654 from elsewhere / pop 100,000

According to old Russian wisdom, 'there is no settlement without a just man; there is no town without a saint.' And so the town of Sergiev Posad is a tribute to St Sergius of Radonezh, founder of the local Trinity Monastery and patron saint of all of Russia. The monastery – today among the most important and active in Russia – exudes Orthodoxy. Bearded priests bustle about; babushkas fill bottles of holy water; and crowds of believers light candles to St Sergius, Keeper of Russia. This mystical place is a window into the age-old belief system that has provided Russia with centuries of spiritual sustenance.

Often called by its Soviet name Zagorsk, Sergiev Posad is 60km from the edge of Moscow on the Yaroslavl road. It's an easy day trip from Moscow – a rewarding option for travellers who don't have time to venture further around the Golden Ring.

St Sergius of Radonezh began his calling as a hermit monk in the forest wilderness. In 1340 he founded a monastery at Sergiev Posad, which soon became the spiritual centre of Russian

Orthodoxy. Prince Dmitry Donskoy's victory in battle against the Mongols in 1380 was credited to the blessing of Sergius. Soon after his death at the age of 78, Sergius was named the patron saint of all of Russia. Since the 14th century, pilgrims have been journeying to this place to pay homage to him.

Although the Bolsheviks closed the monastery, it was reopened after WWII as a museum, residence of the patriarch and working monastery. The patriarch and also the Church's administrative centre moved to the Danilovsky Monastery (see p98) in Moscow in 1988, but the Trinity Monastery of St Sergius remains one of the most important spiritual sites in Russia. Its concentrated artistry and its unique role in the interrelated histories of the Russian Church and State make it is well worth a visit.

TRANSPORT

Suburban trains run every half hour from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal (Yaroslavl station; 1½ hours, R50). Most – but not all – trains to Sergiev Posad or Alexandrov stop at Abramtsevo. There are regular buses between Abramtsevo and Sergiev Posad (R20, 20 minutes).

By car, turn west off the M8 Moscow–Yaroslavl highway just north of the 61km post (signs to Khotkovo and Abramtsevo mark the turn-off) and continue over the train tracks.

TRANSPORT

The fastest transport option is the daily express train from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal (Yaroslavl station) to Rostov-Veliky (one hour from Moscow). Suburban trains also run every half-hour (R55, 1½ hours); take any train bound for Sergiev Posad or Alexandrov. To travel onwards to Rostov-Veliky (3½ hours) or Yaroslavl (five hours), you may have to change at Alexandrov.

Bus services to Sergiev Posad from Moscow's VDNKh metro station depart every 30 minutes from 8.30am to 7.30pm (R50, 70 minutes).

Three daily buses start at Sergiev Posad and run to Pereslavl-Zalesky (1½ hours). Nine daily northbound buses stop here in transit to Yaroslavl, Kostroma or Rybinsk; all these will take you to Pereslavl-Zalesky, Rostov-Veliky or Yaroslavl if you can get a ticket.

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Prospekt Krasnoy Armii is the main street, running north-south through the town centre. The train and bus stations are on opposite corners of a wide square to the east of prospekt Krasnoy Armii. The monastery is about 400m north of here.

The Trinity Monastery of St Sergius is an active religious centre with a visible population of monks in residence; visitors should refrain from photographing them. Female visitors should wear headscarves, and men are required to remove hats in the churches.

Built in the 1420s, the squat, dark Trinity Cathedral is the heart of the Trinity Monastery. The tomb of St Sergius stands in the south-eastern corner, where a memorial service for St Sergius goes on all day, every day. The icon-festooned interior, lit by oil lamps, is largely the work of the great medieval painter Andrei Rublyov and his students.

The star-spangled Cathedral of the Assumption was modelled on the cathedral of the same name in the Moscow Kremlin. It was finished in 1585 with money left by Ivan the Terrible in a fit of remorse for killing his son. It is closed to the general public but included as a part of guided tours. Outside the west door is the grave of Boris Godunov, the skilled 'prime minister' whose tsar-like rule led to the Time of Troubles in the early 17th century.

Nearby, the resplendent Chapel-at-the-Well was built over a spring that is said to have appeared during the Polish siege. The five-tier baroque bell tower took 30 years to build in the 18th century, and once had 42 bells, the largest of which weighed 65 tonnes.

The Vestry, behind the Trinity Cathedral, displays the monastery's extraordinarily rich treasury, bulging with 600 years of donations by the rich and powerful – tapestries, jewel-encrusted vestments, solid-gold chalices and more.

The huge block with the 'wallpaper' paint job is the Refectory Church of St Sergius, so called because it was once a dining hall for pilgrims. Now it's the Assumption Cathedral's winter counterpart, with morning services in cold weather. It's closed apart for services, except for guided tours. The green building next door is the metropolitan's residence.

The miniature imitation of the Trinity Church is the 15th-century Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. It's used only on special occasions. It contains, among other things, the grave of the first Bishop of Alaska.

Several other museums around town showcase the monastery's rich artistic traditions. See local artists' works in the two exhibition halls of the Art Museum, while toys from throughout history and around the world are on display at the Toy Museum. The so-called Konny Dvor exhibits the ethnological and archaeological history of Sergiev Posad.

Sights & Information

Art Museum (% 45 356; pr Krasnoy Armii 144; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun)

Konny Dvor (Horse Yard; % 45 356; ul Udarnoy Armii; 10am-5pm Wed-Sun)

Post & Telephone Office (pr Krasnoy Armii 127A) Find it just outside the southeastern wall of the monastery.

Sberbank (pr Krasnoy Armii; 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Exchange facilities available, but no ATM.

Toy Museum (% 44 101; pr Krasnoy Armii 123; 11am-5pm Tue-Sat)

Trinity Monastery of St Sergius (Troitse-Sergieva Lavra; % 45 350; admission free, guided tour R600, photos R150; 10am-6pm)

Vestry (Trinity Monastery of St Sergius; admission R160; 10am-5.30pm Wed-Sun)

PERESLAVL-ZALESSKY ПЕРЕСЛАВЛЬ-ЗАЛЕССКИЙ

% 48535 / pop 45,000

On the shore of Lake Pleshcheyevo, almost halfway between Moscow and Yaroslavl, Pereslavl-Zalesky is a popular dacha destination for Muscovites who enjoy the peaceful village atmosphere. The southern half of the town is characterised by narrow dirt lanes lined with carved wooden *izbay* (cottages) and blossoming gardens.

Pereslavl-Zalesky – 'Pereslavl Beyond the Woods' – was founded in 1152 by Yuri Dolgoruky. The town's claim to fame is as the birthplace of Alexander Nevsky. Its earthen walls and the little Cathedral of the Transfiguration are as old as the town.

Pereslavl is pretty much a one-street town, with the bus station at the southwest end, 2km from the centre. Apart from the few churches in the kremlin area, most of the historic sights are out of the centre.

The walls of Yuri Dolgoruky's kremlin are now a grassy ring around the central town. Inside is the 1152 Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, one of the oldest buildings in Russia. A bust of Alexander Nevsky stands out in front, while three additional churches across the grassy square make for a picturesque corner. These include the tent-roofed Church of Peter the Metropolitan, built in 1585 and renovated in 1957, and the 18th-century twin churches fronting the road.

The Trubezh River, winding 2km from the kremlin to the lake, is fringed by trees and narrow lanes. You can follow the northern riverbank most of the way to the lake on paths and streets. The Forty Saints' Church sits picturesquely on the south side of the river mouth.

Eating & Sleeping

Russian Court hotel (% 75 392; www.zolotoe-koltso.ru/hotel/dvorik; ul Mitkina 14/2; s/d with breakfast from R1500/1900 Sun-Thu, R1700/2100 Fri & Sat) Some rooms at this delightful hotel boast views of the onion domes peeking out above whitewashed walls. The place is quite modern, despite the rustic style. The fanciest room has a Jacuzzi.

Russian Court restaurant (% 45 114; pr Krasnoy Armii 134; meals R500-800; 10am-9pm) Not to be confused with the hotel by the same name, this restaurant is decorated like a Russian dacha. Appropriately enough, it features staff in peasant dress and hearty country cuisine. The place is popular with tour groups in summer.

Trapeza na Makovtse (% 41 101; pr Krasnoy Armii 131; meals R500-800; 10am-9pm) Location, location, location. The highlight of this 'refectory' is alfresco dining in the shadow of the spires and cupolas. It's also pleasant inside, where there's live music nightly.

TRANSPORT

Pereslavl is not on the train line, but buses travel frequently to Moscow's Shchtyolkovskiy bus station (2½ hours). Not all of these stop at Sergiev Posad (one hour, three daily). Other buses travel to Kostroma (four hours, two daily) and Yaroslavl (three hours, two daily) via Rostov-Velikiy (1½ hours).

Bus 1 runs up and down the main street from just south of the bus station; heading out from the centre, you can catch it just north of the river. Taxis wait at Narodnaya ploshchad.

Southwest of the kremlin, the Nikolsky Women's Monastery has undergone massive renovation. Since its founding in 1350, this monastery has been on the brink of destruction – whether from Tatars, Poles or Communists – more than seems possible to survive. In 1994 four nuns from the Yaroslavl Tolga Convent came to restore the place, and today it looks marvellous. Rumour has it that the rebuilding is being bankrolled by a wealthy Muscovite businessman who has benefited from the nuns' blessings.

Founded in 1010, the Nikitsky Monastery received its current name in the 12th century, after the death of the martyr St Nikita. To punish himself for his sins, Nikita had clasped his limbs in chains and spent the end of his days in an underground cell in the monastery. The handcuffs, which now hang in the main cathedral, are said to help cure addictions and other worldly vices. Behind the cathedral, a small chapel is being built around the dank cell where Nikita died. The monastery is about 3km north of the centre on the west side of the main road. Buses 1, 3 and 4 go most of the distance, or you can catch a taxi from Narodnaya ploshchad.

South of the centre, the Goritsky Monastery was founded in the 14th century, though today the oldest structures are the 17th-century gates, gate-church and belfry. The centrepiece is the baroque Assumption Cathedral (Uspensky sobor) with its beautiful carved iconostasis. The other buildings hold a variety of art and history exhibits.

The 1785 Purification Church of Alexander Nevsky is a working church across the main road from the Goritsky. To the west, on a hillock overlooking fields and dachas, is the Danilovsky Monastery, whose tent-roofed Trinity Cathedral (Troitsky sobor) dates to the 1530s. There's another 16th-century walled monastery, the Fyodorovsky Monastery, 2km south on the Moscow road.

Besides being the birthplace of Alexander Nevsky, Pereslavl also claims to be the birthplace of the Russian Navy: Lake Pleshcheyevo is one of the places where Peter the Great developed his obsession with the sea. As a young man, he studied navigation here and built a flotilla of over 100 little ships by the time he was 20.

Four kilometres along the road past the Goritsky Monastery, at the southern end of the lake, is the small Botik Museum. Its highlight is the sailboat *Fortuna*, one of only two of Peter the Great's boats to survive fire and neglect; the other is in the St Petersburg Naval Museum.



Sights & Information

Assumption Cathedral (Goritsky Monastery; admission R40; 10am-6pm May-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Apr)

Botik Museum (96 22 788; Podgornaya ul; admission R40; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun)

Goritsky Monastery (96 38 100; <http://museum.pereslavl.ru>; admission R50; 10am-6pm May-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Apr)

Nikitsky Monastery (admission free; 10am-5pm)

Sberbank (Rostovskaya ul 27; 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Exchange facility in the lobby of Hotel Pereslavl.

Yartelekom Service Centre (96 31 595; Rostovskaya ul 20; Internet per hr R50) Has Internet and telephone facilities.

ROSTOV-VELIKY РОСТОВ-ВЕЛИКИЙ

96 48536 / pop 40,000

For a place called Rostov-Veliky, or 'Rostov the Great', this place gives the impression of a sleepy village. Perhaps for this reason, the magnificent Rostov kremlin catches visitors off guard when its silver domes and whitewashed stone walls appear amid the dusty streets. Rostov is among the prettiest of the Golden Ring towns, idyllically sited on shimmering Lake Nero. It is also one of the oldest, first chronicled in 862.

Rostov's main attraction is its unashamedly photogenic kremlin. Although founded in the 12th century, nearly all the buildings here date from the 1670s and 1680s. With its five magnificent domes, the Assumption Cathedral dominates the kremlin, although it is just outside its north wall. The cathedral was here a century before the kremlin, while the belfry was added in the 1680s. Each of 15 bells in the belfry has its own name; the largest, weighing 32 tonnes, is called Sysoi. The monks play magnificent bell concerts, which can be arranged through the excursions office, in the west gate, for R250.

The west gate (the main entrance) and north gate are straddled by the Gate-Church of St John the Divine and the Gate-Church of the Resurrection, both of which are richly decorated with 17th-century frescoes. Enter these churches from the monastery walls, which you can access from the stairs next to the north gate. Like several other buildings within the complex, these are only open from May to September. Between the gate-churches, the Church of Hodigitria houses an exhibition of Orthodox Church vestments and paraphernalia.

The metropolitan's private chapel, the Church of the Saviour-over-the-Galleries, has the most beautiful interior of all, covered in colourful frescoes. These rooms are filled with exhibits: the White Chamber displays religious antiquities, while the Red Chamber shows off *finift* (enamelware), a Rostov artistic speciality.

Although the ticket office is in the west gate, you can also enter the kremlin through the north gate. Don't leave without stopping into the gift shop behind the Metropolitan's House to shop for *finift* souvenirs and to sample the homebrewed *medovukha*.

Eating & Sleeping

Cafe Botik (96 98 085; Podgornaya ul; meals R200-300; 11am-11pm) This fun, waterfront café (also shaped like a boat) is in a prime location opposite the Botik Museum. Stop for lake views and lunch before or after your excursion.

Hotel Pereslavl (96 31 788; fax 32 687; Rostovskaya ul 27; s/d from R650/1000) Although this hotel is only 20 years old, it is badly in need of the renovation that is ongoing. The cheapest rooms are very drab, but you can upgrade if you are willing to pay the price (R1300/1600).

Tavern on the Lake (96 94 264; Rostovskaya ul 27; meals R150-300; 9am-midnight) Gnow on shashlyk (meat kebab) to your heart's desire at this Georgian eatery. Pork, chicken, beef and sturgeon – all are grilled up and served hot and spicy.

TRANSPORT

Rostov-Veliky is about 220km northeast of Moscow. The fastest train from Moscow is the express service from Yaroslavl's vokzal (Yaroslavl station; R180, three hours). Otherwise, some long-distance trains stop at Rostov-Veliky en route to Yaroslavl. You can also catch a suburban train, which requires changing at Alexandrov.

The most convenient option to get to Yaroslavl (R52, 1½ hours, seven daily) is by bus, either transit or direct. Transit buses also pass through on their way to Moscow (four to five hours, hourly), Pereslavl-Zalessky (two hours, six daily) and Sergiev Posad (four to five hours, three daily). One lone bus goes to Uglich (three hours).

The train and bus stations are together in the drab modern part of Rostov, 1.5km north of the kremlin. Bus 6 runs between the train station and the town centre.

The restored Monastery of St Jacob is the fairy-tale apparition you'll see as you approach Rostov by road or rail. To get there you can take buses 1 or 2 west 1.5km from the kremlin, although it's very pleasant to walk there alongside Lake Nero. Heading east of the kremlin, bus 1 will also bring you to the dilapidated Monastery of St Avraam, with a cathedral dating from 1553.

Named after a pagan sun god, Khors is a private gallery on the lakeshore behind the kremlin. The eclectic collection includes some antique household items, models of wooden churches and some exquisite enamel work by local artist Mikhail Selishchev. The two small rooms are available for rent to 'artists passing through'. The artist who runs the place also hosts workshops on enamel and Rostov artistry.

For a different perspective on this panorama, board the ferry *Zarya* for a float around Lake Nero. The hour-long trip leaves from the pier near the western gate of the kremlin, and cruises past both monasteries.



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Sights & Information

Khors (☎ 62 483; www.khors.org; ul Podozerka 30; admission free; 11 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Kremlin (☎ 61 717; admission grounds R5, exhibits R15-25 each; 11 10am-5pm)

Post & Telephone Office (ul Severnaya 44) About 1km east of the kremlin.

Sberbank (ul Dekabristov, 11 9am-2pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Zarya (☎ 61 717; tickets R250; 11 10am, 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm, 4pm Tue-Sun)

Eating

Refectory Chamber (☎ 62 871; Rostov kremlin; meals R200-400; 11 9am-5pm, til later in summer) The draw to dining at the refectory is the atmospheric location inside the kremlin, near the Metropolitan's House. The grand

dining room is often crowded with tour groups supping on traditional Russian fare.

Slavyansky (☎ 62 228; Sovetskaya pl 8) About 100m east of the kremlin, this semi-swanky place gets recommendations from the locals.

Sleeping

Pleshano's Manor (Usadba Pleshanova; ☎ 76 440; www.hotel.v-rostove.ru; Pokrovskaya ul 34; r with breakfast Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat R1200/1500; i s) This 19th-century manor house – once the residence of a merchant and philanthropist family – is now a welcoming inn with a nice restaurant, cosy library and wood sauna. The charm of the common areas does not extend to the rooms, which are modern and fresh, but bland.

Vault House (☎ 31 244; s/d with shared bathroom R350/600, d with bathroom R1400-1600) It's inside the kremlin, near the east gate. The clean, wood-panelled rooms vary in size and view.

UPPER VOLGA ВЕРХНЯЯ ВОЛГА

☎ 4852 / pop 680,000 (Yaroslavl); ☎ 4942 / pop 280,000 (Kostroma)

Yaroslavl (Ярославль) and Kostroma (Кострома), perched on the banks of the mighty Volga, mark the far curve of the Golden Ring. They are, respectively, 250km and 300km northeast of Moscow – too far for a day trip, even if you have your own wheels. Both cities are rich in history and architecture, offering ample rewards for the traveller who has time to venture further from the capital.

Yaroslavl is the urban counterpart to Suzdal. This is the biggest place between Moscow and Arkhangelsk, and it has a more urban feel than anywhere else in the Golden Ring. Its big-city skyline, however, is dotted not with smoke stacks and skyscrapers, but with onion domes and towering spires. As a result of a trade boom in the 17th century, churches are hidden around every corner. The poet Grigoriev wrote: 'Yaroslavl is a town of unsurpassed beauty; everywhere is the Volga and everywhere is history.' And everywhere, everywhere, are churches.

Founded in the 12th century, the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour was one of Russia's richest and best-fortified monasteries by the 16th century. The oldest surviving structures, dating from 1516, are the Holy Gate near the main entrance by the river, and the austere Cathedral of the Transfiguration.

The exquisite Church of Elijah the Prophet that dominates Sovetskaya ploshchad was built by prominent 17th-century fur dealers. It has some of the Golden Ring's brightest frescoes by the ubiquitous Yuri Nikitin of Kostroma and his school, and detailed exterior tiles. The church is closed during wet spells.

The Volga and Kotorosl embankments make for an enjoyable 1.5km walk. Look for a myriad of churches, as well as the Music & Time museum and the Yaroslavl Art Museum.

Historic Kostroma is located where its namesake river converges with the Volga. The delightful historic centre – known as Susaninskaya ploshchad – dates to the 18th century,

TRANSPORT

There are three or four daily suburban trains between Kostroma and Yaroslavl (three hours), as well as about 20 daily trains from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal to Yaroslavl (R350, five hours). An overnight train to/from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal goes to Kostroma (8½ hours). Buses also ply these routes.

The best way to get between Kostroma and Yaroslavl in summer is by hydrofoil, which runs twice a day in either direction.

DETOUR: UGLICH (УГЛИЧ)

Uglich is a quaint but shabby town on the Volga 90km northwest of Rostov-Veliky. Here the son of Ivan the Terrible, Dmitry (later to be impersonated by the string of False Dmitriys in the Time of Troubles), was murdered in 1591, probably on the orders of Boris Godunov.

Within the waterside kremlin (☎ 48532-53 678; each exhibit R34; 11 9am-1pm & 2-5pm), the 15th-century Prince's Chambers (Knyazhyi palaty) house a historical exhibit that tells this sordid tale. The star-spangled Church of St Dmitry on the Blood (Tserkov Dmitriya-na-krovi) was built in the 1690s on the spot where the body was found. Its interior is decorated with bright frescoes and the bell that was used to mourn Dmitry's death. (In 1581 the bell was used to call an insurrection on the murder of the *tsarevich*. In response, Godunov ordered the 300kg bell to be publicly flogged and its tongue to be ripped out before it was banished for many years to the Siberian town of Tobolsk.) The impressive five-domed Transfiguration Cathedral (Preobrazhensky sobor) and an Art Museum are also in the kremlin.

When you tire of Dmitry, visit the Vodka Museum (☎ 48532-23 558; ul Berggolts 9; admission R60; 11 10am-5pm). The price of admission includes samples! Another fun stop is the Museum of City Life (☎ 48532-24 414; www.uglich.ru; admission R60; 11 timed to ferry schedule), an interactive museum with costumes and musical instruments. Reservations are recommended.

If you get stuck in Uglich, you can stay at the Assumption Hotel (Uspenskaya Gostinitsa; ☎ 48532-51 870; www.uspenskaya.yaroslavl.ru; pl Uspenskaya; s/d 500/700), opposite the kremlin. It's a cheery place with comfortable rooms and a small café.

Uglich is a regular stop for tour boats plying the Volga. Landlubbers can come by bus from Yaroslavl (R96, three hours, six daily). Buses to Rostov-Veliky run sporadically, so you may have to travel via Borisoglebsk. Otherwise, taxis wait outside the tiny bus station.

when the old wooden structures were demolished by fire. Clockwise around the northern side are a 19th-century fire tower (still in use and under Unesco protection); a former military guardhouse, housing a small literature museum; an 18th-century hotel for members of the royal family; the palace of an 1812 war hero, now a courthouse; and the town hall. In the streets between are many merchants' townhouses, including the elaborate neo-Russian Art Museum.

But the pride of Kostroma is the 14th-century Monastery of St Ipaty, which poses majestically on the right bank of the Kostroma River. In 1590 the Godunovs built the monastery's Trinity Cathedral (Troitsky sobor), which now contains more than 80 old frescoes by a school of 17th-century Kostroma painters, headed by Gury Nikitin (plus some 20th-century additions).

The monastery's more recent history is closely tied to the Godunov and Romanov families, fierce rivals in high-level power games before the Romanovs established their dynasty.

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In 1600 Boris Godunov exiled the head of the Romanov family, Fyodor, and his son Mikhail to this monastery. Mikhail Romanov was here in 1613, when the all-Russia Council came to insist that he accept his position as tsar, thus ending the Time of Troubles. In honour of the event, all successive Romanov rulers came here to visit the monastery's red Romanov Chambers (Palaty Romanova), opposite the cathedral.

The monastery is 2.5km west of the town centre. Take bus 14 from the central ploshchad Susaninskaya and get off once you cross the river. Behind the monastery is an attractive outdoor Museum of Wooden Architecture.

Sights & Information

YAROSLAVL

Alfa Bank (% 4852-739 177; ul Svobody 3; h 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4.30pm Fri) Exchange office and ATM facilities.

Church of Elijah the Prophet (Sovetskaya pl; admission R60; h 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Thu-Tue May-Sep)

Internet Club (% 4852-726 850; pr Lenina 24; per hr R32; h 9am-11pm) A dark club in the Dom Kultury.

Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (% 4852-303 869; www.yarmp.yar.ru; Bogoyavlenskaya pl 25; grounds R10, each exhibit R20-30, all-inclusive Mon-Wed R50, Thu-Sun R130; h grounds 8am-8pm daily Oct-May, exhibits 10am-5pm Tue-Sun year-round)

Music & Time (% 4852-328 637; Volzhskaya nab 33A; admission R50; h 10am-7pm)

Post & Telephone office (ul Komsomolskaya 22; per hr R33; h 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Also offers Internet services.

Sberbank (% 4852-729 518; ul Kirova 6; h 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) Changes money and gives credit card advances.

Yaroslavl Art Museum (% 4852-303 504; Volzhskaya nab 23; admission R25, special exhibits R10-30; h 10am-5pm Tue-Sun)

KOSTROMA

Guardhouse & Literary Museum (% 4942-516 027; ul Lenina 1; admission R20; h 9.30am-5pm)

Kostroma Art Museum (% 4942-513 829; pr Mira 5 & 7; admission to each building R40; h 10am-6pm)

Monastery of St Ipaty & Trinity Cathedral (% 4942-312 589; admission R50; h 9am-5pm)

Museum of Wooden Architecture (% 4942-577 872; admission R20, photos R30; h 9am-5pm May-Oct)

Post & Telephone Office (cnr uls Sovetskaya & Podlipaeva; h 9am-9pm)

Sberbank (Sovetskaya ul 9; h 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Conveniently located bank with ATM.

Telecom Centre (% 4942-621 020; cnr uls Sovetskaya & Podlipaeva; per hr R50; h 9am-9pm) Internet access in the same complex as the post office.

Eating

YAROSLAVL

Actor (% 4852-727 543; ul Kirova 5; meals R100-200, beers R60; h 10am-2am) It has a trattoria ambience, without the fresh air. The walls are covered with whimsical frescoes and theatre posters, and the air is filled with sounds of live rock, jazz and blues.

Bristol Restaurant (% 4852-729 408; ul Kirova 10; meals R200-500; h noon-midnight Sun & Mon, noon-2am Fri & Sat) Sunlit café downstairs; a formal dining room upstairs.

Poplavok (% 4852-314 343; Kotorosl River; meals R500-800; h noon-1am) Kostroma's only truly waterside dining (on a boat). Seafood specials are skilfully prepared and artfully presented.

KOSTROMA

Horn & Hoof Cafe (% 4942-315 240; Sovetskaya ul 2; meals R150-200; h 9am-midnight) A coffee shop that also harkens back to eras past. Wrought-iron furniture and B&W photos set the atmosphere.

White Sun (% 4942-579 057; Lesnaya ul 2; meals R400-600) This restaurant serves spicy central-Asian food and has a prime location next to the river station.

Sleeping

YAROSLAVL

Hotel Volga (% 4852-731 111; fax 728 276; ul Kirova 10; s with shared bathroom R600, s/d with bathroom R1500/1800) A throwback to prerevolutionary Russia.

Hotel Yubileynaya (% 4852-309 259; www.yubil.yar.ru; Kotorosl'naya nab 26; s/d with breakfast from R1800/2600; a i) The usual concrete-slab building located in a prime spot overlooking the Kotorosl River. The rooms are completely renovated, simply decorated and comfortably furnished.

Ring Premier Hotel (% 4852-581 058; fax 581 158; ul Svobody 55; s/d with breakfast R4500/5000; a i) A slick new business hotel.

KOSTROMA

Hotel Mush (% 4942-312 400; www.mush.com.ru; Sovetskaya ul 29; r with breakfast R1300-2100) It has

a central location and hospitable atmosphere. The four rooms are spacious and elegantly furnished. Enter through the courtyard.

Ipatievskaya Village (% 4942-577 179; fax 319 444; Beregovaya ul 3A; d R1500-2300) A wooden house opposite the monastery entrance. The quaint rooms feature modern amenities but old-fashioned style. Highlights

include the authentic Russian *banya* and the small beach fronting the Kostroma River.

Rus Tourist Complex (% 4942-546 163; russ@kmtn.ru; Yunosheskaya ul 1; s/d with breakfast from R1000/1500) This is Kostroma's Soviet-standard block hotel overlooking the Volga. It's about 2km southeast of the centre, near the bridge.

ZAVIDOVO ЗАВИДОВО

% 495

At a beautiful spot at the confluence of the Volga and Shosha Rivers, the village of Zavidovo is midway between Klin and Tver on the road to St Petersburg. On the outskirts, the Zavidovo Holiday Complex (% 937 9944; www.zavidovo.ru; d incl breakfast from R5000/5500; i s a) offers all kinds of recreational activities, such as horse riding, water skiing, tennis, boating and fishing. Afterwards, soothe your weary body in the tiled Turkish bath or the lakeside Russian *banya*. In addition to the hotel complex, comfortable cottages (Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat R8100/9800) sleeping four to eight people replicate various architectural styles, including Finnish cabins, Alpine chalets and Russian dachas.

TRANSPORT

Suburban trains from Moscow's Leningradsky vokzal (Leningrad station) to Tver stop in Zavidovo (R75, two hours, hourly).

ISTRA ИСТРА

% 231

A steady stream of pilgrims makes the journey to this village, 50km west of Moscow. Their motives are diverse, as they come to worship at the grandiose New Jerusalem Monastery, or to worship the gods of sun and fun at the nearby holiday resorts.

In the 17th century, Nikon, the patriarch whose reforms drove the Old Believers from the Russian Orthodox Church, decided to show one and all that Russia deserved to be the centre of the Christian world by building a little Holy City right at home, complete with its own Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Thus, the grandiose New Jerusalem Monastery (Novo-Iyerusalimsky monastery; % 49 787; each exhibit adult/child R40/20, guided tour R500; h 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) was founded in 1656 near the picturesque Istra River. The abrasive Nikon lost his job before the church was completed.

Unlike other monasteries around Moscow, this one had no military use. In WWII the retreating Germans blew it to pieces, but it's gradually being reconstructed. After years as a museum, the monastery is now in Orthodox hands and attracts a steady stream of worshippers.

In the centre of the monastery grounds is the Cathedral of the Resurrection (Voskresensky sobor) intended to look like Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Like its prototype, it's really several churches under one roof. The main building is still under restoration, but it's possible to enter the detached Assumption Church (Uspensky tserkov) in the northern part of the cathedral. Here, pilgrims come to kiss the relics of the holy martyr Tatyana, the monastery's patron saint.

Reconstruction is also complete on the unusual underground Church of SS Konstantin & Yelena (Konstantino-Yeleninskaya tserkov), with only its belfry peeping up above the ground. Nikon was buried in the cathedral, beneath the Church of John the Baptist (Tserkov Ioanna Predtechi).

TRANSPORT

Suburban trains run from Moscow's Rizhsky vokzal (Riga station) to Istra (R42, 1½ hours, hourly), from where buses run to the Muzey stop by the monastery. If the weather is fine, a 3km walk from the Istra train station is a pleasant alternative.

DETOUR: PLYOS (ПЛЮС)

Plyos is a tranquil town of wooden houses and hilly streets winding down to the Volga waterfront, halfway between Ivanovo and Kostroma. Though fortified from the 15th century, Plyos' renown stems from its role as a late-19th-century artists' retreat. Isaac Levitan, Russia's most celebrated landscape artist, found inspiration here in the summers of 1888 to 1890. The playwright Chekhov commented that Plyos 'put a smile in Levitan's paintings'. During the three summers he lived here, Levitan completed around 200 works, including 23 paintings.

The oldest part of town is along the river, as evidenced by the ramparts of the old fort, which date from 1410. The hill is topped by the simple 1699 Assumption Cathedral (Uspensky sobor), one of Levitan's favourite painting subjects.

The Levitan House Museum (Dom-Muzey Levitana; % 49339-43 782; ul Lunacharskogo 4; admission R50; h 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) in the eastern part of the town, across the small Shokhonka River, displays works of Levitan and other artists against the background of the Volga.

Plyos is easy to reach in summer, when hydrofoils ply the Volga from Kostroma and Yaroslavl. Otherwise, buses run occasionally from Kostroma (weekends only).

The refectory exhibits weapons, icons and artwork from the 17th century, including personal items belonging to the patriarch, Nikon. In the monastery walls, there is additional exhibit space displaying 20th-century drawings and handicrafts from around the Moscow region. On weekends you can sample freshly brewed tea and homemade pastries in the tearoom.

Just outside the monastery's north wall, the Moscow region's Museum of Wooden Architecture is a collection of picturesque peasant cottages and windmills, set along the river. It is open May to September.

On the shores of the lovely Istra water reserve, sits a collection of quaint wooden cottages known as the Istra Holiday Country Hotel (% 495-739 6198; www.istraholiday.ru; Trusovo; d Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat from R4000/7100; s a). The place offers all the sports and outdoor activities you could hope for, from skiing to swimming to lounging on the beach. The resort is all-inclusive, with two restaurants, several cafés and bars, as well as sports facilities and a spa.

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ARKHANGELSKOE АРХАНГЕЛЬСКОЕ

% 495

In the 1780s, the wealthy Prince Nikolai Yusupov bought this grand palace on the outskirts of Moscow and turned it into a spectacular estate (% 495-363 1375; www.arkhangelskoe.ru; admission grounds R150, colonnade R80; h grounds 10am-6pm daily, exhibits 10am-4pm Wed-Sun).

During several ambassadorships and as Director of the Imperial Museums, Prince Nikolai accumulated a private art collection that outclassed many European museums. The palace consists of a series of elegant halls that display his paintings, furniture, sculptures, glass, tapestries and porcelain.

The multilevel, Italianate gardens are full of 18th-century copies of classical statues. The majestic colonnade on the eastern side was meant to be a Yusupov mausoleum, but the family fled Russia after the revolution. In summer months, this is the exquisite setting for live classical music concerts (% 501 453 8229; tickets R300; h 5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep).

Prince Nikolai also organised a troupe of serf actors that eventually became one of the best known of its kind, and built them a theatre just west of the gardens. Predating everything else is the little white Church of the Archangel Michael (Arkhangelskaya tserkov) built in 1667.

BORODINO БОРОДИНО

% 238

In 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia, lured by the prospect of taking Moscow. For three months the Russians retreated, until on 26 August the two armies met in a bloody battle of attrition at the village of Borodino, 130km west of Moscow. In 15 hours, more than one-third of each army was killed – more than 100,000 soldiers in all. Europe would not know fighting this devastating again until WWI.

The French seemed to be the winners, as the Russians withdrew and abandoned a Moscow set ablaze. But Borodino was in fact the beginning of the end for Napoleon, who was soon in full, disastrous retreat.

The entire battlefield – covering more than 100 sq km – is now the Borodino Field Museum-Preserve, basically vast fields dotted with dozens of memorials to specific divisions and generals (most erected at the centenary of the battle in 1912). Start your tour at the museum (% 51 546; www.borodino.ru; h 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), where you can study a diorama of the battle before setting out to see the site in person.

The front line was roughly along the 4km road from Borodino village to the train station: most of the monuments are close to this road. The hilltop monument around 400m in front of the museum is the grave of Prince Bagration, a heroic Georgian infantry general who was mortally wounded in the battle.

Further south, a concentration of monuments around Semyonovskoe village marks the battle's most frenzied fighting; here Bagration's heroic Second Army, opposing far larger

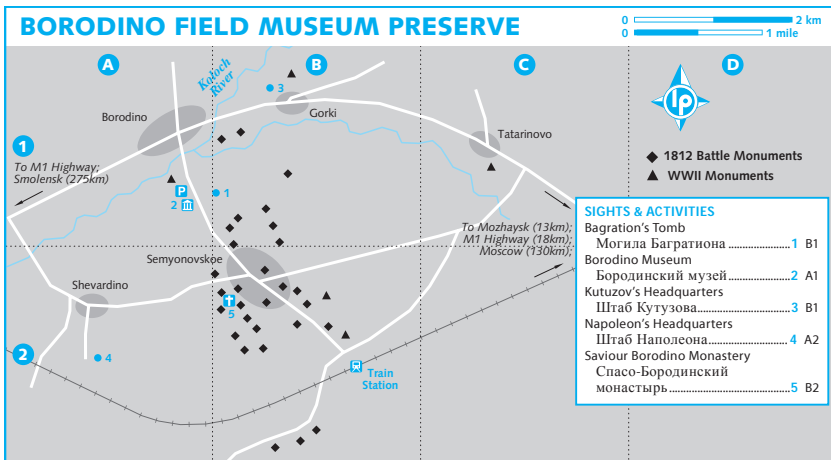
TRANSPORT

The estate is 22km west of central Moscow. Take *marshrutka* 151, 285 or 549 from Moscow's Tushinskaya metro station to Arkhangelskoe (R20, 30 minutes).

TRANSPORT

Suburban trains leave in the morning from Moscow's Belorussky vokzal (Belarus station) to Borodino (R45, two hours). A few trains return to Moscow in the evening, but be prepared to spend some time waiting. If you miss the train, you may be able to catch a bus or a car to nearby Mozhaysk, from where there are frequent trains and buses.

As the area is rural, visiting by car is more convenient and probably more rewarding. If driving from Moscow, stay on the M1 (Minskoe shosse) till the Mozhaysk turn-off, 95km beyond the Moscow outer ring road. It's 5km north to Mozhaysk, then 13km west to Borodino village.



French forces, was virtually obliterated. Apparently, Russian commander Mikhail Kutuzov deliberately sacrificed Bagration's army to save his larger First Army, opposing lighter French forces in the northern part of the battlefield. Kutuzov's headquarters are marked by an obelisk in the village of Gorki. Another obelisk near Shevardino to the southwest, paid for in 1912 with French donations, marks Napoleon's camp.

This battle scene was re-created during WWII, when the Red Army confronted the Nazis on this very site. Memorials to this battle also dot the fields, and WWII trenches surround the monument to Prince Bagration. Near the train station are two WWII mass graves.

The Saviour Borodino Monastery (% 51 057; admission R15; h 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) was built by the widows of the Afghanistan conflict. Among its exhibits is a display devoted to Leo Tolstoy and the events of *War and Peace* that took place at Borodino.

The rolling hills around Borodino and Semyonovskoe are largely undeveloped, due to their historic status. Facilities are extremely limited; be sure to bring a picnic lunch.

GORKI LENINSKIE ЛЕНИНСКИЕ ГОРКИ

% 495

In Lenin's later years, he and his family spent time at the lovely 1830s manor house on this wooded estate, 32km southeast of the Kremlin. Now it is an interesting and well-maintained museum (% 495-548 9309; admission to each exhibit R50, guided tour R350; h 10am-4pm Wed-Mon).

The house was redesigned in neoclassical style by the Art Nouveau architect Fyodor Shekhtel. It is largely furnished with the incredible collection of custom-designed furniture that was commissioned by the wealthy Morozov family, who owned the estate prior to the revolution. It is set amid lovely landscaped grounds – reason enough to visit this spot on a summer afternoon.

Many of the rooms are maintained as when Lenin's family lived here. A special exhibit re-creates his office in the Kremlin, with many of his personal items on display. The highlight, however, is his vintage Rolls Royce – one of only 15 of its type in the world. Other buildings on the grounds house exhibits about 20th-century political history and peasant life in the region.

TRANSPORT

Bus 439 (30 minutes) leaves every 90 minutes for the estate from the Domodedovskaya metro station in Moscow. By car, follow the M4 (Kashirskoe shosse) to 11km beyond the Moscow outer ring road, then turn left to Gorki Leninskie.

MELIKHOVO МЕЛИХОВО

% 272

'My estate's not much,' wrote playwright Anton Chekhov of his home at Melikhovo, south of Moscow, 'but the surroundings are magnificent'. Here, Chekhov lived from 1892 until 1899 and wrote some of his most celebrated plays, including *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*. When in residence Chekhov flew a flag above his home, notifying peasants that they could come for medical assistance.

Today the estate houses the Chekhov museum (% 23 610; admission R10, tour R50; h 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) dedicated to the playwright and his work. Visitors today can examine his personal effects, wander around the village and peek into the 18th-century wooden church.

Theatre buffs should visit in May, when the museum hosts Melikhovo Spring (tickets R100-150), a week-long theatre festival. Theatre groups from all over the world descend on the village to perform their interpretations of the great playwright's work.

PRIOKSKO-TERRASNY NATURE RESERVE ПРИОКСКО-ТЕРРАСНЫЙ ЗАПОВЕДНИК

The Prioksko-Terrasny Nature Reserve (% 27-707 145; <http://online.stack.net>; admission R50, guided tour R150-350; h 9am-4pm) covers 50 sq km bordering the northern flood plain of the Oka River, a tributary of the Volga. The reserve is a meeting point of northern fir groves and marshes with typical southern meadow steppe. It has a variety of fauna, though you're unlikely to see many of the species.

The nature reserve's pride, and the focus for most visitors, is its European bison nursery (*pitomnik zubrov*). Two pairs of bison, one of Europe's largest mammals (some weigh over a tonne), were brought here from Poland in 1948. Now there are about 60 and more than 200 have been sent out to other parts of the country. The best opportunity to see the bison is during feeding time.

You cannot wander freely around the reserve by yourself, so it's useful to make advance arrangements for an informative tour. Otherwise, you might tag on to a prescheduled group tour. There is also a small museum near the office with stuffed specimens of the reserve's fauna, typical of European Russia, including beavers, elk, deer and boar.

TRANSPORT

Suburban trains (R50, 1½ hours) run frequently from Moscow's Kursky vokzal (Kursk station) to the town of Chekhov, 12km west of Melikhovo. Bus 25 makes the 20-minute journey between Chekhov and Melikhovo, with departures just about every hour. By car, Melikhovo is about 7km east of the dual carriageway that parallels the old M2 Moscow-Oryol road, signposted 50km south of Moscow's outer ring road.

TRANSPORT

Public transport is difficult. If you leave by 8am, you can take a suburban train from Moscow's Kursky vokzal (Kursk station) to Serpukhov (two hours), then a rare bus (No 25, 31 or 41) to the reserve. You might also be able to negotiate a ride from Serpukhov.

Drivers from Moscow should follow Simferopolskoe shosse (the extension of Varshavskoe shosse). At 98km, look for the sign to the reserve or to the village of Danki.

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YASNAYA POLYANA ЯСНАЯ ПОЛЯНА

☎ 487

Located 14km south of central Tula and around 240km from Moscow, Yasnaya Polyana (☎ 238 6710, 517 6081; www.yasnayapolyana.ru; admission R100; ⌚ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 9.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) is the estate where the great Russian writer Count Leo Tolstoy was born and buried.

Tolstoy spent much of his life in this house, which is a simple place filled with many of his possessions. Of Yasnaya Polyana, he wrote: 'All [my grandfather] had built here was not only solid and comfortable, but also very elegant. The same is true about the park he laid out near the house.' Tolstoy's nearby grave is unmarked except for the bouquets of flowers left by newlyweds. Cafe Preshpekt (meals R200 to R250) features hearty home-cooked Russian fare. House specialities are prepared according to recipes of Sofia Andreevna, Leo's devoted wife.

TRANSPORT

The easiest way to get to Yasnaya Polyana is the express train from Moscow's Kursky vokzal (Kursk station; R180, three hours, departs 9am, returns 4.36pm). While waiting for the shuttle bus to the museum, you can amuse yourself by perusing the exhibit on the railway during Leo Tolstoy's time. Otherwise, you can take the *elektrichka* to Tula (R130, three hours), then take bus 261 to Yasnaya Polyana (R10, 20 minutes).

If you're driving from Moscow, it's easiest to follow Tula's western bypass all the way to its southern end and then turn back north towards Tula.

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