

Western European Russia

Западно-Европейская Россия

With its birch forests, idyllic rivers and endless rolling steppe, Western European Russia is an enticing vision straight out of Russian folklore. Those seeking the soul of Old Rus would do well to explore this historically rich region, as the charming old villages, photogenic fortress towns and gold-domed monasteries are just part of the lure.

Novgorod, founded over 1000 years ago, occupies a pivotal place here. Its claim as the birthplace of modern Russia can be experienced in its red-brick ramparts, ancient churches and inspiring vistas along the meandering Volkhov River. Other striking kremlin towns include Pskov and Smolensk, both set along scenic rivers and with a colourful past that began well before the Mongols swept through the land. Smolensk is also famed for its well-known native son, Mikhail Glinka, widely regarded as the founder of Russian orchestral music. The symphony hall where he conducted is still a fantastic place to hear live concerts throughout the year.

Some of Russia's greatest writers hail from this region. In Mikhailovskoe, Pushkin's ancestral home, travellers can stroll the serene lake shore that inspired one of Russia's greatest poets. For an equally bucolic experience, step back into the 19th century at Staraya Russa, a sleepy town of blue- and green-painted wooden houses, an ambling river and the house of Dostoevsky, who set *The Brothers Karamazov* there.

This chapter also includes Kaliningrad, one of Russia's more elusive destinations, with six centuries of Prussian history. Geographically isolated from the rest of Russia, this small wedge facing the Baltic makes for some fascinating exploration. It boasts a lively, youthful city and some lovely countryside that includes the Curonian Spit, a long, narrow strip of land backed with sand dunes and lined with wildlife-filled forests. In addition to Kaliningrad, this region comprises the areas between Moscow and St Petersburg up to the borders of Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gaze at the idyllic landscape that inspired one of Russia's greatest poets at **Mikhailovskoe** (p339)
- Delve into centuries of Russian history at the striking kremlin town of **Novgorod** (p327)
- Witness Russia's great orchestral legacy in the **Glinka Concert Hall** (p326) in Smolensk
- Follow the winding river Polist through **Staraya Russa** (p333), the village where Dostoevsky once lived
- Explore old Prussian ruins and the breathtaking coastline in the **Kaliningrad region** (p341)



History

Slavs, migrating from the west, first settled in the region between the 6th and 8th centuries AD. At the same time Varangians (Vikings) from Scandinavia began trading and raiding across the region en route to the Black Sea. In 862, apparently at the invitation of local Slavs, Varangians under Prince Rurik came to rule, establishing order in the land of 'Rus'. Their first permanent settlement, Novgorod, is seen by many as the birthplace of Russia. Rurik's successor Oleg founded the Kyivan Rus state, and the upstart principalities of Vladimir and Muscovy are descended from the same line.

By the 12th century Novgorod was a European political and commercial centre, expanding aggressively and increasingly attracting the attention of the Swedes, who held sway in most of present-day northwest Russia. The friction, at first economic, took on a religious tenor as Swedish crusaders tried to push back the Orthodox 'heathens'. Novgorod's Prince Alexander Nevsky is considered a Russian hero for thrashing both the Swedish and Teutonic crusaders in the 1240s

(the latter fantastically imagined in Eisenstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*), putting an end to Christian intentions in Russia.

Though the Mongol Tatars got only as far as the swamps outside Novgorod, the city's princes sensibly accepted the Tatars as rulers. By 1480 Ivan III had driven them out and annexed Novgorod and all its northern lands for Moscow. South of Moscow, towns such as Oryol and Voronezh were founded to serve as fortifications against the Tatars.

From 1558 to 1583, Ivan IV (the Terrible) fought Poles, Lithuanians and Swedes in an unsuccessful grab for Baltic real estate. Soon afterwards, with Russia in a shambles during the Time of Troubles (p39), Sweden and Poland took bits of western Russian territory, including Smolensk and the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland. Under the early Romanov tsars (1613–82), Russia gradually expanded its territories west and south of Moscow, but experienced revolts from Cossack communities, including those from Voronezh, near the Don River.

Determined to defeat the Swedes and reach the Baltic, Peter the Great made an



alliance with Poland and Denmark, and forced his way to the Gulf of Finland, pausing only to lay the foundations of St Petersburg. With his new navy he won the Great Northern War (1700–21), regaining everything from Sweden, plus the Baltic coastline down to Riga in Latvia. With the Partitions of Poland between 1772 and 1795, Russia's western territories expanded further to include Lithuania, Belarus and much of Poland.

In 1920 Soviet Russia recognised the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. During the early stages of WWII secret deals that had been struck with Nazi Germany allowed the USSR's western European border to expand again. Hitler subsequently invaded the western USSR, including the Baltic States, and the German war machine devastated many cities in this region. Towns in the south such as Oryol, Bryansk and Smolensk saw the heaviest fighting, with cities like Kursk and Voronezh almost completely destroyed. For the most part they have been thoroughly rebuilt, with the sad loss of many of their historic neighbourhoods (not to mention the millions of casualties).

After the German army was driven out of Russia, the Red Army also seized Kaliningrad, a previously German city, and Russianised it over the subsequent 60 years. The tumultuous events of 1990–91 saw the new independence of the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine, and Russia's western boundaries became borders between countries, rather than just between republics of the Soviet Union.

SOUTH & WEST OF MOSCOW

Set on rolling, ever-changing steppe, this region has small, attractive towns and ragged, industrial cities. Among the highlights are the sleepy village Yelets, the revitalised old streets of Smolensk, the literary-minded town Oryol and nearby Spasskoe-Lutovinovo, Turgenev's lushly landscaped estate. The rather Soviet cities of Voronezh and Kursk, while omitted from many itineraries, have some worthwhile sights. Towns in this region are generally poor, with large portions of the populace unemployed and given to loitering on street corners, often in Adidas sweatclothes, for some reason.

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 western European Russia. 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. The new numbers are reflected here.

Keeping a low profile will help you to avoid offence or threats, though for the most part the residents aren't antiforeigner or aggressive, just bored.

The major towns listed here are easily accessible by train. The main routes from Moscow are the eastern route to Yelets and Voronezh; the central route through Oryol, Kursk and Belgorod en route to Kharkiv in Ukraine; and the western route, through Smolensk heading towards Minsk (Belarus).

YELETS ЕЛЕЦ

☎ 47416 / pop 118,000 / 📍 Moscow

Amid lovely countryside, Yelets is a relaxing town that looks like a slice out of mid-19th-century Russia. Streets are lined with colonnaded buildings and wood and brick houses, while the town's showpiece, beautiful Ascension Cathedral, is visible from kilometres around. Tucked into the town's tidy streets are another half-dozen working churches and cathedrals, as well as ruins of several more. There's also a well-stocked regional museum and a museum devoted to Soviet composer Tikhon Khrennikov.

Yelets was founded on the Sosna River in 1146 as a fortification against the Polovtsy, invaders from the east. It was sacked by Tatars three times and rebuilt in the 1500s.

If you do not require much in the way of nightlife or hotel amenities, you might consider staying here and visiting the far larger and gruffer Voronezh on a day trip.

Orientation

Yelets' centre is laid out in a grid, with ul Kommunarov connecting City Park in the east with Ascension Cathedral in the west. Further west (downhill) lies the Sosna River. The train station and long-distance bus stop are about 3km southeast of the centre.

Horse-drawn carts would look perfectly appropriate on ul Mira, perhaps the most picturesque street in town; it's also the main shopping street, filled with pedestrians throughout the day. At the southern end is the main square, pl Lenina, which looks like a movie set for an Ostrovsky drama. Near the square is a bare-bones **souvenir shop** (ul Mira; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat). Excellent Russian-language maps (R20) are available from kiosks or the Hotel Yelets.

Information

Bagira Plyus (ul Mira 96; per hr R50) Attracting a gaggle of eager young schoolchildren, this Internet café keeps irregular hours.

Sberbank (ul Mira) Best place in town to change money (US dollars and euros only).

Yelets Travel Bureau (☎ 20618; ul Mira 121; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri) This office can arrange tours around town and to Znamensky Monastery (in Russian only) for around R300 per person.

Sights

CHURCHES

Beneath the gleaming dome of **Ascension Cathedral** (foot of ul Kommunarov; ☎ services 8–11am & 5–7pm) you'll find a fantastical, multicoloured interior, with gilt-framed iconography stacked high on each wall. It was designed by Konstantin Ton (1794–1881), the architect who designed both St Petersburg's Moscow and Moscow's Leningrad train stations. There's a great view of the cathedral from the bridge crossing the Sosna, just east of town.

Vvedenskaya Church (Vvedensky spusk), a tiny jewel box of a church, stands near a cluster of photogenic late-17th- and early-18th-century wooden houses. At the bottom of the hill, a path under the trees bearing right leads to a floating footbridge over the river to the local **beach**. Built during the early 1900s, **Great Count's Church** (ul Sovetskaya) has a distinctly modernist, even Art Nouveau flair, with an exotically tiled interior of metallic hues. The cross on the top is made of crystal, supposedly donated from the local glassware factory.

OTHER SIGHTS

The town's **City Park** (Gorodskoy Park) is quite relaxing, with a Ferris wheel that spins during summer. There's a small **Children's Park** (Detsky Park) across the street, with

basic playground equipment, the chassis of a MiG fighter jet and a café.

For a fine view of the town's gilded cupolas, ask the firefighters at the antique red-brick fire house to let you climb up their **fire observation tower** (ul Kommunarov).

Yelets' **Regional Museum** (ul Lenina 99; admission R10; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sat) houses artefacts from its colourful past. Particularly interesting are the model of ancient Yelets and the collection of Russian coins from the 4th century BC to the Soviet era. Upstairs is a collection of paintings by local 19th-century artist Meshchikov and information on Yelets' devastating WWII experience.

The crisp **Khrennikov Museum** (☎ 49476; ul Mayakovskogo 16; admission R10; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm Tue–Sat) pays homage to the successful Soviet composer on the site where he grew up and first studied music. Original furniture, photos and artefacts fill the small house; because Khrennikov was favoured by the Soviet state, the documentation is also interesting in terms of the history of Soviet aesthetics. Writer Ivan Bunin spent some of his childhood in Yelets, studying at the town's gymnasium. A small **museum** (☎ 24329; ul Gorkogo 16) chronicles his life and works.

The crumbling tower visible over the town's north end is the early-19th-century **Znamensky Monastery**. For a nice hour-long hike, follow ul Sovetskaya towards the monastery. At the fork in the road, veer right downhill to the water and cross the handmade footbridge. A bit to your left will be the base of a stone stairway leading up to the monastery. All that's left today are remnants of the old wall, the shell of a tower and an unsurpassed view over all Yelets. The large blue cupolas off to the right, as you look out from the monastery, belong to the now-abandoned **Church of the Nativity** (Tserkov Khristorozhdestvenskaya).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Yelets (☎ 22235; ul Kommunarov 14; s/d from R405/680) This nine-storey monstrosity is the only hotel in town. It's well worn, with ageing wallpaper and dated fixtures, but rooms have nice views of the cupolas and the staff are grateful, if somewhat astonished, to see tourists. If by some quirk the hotel is full, you could try walking along the surrounding streets and asking for a room to rent.

YELETS

0 300 m
0 0.2 miles

INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
Bagira Plyus Багира плюс..... 1 C3	Great Count's Church Великокняжеская церковь..... 7 B3	Hotel Yelets Гостиница Елец..... 13 A3	
Sberbank Сбербанк..... 2 C2	Ivan Bunin Museum Музей Бунина..... 8 A2		
Yelets Travel Bureau Елецкое бюро путешествий... 3 C3	Khrennikov Museum Музей композитора Т Н Хренникова..... 9 D2	EATING	
	Regional Museum Краеведческий Музей..... 10 B2	Kafe Leto Кафе Лето..... 14 A2	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Souvenir Shop Сувенирный магазин..... 11 C3	Кафе Русский Чай..... 15 C3	
Ascension Cathedral Вознесенский собор..... 4 D3	Vvedenskaya Church Введенская церковь..... 12 D2	Ресторан Елец..... 16 A3	
Ferris Wheel Колесо обозрения..... 5 B2		Svezhy Kleb Свежий Хлеб..... 17 C3	
Fire Observation Tower Пожарная каланча..... 6 B3		Winnie Pooh Café Винни Пух Кафе..... 18 B3	

Restoran Yelets (☎ 22296; ul Kommunarov 18; meals R100-250) Located in the same building as the hotel (go outside and turn left), this is a red-velvet, disco-light extravaganza. The live music – synchroniser, drum box and schmaltsy vocalist – starts at 8pm. The food, on the other hand, is pretty decent. The *firmennyye blyuda* (house specials) are good bets. Listed on the first page of the menu and changed periodically, they always include some tasty meat dishes and bliny.

Kafe Russkiy Chay (pl Lenina; meals R10-30; ☎ 8am-8pm) Set with long wooden tables and benches, this simple eatery remains a bastion of communal dining, its popularity persisting despite the basic, almost tasteless fare. *Pelmeni* (small dumplings usually filled with meat), bliny, soup and salads are among the options. Order at the counter.

Svezhy Khleb (ul Mira at pl Lenina; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) This no-frills bakery serves dark bread, croissants and jam-filled *bulochki* (buns).

Winnie Pooh Café (Children's Park; snacks R20-35; ☎ 10am-8pm) Popular with the six- to 10-year-old set, this brightly hued eatery makes a

fine pit stop for pizza, ice cream, cake and pots of tea.

Kafe Leto (☎ 11am-11pm Jun-Sep) Just inside the City Park, off ul Kommunarov, this open-air spot serves standard *pelmeni*, shashlyk, salads and soup. It's also a fine place for a drink in the afternoon.

Getting There & Away

On the Moscow–Donetsk railway, Yelets has several services each day to Moscow (R565, eight to 10 hours) and Oryol (R105 to R200, four hours by train and six hours by *elektrichka*, a slower suburban train). The **train station** (☎ 33109) has lockers (R40 per day) and a banner-waving collection of Soviet socialist realist oil paintings in the main hall.

There are several buses a day to/from Voronezh (R85). Buses to/from Tula and Oryol take about six hours. There are two long-distance bus stops in Yelets: one is near the train station on the main highway; the other is 2.5km west of City Park off ul Kommunarov. From here to town, bus 1 runs every 15 minutes and stops just past Hotel Yelets on ul Kommunarov; it's a 10-minute ride. From

the train station to the centre, walk to the west end of the platform and cross the tracks to the bus stop. Buses to local destinations as well as some buses to Voronezh leave from bus stop No 1 (Avtostantsiya-1) next to the train station. For other destinations, head to bus stop No 2 (Avtostantsiya-2). A taxi to Hotel Yelets should cost about R50.

VORONEZH ВОРОНЕЖ

☎ 483 / pop 841,000 / ☎ Moscow

Upon reaching the industrial shores of Voronezh, your first reaction may be to swallow in dread. Black, belching smokestacks line the riverbank, and in addition to the smog, an opaque gritty pessimism hangs over the town. Indeed, Voronezh is a city scraping and clawing its way out of the Soviet era, with few immediate signs of success. Construction is rampant in this large city, giving rise to everything from gleaming new churches to cookie-cutter apartment buildings – but all the scaffolding cannot conceal the poverty that afflicts most citizens here.

The sullen Adidas-clad young men who seem to lurk on every corner of provincial European Russia are particularly numerous in Voronezh. Unfortunately, there have been attacks on foreign visitors in recent years, and travellers should be particularly cautious when visiting this city.

Though Voronezh lacks the charm and accessibility of smaller towns in the region, it does contain some interesting sights, and the growing number of cafés and restaurants suggest Voronezh may be on the up and up. The city and the surrounding district are fondly remembered by many Russians for their rich history, which you can uncover at a handful of small museums, as well at the beautiful St Alexey monastery.

History

Voronezh was first mentioned in 12th-century chronicles, but it was officially founded in 1585 as a fortress against invading Tatars. Some *stanitsi* (Cossack villages) were established in this frontier region, and uprisings against Russian domination were common. Some of the more legendary uprisings were led by Stepan (Stenka) Razin in 1670–71 and Kondraty Bulavin in 1707–08.

During the reign of Peter the Great, the first Russian warship, the *Predestinatia*, was built here in 1696; more than 200 warships

from the Voronezh dockyards followed to form the new Russian fleet.

During WWII the city suffered frontline fighting for 200 days, with over 90% of its buildings destroyed (especially during intense skirmishes in July and August 1942).

Orientation

The main street is pr Revolyutsii; its northern tip is connected to the train station by ul Koltsovsкая, while the southern tip passes through pl Lenina before becoming ul Kirova. The other main street is ul Plekhanovskaya, intersecting at pl Lenina. The eastern bank of Voronezh across the reservoir was founded in 1928. In fact the view across the river is a Soviet dream: factories and smokestacks piled one upon the other and all becloaked in the smog of productivity. Usable Russian-language maps of the city are available from kiosks at the train station and at bookshops in town.

Information

Kamelot Programma For information on goings-on around town, as well as current museum exhibitions, pick up a copy of this Russian-language publication, out each Wednesday, at any newsstand.

Knizhny Magazin Masko (pl Lenina 15) On the southeast corner of pl Lenina, this bookshop sells Russian-language maps of the city.

Main post office (pr Revolyutsii 23; per hr R60) Provides Internet service.

Public library (pl Lenina 2; per hr R40) The library's ground-level computer centre provides Internet access.

Sberbank (ul Plekhanovskaya 12; pr Revolyutsii 52) One of several places to change US dollars, Sberbank has two convenient locations with 24-hour ATMs.

Voronezh Office of Travel & Excursions (☎ 552 570; ul Plekhanovskaya 2) Excursions around town can be booked through this agency. English-language tours are unlikely, but not impossible; call in advance.

Sights

MUSEUMS

The **IN Kramskoy Regional Fine Arts Museum** (Khudozhestvennyy muzey IN Kramskogo; ☎ 553 867; pr Revolyutsii 18; admission R20; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is reached through a passage leading into a courtyard; look for the large green structure. Russian painting and sculpture, Greek and Roman sculpture and an Egyptian sarcophagus form the bulk of the collection, with exhibitions of modern local artists behind the main building.

Well stocked if not well lit, the **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 523 892; ul Plekhanovskaya 29; admission R10; 🕒 10am–6pm Wed–Sun) has permanent exhibits on Peter the Great and the history of the region from the pre-Bronze Age to the Soviet era. The museum is closed on the first Wednesday of each month. Postcards of old Voronezh are on sale at the ticket office.

The large, two-storey **Museum of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945/Arsenal** (Muzey Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945/Arsenal; ☎ 552 421; ul Stepana Razina 43; admission R20; 🕒 11am–6pm Tue–Sun) has the usual photos and weapons found in WWII museums. One of the most interesting exhibits is an *obyavlenie* (a handwritten bulletin) ordering residents to evacuate and leave everything behind except their cows and goats. Outside the museum, about 50m towards the reservoir, are a few tanks and a rocket-launching truck.

IS Nikitin Literary Museum (Oblastnoy Literaturny muzey imeni IS Nikitina; ul Plekhanovskaya 3; admission R20; 🕒 10am–6pm Tue–Sat) includes exhibits on writers Alexey Koltsov, Ivan Bunin and Andrei Platonov in the former home of Ivan Nikitin, a second-rate realist poet born in Voronezh in the early 19th century.

You'll have to delve deep into the backstreets of Voronezh to reach the quirky collection at the **AL Durov House-Museum** (Dom-muzey AL Durova; ☎ 530 387; ul Durova 2; admission R40; 🕒 10am–6pm Tue–Sat), near the reservoir. The Durovs were Russia's most famous circus stars, and the museum is situated on what were once the grounds of their home-base circus. It showcases photos and costumes. Even if it is closed, you can still admire the grounds, including Durov's grave.

WALKING TOUR

For a stroll through Voronezh's past, start at the **Arsenal** (take any minibus from ul Plekhanovskaya to the stop just before Chernyavsky bridge), cross ul Stepana Razina and take the narrow, dusty Sacco and Vanzetti ul north. The streets that cross Sacco and Vanzetti ul are named after Russian artists (notice dilapidated ul Dostoyevskogo). Turn right onto ul Durova and follow the dirt road to the **AL Durov House-Museum**. Next, go towards the reservoir then turn right and continue about 100m to an overgrown stone staircase. This leads to the **St Alexey monastery**, which will emerge on your left. Leaving the monastery, follow the street away from the reservoir, past the 18th-century **Vvedenskaya Church** (Vvedenskaya tserkov; ul Osvobozhdeniya Truda 18) and back to ul Stepana Razina. From the bridge at the foot of Razina, you can see the gold dome of the **Intercession Cathedral**, from where it's a short walk to the café- and store-lined pr Revolyutsii.

CHURCHES & MONASTERY

There are a dozen churches, cathedrals and monasteries in town, with more appearing all the time. The large green-domed church in the centre, visible from many points in town, is the brand-new **Voskresesky Khram** (ul Ordzhonikidze 15). It boasts a colourful fresco-covered interior that now hosts regular choral services.

The recently restored **St Alexey of Akatov women's monastery** (Svyatoy Alekseevo-Akatov zhenskiy monastyr; ul Osvobozhdeniya Truda 1) is worth visiting. The interior of the monastery church is covered entirely with frescoes; if you come at 7.30am or 5pm you'll hear the intensely beautiful service. The monastery, founded in 1674, is near the river on lovely grounds, which include a tiny graveyard, and surrounded by colourful, lopsided cottages.

In a downtrodden part of town, the small 1720 **Nicholas Church** (Nikolskaya tserkov; ul Tarandenko 19-a) has a fresco-covered entryway and an 18th-century iconostasis. In spite of the many icons and ornamentation, it has the feel of a country church and holds frequent Orthodox services.

Sleeping

Voronezh has a limited range of sleeping options. Both hotels listed below are convenient, just off pl Lenina.

Hotel Don (☎ 555 315; ul Plekhanovskaya 8; s/d from R1300/1400) With large, pleasant rooms and well-maintained facilities, the Hotel Don is the city's best. It is often booked with groups or conferences; best to call ahead.

Hotel Brno (☎ 509 249; ul Plekhanovskaya 9; s/d from R750/1000) This giant, unattractive building looming over the city hides smallish but fairly clean rooms. Outside the hotel, you

can often find locals renting private rooms for around R500 a night.

Eating

Restoran Pushkin (☎ 533 305; ul Pushkinskaya 1; meals R200–900) The elegant green-toned dining room makes a fine setting for an indulgent meal. Among the selections on the English-language menu are salmon with caviar, rack of lamb and roast duck. The three-course business lunch (R315) is good value. At night, Pushkin's excellent dishes are marred only by the live music.

Sinyor Pomidor (ul Plekhanovskaya 4; pizzas R140–200) A block south of Hotel Don, this pleasant café serves decent pizzas for two (half pizzas available), with friendly service and Italianesque décor.

Kofeynya Cappuccino (☎ 208 792; ul Plekhanovskaya 2; meals R50–150; 🕒 10am–11pm) This colourfully painted coffee house boasts electronic music and a range of caffeinated beverages, tasty desserts and snacks.

Paladin (☎ 551 862; ul Pushkinskaya 7; mains R100–250) Down the road from Restoran Pushkin, Paladin specialises in shashlyk and other meat dishes – not surprising given the medieval-inspired setting.

Po Shchuchyemu Velenyu (☎ 550 479; pr Revolyutsii 47; meals R90–150) This decent restaurant is easily spotted by its unusual log-cabin façade. Inside, you'll find a good buffet, subdued conversation and a splash of style.

Entertainment

In addition to the **Regional Philharmonia** (Oblastnaya filarmoniya; ☎ 554 877; pl Lenina 11), the **State Theatre of Opera & Ballet** (Gosudarstvenny teatr opery i baleta; ☎ 553 927; pl Lenina 7) hosts regional productions, some youth productions and the occasional touring show. Puppet theatre, one of the few arts truly embraced by the Soviets, can be admired at the **Regional Puppet Theatre** (Oblastnoy teatr kukol; pr Revolyutsii 50). Tickets for all venues can usually be had for R60 to R120.

Getting There & Away

Voronezh is well connected by rail and bus, but there are several daily flights to/from Moscow (Domodedovo).

Several trains run daily to Moscow (R675, 10 hours). Trains to other destinations include Saratov (18 hours), Kislovodsk (25 hours), St Petersburg (24 hours) and Yelets (R400, 4½ hours).

Sample destinations from **Voronezh bus station** (☎ 161 378) are Moscow (R540, eight hours), Saratov (R650, 12 hours), Volgograd (R675, 12 hours), Oryol (R480, seven hours) and Yelets (R90, three hours). You may have to pay a small fee (R10 to R50) for your luggage.

Getting Around

Buses to the airport (40 minutes) depart from the train station or near Hotel Brno.

Outside the **train station** (pl Chernyakhovskogo) you'll encounter a mess of buses, *marshrutky* (dedicated minibuses) and trams. Most have major destination points pasted to the window; to reach the centre, look for pl Lenina. Some trains may stop at **Pridacha**, a few kilometres outside the city. If you arrive there, follow the other arrivals 300m out of the station, where you'll find a parking lot full of *marshrutky* to whisk you into town.

To get to the **main bus station** (Moskovsky pr 17) take tram 12. To reach the centre from the bus station, exit the station and catch a bus heading right; buses 6 and 7 are among those that run along ul Plekhanovskaya.

ORYOL OPĚJ

☎ 4862 / pop 345,000 / 🗺 Moscow

Once the winter snows have melted, Oryol can seem like a magical place. Afternoon boaters float idly along the Oka River as the glow of sunlight illuminates the golden domes of Orthodox churches about town. Couples and friends stroll along the blossom-lined riverbanks, and fill the parks and plazas until late in the evening, when red-and-yellow trams are still rattling through town.

In sharp contrast to nearby industrial cities, Oryol is a visibly wealthy place, with a distinctly European capitalist flavour. Founded in 1566 as a fortress against the Tatars, Oryol (*arr-yol*, meaning eagle) reached its peak during the 19th century, when a surprising number of gentry lived here (19,000 out of a population of 32,000 in 1853). The writer Ivan Turgenev was one of 12 writers who thrived here; their work is remembered at the several museums about town.

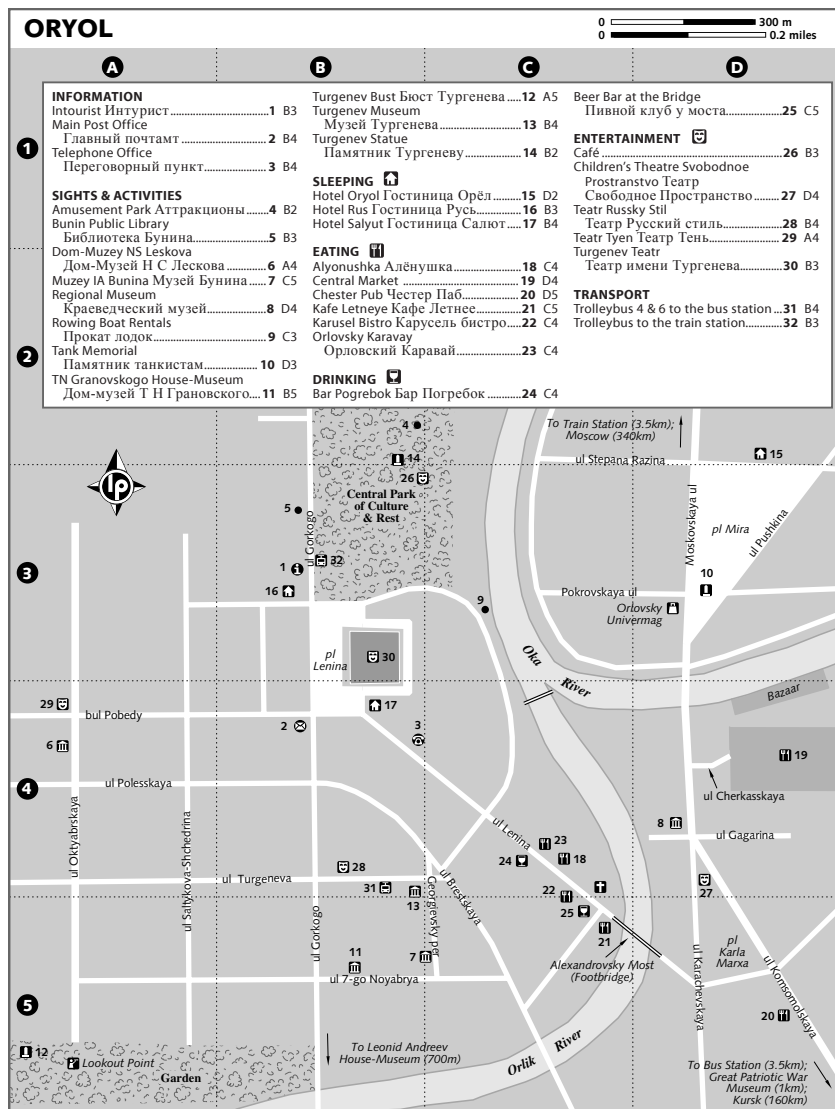
For lovers of 19th-century Russian literature, Oryol is bound to be rewarding. To others, the town may seem to be in something of a time warp, with capitalism and communism rather awkwardly commingled.

Orientation

Though the main streets are freshly cobbled and the cupolas newly gilded, most activity still hovers around the less-polished, inner areas of the city. The train station is 3.5km northeast, and the bus station is 3km south of pl Lenina. The pedestrian ul Lenina runs between pl Karla

Marksa and pl Lenina, connecting the old city centre to Moskovskaya ul, the main commercial strip today. Both areas are of interest to the visitor, and pleasant foot-bridges make crossing back and forth between them easy.

Pick up a map at the train station or from one of the kiosks in town.



Information

You can change money at Hotel Salyut or at a number of banks, especially on the east side of the river.

Intourist (☎ 761 038; intourist@orel.ru; ul Gorkogo 39; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Several English speakers on staff; English-language town tours should be arranged in advance.

Main post office (ul Lenina 43, per hr R42) Two computers with Internet on 1st floor.

Telephone office (ul Lenina 34; ☎ 8am-8pm) ATM inside. There's also an ATM inside the Hotel Salyut.

Sights

LITERARY ATTRACTIONS

A cluster of **literary museums** (☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) cover an awkward block off the unwieldy Georgievskiy per; a central organisational **office** (☎ 765 520) manages all six. Admission to each is R35.

Short-story writer Nikolai Leskov (1831-95), who immortalised an English jumping flea, is honoured at the **Dom-muzey NS Leskova** (☎ 763 304; ul Oktyabrskaya 9), a few blocks from the main cluster. Also set a bit apart, across the river, the birthplace of writer and dramatist Leonid Andreev is a sweet, late-19th-century cottage, now the **Leonid Andreev House-Museum** (☎ 764 824; 2-ya Pushkarnaya ul 41). The **TN Granovskogo House-Museum** (☎ 763 465; ul 7-go Noyabrya 24) presents materials and memorabilia relating to the historian as well as other 19th-century writers and thinkers.

Though materials on the writer, poet and 1933 Nobel laureate Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) are spread thin through provincial Russia, Oryol's **Muzey IA Bunina** (☎ 760 774; per Georgievskiy 1) has a good collection of photos and other documents, plus a 'Paris Room' devoted to his years as an emigrant, including the bed in which he died. At the end of the one-hour excursion (the only way you're going to make sense of all the curious photos and yellowed books), the guide flips on a tape player and the man himself reads one of his last poems, a typed copy of which lies near his typewriter. Still not sated? There's a statue of Bunin (apparently it bears no resemblance to him) in front of the **Bunin Public Library** (ul Gorkogo 43; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), opposite the Park of Culture and Rest. The Greek Revival library itself is in beautiful condition and sees a good deal of scholarly activity. It is a good place for a few warm moments with a book during the chilly months.

Turgenev's estate, Spasskoe-Lutovinovo (p319), is the literary mecca. Not to be outdone, Oryol has its own **Turgenev Museum** (☎ 762 737; ul Turgeneva 11). You will find tributes to Turgenev throughout town, including a big statue of him overlooking the Oka on Turgenevsky spusk, the sloping street off pl Lenina, and a bust in the public garden.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Park of Culture and Rest** (Park Kultury i Otdykha) is a typical small-city park, with an amusement park at the northeastern end. A walk down the steep embankment to the Oka, between the park and junction of the Oka and Orlik Rivers, brings you to the rental stand where you can rent **rowing boats** (9am-9pm) during the warmer months. The banks of the Oka draw huge crowds of bathers and carpet washers on sunny days.

The nonliterary museums in Oryol are decidedly less interesting than the literary ones. The **Regional Museum** (☎ 766 791; ul Gostinaya 2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) on Oryol's fashionable shopping strip holds some good temporary exhibitions. The **Great Patriotic War Museum** (☎ 766 794; cnr uls Komsomolskaya & Normandiya Neman; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has a rather paltry collection of weaponry, recruitment and propaganda posters and a panorama depicting the liberation of Oryol.

Ploshchad Mira (Peace Square) is easily identified by its **WWII tank**. The fighting machine, perched atop a granite base, is a time-honoured spot for newlyweds to pose for photos on the big day. It's also the site for city residents to pay their respects to those who fought and died in battle.

Sleeping

Hotel Rus (☎ 475 550; ul Gorkogo 37; s/d with bathroom from R340/670) Oryol's best option features small but clean, comfortable rooms, helpful staff and a good location on pl Lenina near the park.

Hotel Salyut (☎ 764 207; ul Lenina 36; s/d from R750/900) A rung down on the value ladder, this unattractive hotel, also on pl Lenina, has decent rooms - some in dire need of renovation. At night the loud disco on the 2nd floor pumps techno until late.

Hotel Oryol (☎ 550 525; pl Mira 4; s/d from R600/900) Overlooking pl Mira, this solid, attractive hotel offers bright, airy rooms - though the dim lobby may send you back into the

street. Foreigners are a rarity here; it's best to book ahead.

Eating & Drinking

Dining options are fairly limited in Oryol. Your best bet is to stroll along ul Lenina, which has the old town's best selection of restaurants and bars.

Chester Pub (☎ 543 054; ul Komsomolskaya 36; meals R150-300) An Oryolian dream of English pubdom, this handsome three-storey restaurant serves tasty, eclectic dishes like French quail with baked apples, prunes and walnuts; river trout with almonds; chilli con carne; and other surprising choices. For dessert, try the tiramisu or apple puff pastry. English menu.

Karusel Bistro (☎ 760 396; ul Lenina 19; meals R60-120) Good, inexpensive food and beer on tap draw a young student crowd to this sleek diner. Popular dishes include pizza, hamburgers, lasagne, salads and milkshakes.

Beer Bar at the Bridge (Pivnoy Bar 'U Mosta'; ☎ 435 602; ul Lenina 13; dishes R80-150) This mellow basement grotto has a handful of wooden tables and unobtrusive music. Appetisers include fried cheese, fried calamari and other tasty bites to go with the alcohol. The speciality is locally brewed 'English ale', which tastes surprisingly similar to dark Baltika.

Bar Pogrebok (☎ 762 808; ul Lenina 25; meals around R100) Another underground watering hole, Pogrebok sits a few doors down from Pivnoy Bar, and prepares decent traditional Russian main courses. It's low-key during the week, while young crowds fill the place on weekends.

Alyonushka (☎ 760 160; ul Lenina 20; meals R45-150; ☎ 10am-10pm) A large pit filled with soft rubber balls and a continuous loop of cartoons playing on the giant screen set the stage for this very kid-friendly restaurant. The front room is a little less chaotic and serves stiff drinks as well as traditional dishes like *pelmeni* and *solyanika* (a pickled vegetable and potato soup). The younger crowd opt for pizza and French fries.

Orlovsky Karavay (ul Lenina 26; meals R15-45; ☎ 8am-8pm) This bakery and lunch counter offers quick, cheap bites.

Kafe Letneye (ul Lenina 9; ☎ 10am-10pm) Overlooking the footbridge and riverside park, this snack bar has outdoor seating only.

Inside the Park of Culture and Rest there's a **café** (☎ 6-11pm; admission around R20)

where a young, energetic crowd transforms this small space into a dance haven.

There's a teeming daily central market on the south bank of the Oka River just to the east of Moskovskaya ul, along with a bazaar that sells just about everything you could want, from toothpaste and TVs to a large selection of fresh produce from the Caucasus.

Entertainment

Given the literary bent of Oryol, it's no surprise to find a number of quality theatres paying tribute to the works of local luminaries. All tickets cost under R100.

Turgenev Teatr (☎ 761 639; pl Lenina) Hosts good Russian theatre several times a week. It is a clever modernist building, the façade mimicking the effect of a stage with the curtains drawn.

Teatr Russky Stil (☎ 762 024; ul Turgeneva 18) A fun, small-scale, occasionally experimental theatre. Most of the offerings are comedies, often with local colour.

Children's Theatre Svobodnoe Prostraystvo (☎ 764 846; pl Karla Marksa) This excellent children's theatre is both entertaining and good for practising your Russian.

Teatr Ten (☎ 813 570; ul Oktyabrskaya 5) Hosts both opera and theatre.

Getting There & Away

Oryol is on the Moscow-Kharkiv railway, with numerous daily services to the capital (R550, 4½ hours). Backed by neoclassical colonnades, the **train station** (☎ 762 121) is your first clue to the upmarket character of Oryol. Left luggage costs R40 per day, per bag.

All buses, including Moscow-bound buses (several daily, six hours), leave from the less pleasant **bus station** (☎ 721 111), several kilometres south of town, at the opposite end of the Moskovskaya ul and ul Komsomolskaya axis.

Only *prigorodny* trains run from Yelets (R105, 6½ hours). To Kursk there is a fast train (R340, two hours), the *elektrichka* (R160, 3½ hours) and bus service (R90, 2½ hours). There is no direct rail service to Smolensk, but there is one daily bus (R305, eight hours).

Getting Around

The best way to see the city is on foot. From the train station, trams 1 and 2 and trolley-

bus 3 (all R4) stop at ul Karla Marksa, on the southeastern end of the Alexandrovsky bridge leading to ul Lenina, before continuing on to the bus station. Trolleybuses 4 and 6, which run along ul Turgeneva, also provide convenient access to the bus station.

Taxis to the train or bus station from pl Lenina charge about R80.

SPASSKOE-LUTOVINOVO СПАССКОЕ-ЛУТОВИНОВО

Here is the forest. Shadow and silence. Stately poplars whisper high above your head; the long, hanging birch-branches hardly stir...The small golden voice of the robin rings out in its innocent, prattling joy...

*Ivan Turgenev, from
A Sportsman's Sketches*

Surrounded by lovely countryside, the manor of 19th-century novelist Ivan Turgenev is a splendid place to pay homage to one of Russia's great writers. In addition to the **museum** (☎ 48646-57 214; guided tour R50; grounds only R15; ☎ 10am-6pm), you'll also get a chance to absorb the bucolic setting that inspired the master himself.

Turgenev, born in Oryol in 1818, grew up at his family's estate here, which was originally given to the family by Ivan the Terrible. Though he spent much of his life in Moscow, St Petersburg, Germany and France, Turgenev thought of Spasskoe-Lutovinovo as his home and returned here many times. The beauty of the estate makes this easy to understand. Turgenev was exiled here from St Petersburg in 1852-53 as a result of his work *A Sportsman's Sketches*. He completed his most famous novel, *Fathers and Sons*, at Spasskoe-Lutovinovo.

The main house, restored in the 1970s, contains a good bit of original furniture, some of the writer's personal items and a substantial percentage of his books, which will give you an idea of his astonishing linguistic abilities. There's an icon hanging in Turgenev's study that was given to the family by Ivan the Terrible, and the chessboard is set ready to play (Turgenev was a masterful player). The entrance to the house was formerly the kitchen.

Also on the grounds is the family church, which has been restored and holds regular services. The big oak tree planted as a

sapling by Turgenev and the writer's 'exile house', where he lived in 1852-53, are just away from the main house. Behind the house are paths through the idyllic forest that skirt several lakes - where Turgenev set out on his long hunting expeditions.

Outside the estate, descendants of the peasant serfs who once belonged to the Turgenevs still live and work on tiny farms. There is a flower-bedecked WWII memorial among their homes, a five-minute walk to the right as you exit the estate.

Getting There & Away

The estate is 6km west of the Moscow-Oryol road from a turn-off 65km north of Oryol. To get there, take one of the dozen or so daily *marshrutky* that travel from Oryol to Mtsensk (R50, one hour, 6am to 9pm), then switch at Mtsensk's bus station for an hourly Spasskoe-Lutovinovo bus (R15, 30 minutes). To save time, you can hire a taxi from Mtsensk to the estate for about R120. On the way back, try hopping onto one of the air-conditioned excursion buses.

If you prefer the train, *elektrichka* leave from Oryol at 9am for Bastyevo (R50, 1½ hours), returning at around 4pm. From the northern end of the train station, cross the tracks and walk west 5km (to the left), or catch the bus that runs from Mtsensk via Bastyevo to the estate about once an hour. The bus stop is to your right (east) from the front of the train station.

KURSK КУРСК

☎ 47100 / pop 412,000 / ☎ Moscow

Set along the Tuskar River, Kursk is a working-class city that's seen more than its fair share of destruction over its 1000-year history. Much of the city has been rebuilt since WWII and stands as an unsightly monument to Soviet urban planning, c 1967. Its importance in WWII is well documented in its museums, and the pride of its stolid residents lives on. Aside from this - and a few attractive churches - Kursk doesn't draw many visitors.

Founded (most likely) in the 9th century, Kursk was destroyed by the Tatars in 1240. It then lay in Lithuanian territory for several centuries before being annexed by Moscow and later emerging as a southern frontier fort in the late 16th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries it became a grain-trade

and industrial centre and an important railway junction. But its real fame rests on the nearby Battle of the Kursk Bulge (5 July to 5 August 1943), which was one of the Red Army's most important victories in WWII. German tanks attempting a pincer movement on Kursk – at the time the most forward Soviet-held town on this front – were halted by minefields and then driven back, turning Germany's 1943 counteroffensive into a retreat that saw the Red Army pass the Dnepr River by the end of September.

The Kursk battle sprawled over a wide area, liberating places as far apart as Oryol and Belgorod. A memorial stands beside the Kursk–Belgorod highway, 115km from Kursk and 40km south of Oboyan.

Orientation

Kursk's centre is divided by the north–south running ul Lenina, with Krasnaya pl at the southern end. Ul Dzerzhinskogo heads quite steeply downhill from the western side of Krasnaya pl to the valley of a now invisible river, where you'll find the busy central market.

Information

Dom Knigi (☎ 24234; ul Lenina 11) Detailed city maps available here in hard-cover format for R122.

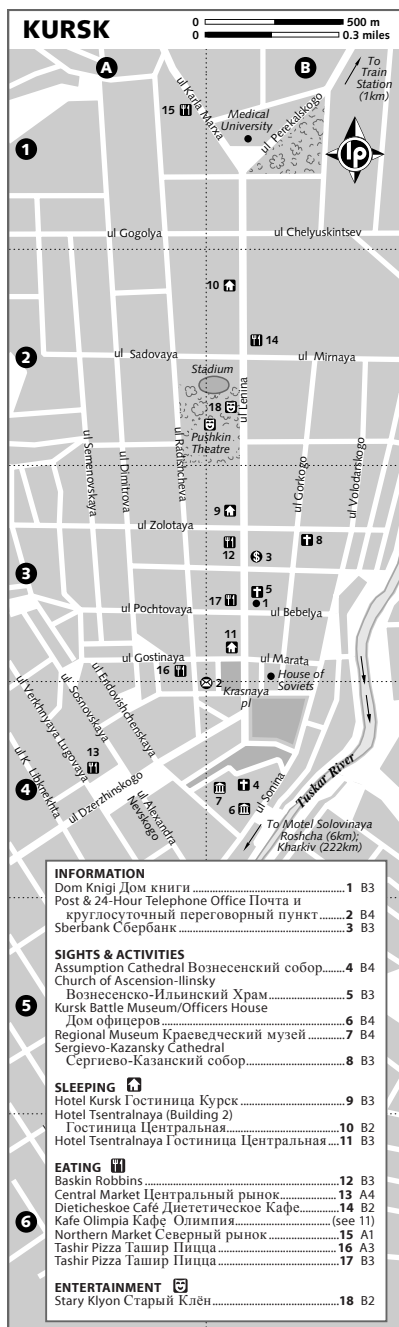
Post office & 24-hour telephone office (☎ 25159, 24873; Krasnaya pl; per min R0.60) Three computers available for Internet access.

Sberbank (ul Lenina 19) Good for changing money. ATMs also lie along ul Lenina north of Krasnaya pl.

Sights

The foot of ul Lenina opens into Krasnaya pl, surrounded by imposing Stalinist buildings – the House of Soviets on the east side, the post office on the west, the Hotel Tsentralnaya on the northwest and the matching city council building on the northeast. At the south end of the square is Kursk's most distinctive building, the domed 1816–28 **Assumption Cathedral**. The Soviets converted the cathedral into a cinema, but it's recently been restored to its former glory. Behind the greenish-blue walls, you'll find a mix of the lavishly ornate (gilded columns, an enormous chandelier) coupled with even larger paintings depicting scenes from Christ's life.

Around ul Sonina from the cathedral is the two-room **Kursk Battle Museum** (☎ 566 290; ul Sonina; admission R50; ☎ 9am–4pm Wed–Sun), up-



stairs in the ornate red-and-white former House of the Nobles, now the **Officers House** (Dom Ofitserov). Admission buys you good views over town, documentation and artefacts from the battle, and an enthusiastic former Red Army soldier who will tell you all about it and then some. Downstairs, you might be able to stir up a game of billiards with a military man. The tables are available to the public from 1pm to 9pm daily.

Nearby is the small **Regional Museum** (☎ 26275; ul Lunacharskovo 6; admission R16; ☎ 10am–5:30pm Sat–Thu), which houses exhibits on the region's natural and archaeological history, period furnishings from the 19th century and – beyond the red curtains – socialist artwork from the Soviet era.

A block east of ul Lenina, on a pleasant, tree-lined street, is the fine baroque **Sergievo-Kazansky Cathedral** (cnr uls Gorkogo & Zolotaya), built in 1752–58 and designed by Elizabeth I's court architect, Rastrelli. The construction was ordered by a wealthy merchant who sought repentance for a murder he committed (more or less in self-defence so the story goes).

The 1786 **Church of Ascension-Ilinsky** (ul Lenina) was used during the Soviet era as a warehouse for the Dom Knigi bookshop, a hulking neoclassical structure placed smack in front of the strawberry-milk-hued, 18th-century church. With the fall of communism in Russia, the books were moved out and the church reopened. When a regional bank was constructed next door in 1997, tinted glass was used to reflect the church, creating the illusion that it is once again part of the main street. Inside, you can see original frescoes by famous icon painter Vasnetsov.

Sleeping

Hotel Tsentralnaya (☎ 569 048; Krasnaya pl; s/d without bathroom R200/300) The best option in town, this grand old place has high ceilings and tiled bathrooms in some rooms. It's a charming place overall, though they sometimes turn foreigners away so call ahead.

Hotel Kursk (☎ 26980; ul Lenina 24; s/d from R700/980) Inside this uninspiring high-rise, you'll find fairly clean rooms and typical Russian service. The whole place needs an update and seems rather stark, but if the Tsentralnaya turns you down, the Kursk is your best bet.

Hotel Tsentralnaya building 2 (☎ 566 521; ul Lenina 72; s/d without bathroom from R200/300, s/d

with bathroom R300/350) Yet another eyesore on Kursk's skyline, the Tsentralnaya 2 is about as original as its name: it has bland but functional rooms and non-nonsense staff.

Motel Solovinyaya Roshcha (☎ 504 000; fax 504 050; ul Engelsa 142a; s/d incl breakfast from R1100/1500) Situated in a park some kilometres from the centre, this motel has simple but excellent facilities, including sparkling renovated bathrooms. The breakfast is hearty. From the centre take a taxi (about R100) or one of a number of buses, including bus 10, 21 or 61, or tram 4 or 5. Ask for notice when nearing the hotel; you will have to walk a few minutes off the road to your left. A shady, pine-filled park lines one side of the hotel, lending an almost rural feel.

Eating

Dieticheskoe Cafe (ul Lenina 61; meals R100–250; ☎ 10am–10pm) This cosy café and restaurant makes a lovely spot for a light meal or a drink in the evenings.

Kafe Olimpiya (☎ 569 227; Krasnaya pl; meals R60–130) Inside the Hotel Tsentralnaya, this somewhat stately dining room serves big plates of Russian fare. Steaks, salads and calamari are among the popular choices. Friendly wait staff.

Tashir Pizza (☎ 521 414; ul Radishcheva 14; slices R35; ☎ 10.30am–10pm) Dramatic curtains adorn this casual pizzeria near the main post office. Slices of pizza are served with mayonnaise (instead of tomato sauce) and are sometimes undercooked. In spite of this, it's not a bad place for a bite. Second location on ul Lenina.

Baskin Robbins (ul Lenina 12; ☎ 10am–11pm) For a cold treat on a muggy day (or a frigid one), stop at this well-known ice-cream chain.

The town's two main markets, the **central market** (Tsentralny; ul Dzerzhinskogo) and the **northern market** (Severny; ul Karla Marksa), sell food, produce and clothes (the sort that will make you say, 'So *that's* where they get it!').

Entertainment

Stary Klyon (☎ 512 635; ul Lenina 58; cover around R50–100; ☎ 6pm until late) This pyramid-shaped building houses a disco and bar plus a few billiard tables. Youthful crowds arrive on weekends for the live music/DJ combo. Nearby are a handful of open-air bars that make for fine people-watching in summer.

Getting There & Away

Kursk is well connected by bus and rail, and there are flights to/from Moscow and St Petersburg.

Like Oryol, Kursk is on the Moscow–Kharkiv railway with trains to Moscow (R420, eight hours) every half-hour, sometimes more. There are also trains to Kharkiv (R225, three hours) and to/from the Caucasus and Crimea daily. To Oryol you can go by train (R170, two hours) or *elektrichka* (R94, three hours). The **station** (ul Internatsionalnaya) is about 3km northeast of Krasnaya pl.

Kursk is also accessible by frequent bus services from Oryol, Belgorod, Moscow and Kharkiv. If you're arriving in Kursk by bus from the south, have the driver let you off at the Motel Solovinaya Roshcha, from where you can get a tram or trolleybus to the centre, saving an hour of doubling back.

Getting Around

Numerous buses, trams, and *marshrutky* ply the route between the train station and Krasnaya pl for R4 to R5. Bus 1 and tram 2 go between the train station, past the corner of uls Karla Marksa and Perekalskogo (in front of the Medical University), and the bus station, northwest of the centre. Taxis charge around R80 from the station to Krasnaya pl.

SMOLENSK СМОЛЕНСК

☎ 4812 / pop 325,000 / 📠 Moscow

Behind the walls of this old city you'll find well-landscaped parks, a magnificent old cathedral, a smattering of museums and a youthful population breathing new life into this historic town. Its elegant music hall is the jewel of the town, and the regular concerts held here as well as its annual music festival keep Smolensk well connected to flourishing musical traditions of centuries past.

Set on the upper Dnepr River, 390km southwest of Moscow, Smolensk was first mentioned in 863 as the capital of the Slavic Krivichi tribes. The town's auspicious setting gave it early control over trade routes between Moscow and the west and between the Baltic and Black Seas – or in other words 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. Smolensk became part of Kyivan Rus, but after being sacked by the Tatars in about

1237 it passed to Lithuania. Moscow captured Smolensk in 1340, Lithuania in 1408, Moscow again in 1514, Poland in 1611 after a 20-month siege, and Russia in 1654.

There was a big battle between the Russians and Napoleon's army outside Smolensk in 1812 and more heavy fighting in 1941 and 1943. In a sign of Soviet favour, much of the devastated centre was quickly rebuilt, often along original plans, resulting in the very complete feeling of the central area today. Long sections of the restored city walls boast fine towers reminiscent of the Moscow Kremlin.

Other areas of interest for the visitor include flax production and music. Smolensk was the regional hub of flax production during the Middle Ages, and you can still find fine locally made flax products. Meanwhile, composer Mikhail Glinka, regarded as the founder of Russian art music, grew up near Smolensk and performed frequently in the Nobles' Hall, facing what is now the Glinka Garden. The statue of Glinka, installed in 1885, is surrounded by a fence with excerpts from his opera *A Life for the Tsar* wrought into the iron. Music aficionados will want to make the trip out to Glinka's family home, now a museum. Inquire at the Intourist office.

Orientation

Central Smolensk, surrounded by lengths of ancient wall, stands on a hill on the south bank of the Dnepr. The formal city centre is pl Lenina with the Glinka Garden (Gorodskoy sad imeni MI Glinki) on its south side and the House of Soviets, Drama Theatre and Hotel Tsentralnaya on the north side. Pedestrian-only areas skirt the perimeters of the park. Venture beyond the walled centre to the south to find the art gallery and a bustling commercial and residential area, with more than a little Soviet residue. The train station and Kolkhoznaya pl, site of the main market, are north of the river. Ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya leads across the river and up the hill from Kolkhoznaya pl to the centre. The Moscow–Minsk highway passes about 13km north of Smolensk.

Information

Central post, telegraph & telephone office (ul Oktyabrskoy Revolyutsii 6; per hr R34; 📠 8am–8pm Mon–Sat) Internet access available.

Intourist office (☎ 381 492; ul Konenkova 3; 📠 9am–6pm Mon–Fri) Near Hotel Tsentralnaya, this tourist office is unusually helpful. Staff can arrange a two- to three-hour English-language city tour (R500 per person) and excursions to Novospasskaya (Glinka's birthplace), about 150km away. You'll need to arrange things a day in advance for the city tour and several days in advance for Novospasskaya, for which you'll also need to rent a car or hire a taxi. English-language city map (R15) available.

Knizhny Mir (ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya 22; 📠 10am–7pm Mon–Sat, 11am–6pm Sun) One of several bookshops on this street (others are at No 12 and No 17), Knizhny Mir sells Russian-language maps (R40).

Sberbank (cnr uls Glinki & Kommunisticheskaya) Money exchange. A 24-hour ATM sits across the street at No 33.

SKA bank (ul Lenina 13a; 📠 9.30am–5.30pm) Another money exchange.

Sights

FORTRESS WALLS

Built between 1596 and 1602, the impressive 6.5km-long, 5.5m-thick, 15m-high walls originally had 38 towers, with 17 still standing. The pleasant **Central Park of Culture and Rest** (Tsentralny Park Kultury i Otdykha) backs onto a longish southwest stretch of the walls. Overlooking the Spartak Stadium just outside the line of the walls on the west side of the park, the Korolevsky Bastion is a high earth rampart built by the Poles who captured Smolensk in 1611. It saw heavy fighting in 1654 and 1812. The park has a 26m-high cast-iron monument to the 1812 defenders.

At the foot of the walls southeast of the Glinka Garden you'll find an eternal flame memorial to the dead of WWII and the graves of some of the Soviet soldiers who died in Smolensk's defence, plus another monument to the heroes of 1812. A **WWII museum** (☎ 383 265; ul Dzerzhinskogo 4a; admission R10; 📠 10am–5pm Tue–Sat) within the fortress walls nearby documents the invasion and widespread devastation; it is incredible to realise just how much of old Smolensk is actually reconstruction. A collection of tanks, artillery and a MiG fighter jet are parked behind the museum.

ASSUMPTION CATHEDRAL

Smolensk's big green-and-white working **Assumption Cathedral** rises at the top of a flight of steps off ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya. A cathedral has stood here since 1101 but this one was built in the late 17th and early 18th centuries; it is one of the earliest exam-

ples of the Russo-Greek revival in architecture following the Europeanisation trends of Peter the Great's reign. Topped by five domes, it has a spectacular gilded interior, which was partially damaged by fire during WWII. According to legend, Napoleon was so impressed that he set a guard to stop his own men from vandalising the cathedral.

Immediately on your left as you enter, an icon of the Virgin is richly encrusted with pearls drawn from the Dnepr around Smolensk. Further on, a cluster of candles marks a supposedly wonder-working icon of the Virgin. This is a 16th-century copy of the original, said to be by St Luke, which had been on this site since 1103 and was stolen in 1923. The cathedral bell tower is to the left of the cathedral. There's a good view of the fortress walls and two towers from the terrace at the eastern end of the cathedral. Outside the cathedral entrance, you can buy a loaf of tasty (and blessed!) fresh bread.

MUSEUMS

The wealth of Smolensk museums is a blessing for the traveller; they are all closed on Monday.

The pink former Church of Trinity Monastery now houses a small **Flax Museum** (☎ 383 611; ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya 11; admission R10; 📠 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sun). Historically, flax production has been one of Smolensk's main industries as the moderate climate sustains soil ideal for growing flax. Exhibits here are spare, but you'll get an idea of how the process works. To get a souvenir of the distinctive local style, visit the unsigned **flax shop** (☎ 383 611; ul Przhevalskogo 6/25; 📠 10am–6pm Mon–Sat) near the Central Park of Culture and Rest.

Smolensk's **History Museum** (☎ 656 871; ul Lenina 8; admission R10; 📠 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) doubles as a fine-arts museum, displaying a hodgepodge of 18th- and 19th-century portraiture and 13th-century iconography and graffiti, along with battle maps and Soviet paraphernalia. Particularly interesting are the fragments from the 1812 war, including a French uniform from one of Napoleon's soldiers.

The town's main **art gallery** (☎ 381 591; ul Tenishevoy 7/1; admission R10), south of the fortress walls, has paintings by famous artists such as Rerikh and Ivanov, a good sampling of socialist realism, 14th- to 18th-century icons and works by Smolensk artists patronised by Princess Maria Tenisheva (see p326).

SMOLENSK

INFORMATION

Central Post, Telegraph & Telephone Office Главный почтамт.....	1 B4	Monument to the Heroes of 1812 Памятник героям 1812 г.....	13 C4	Smolenskaya Krepost Смоленская крепость.....	26 B2
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SKA Bank СКА Банк.....	5 C3				

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The one-room **Museum of Russian Vodka** (☎ 381 318; ul Studencheskaya 4; admission R20; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat) gives visitors a brief overview of the drink's colourful history. Fifteen-minute guided tours (in English or Russian) end at the makeshift bar where you can purchase a glass (or better yet a bottle) of some noteworthy Smolenskiy brands. There's a good restaurant next door.

The **Konenkov Sculpture Museum** (☎ 382 029; ul Mayakovskogo 7; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) was closed for renovation at the time of research. When it reopens in 2006, you can expect playful woodworks by Sergei Konenkov, as well as works in steel, bronze and aluminium from some of the other noted artists who hail from Smolensk.

Festivals & Events

The **Glinka Festival**, which runs from 1 to 10 June, showcases Russian music and attracts a wide range of classical talent. Symphony orchestras, choral groups and string quartets perform nightly in various venues with free concerts held beside Glinka Park. Stop by the Intourist office for details.

Sleeping

Hotel Tsentralnaya (☎ 383 604; nr pl Lenina & ul Konenkova; s/d without bathroom from R400/600, s/d with bathroom from R650/800) Set on the edge of the Glinka Garden, this centrally located hotel has clean, bright rooms – though modest in size. Ask for a 'renovated' room to score fresh paint and fixtures.

Hotel Smolensk (☎ 326 866; ul Glinka 11/30; s/d without bathroom from R265/500, s/d with bathroom from R775/1570) Near pl Smirnova, this ageing Soviet hotel has a mix of rooms, the best of which are nicely renovated with OK furnishings. Overall it's a clean, well-run place.

Hotel Rossiya (☎ 655 610; ul Dzerzhinskogo 23/2; s/d from R910/1460) A relic from the Brezhnev era, this hulking hotel has unintended style in its functional but overpriced rooms. There's a bar-restaurant on the 2nd floor and a cinema next door.

Eating

Smolenskaya Krepost (☎ 327 690; ul Studencheskaya 4; meals R120-200) Set in the old castle walls, this charming restaurant has plenty of character – from the stained-glass windows to the tiny fireplace and exposed brick walls – with lovely views of the Dnepr. The menu

features well-prepared traditional Russian dishes.

Russky Dvor (☎ 683 499; Glinka Garden; meals R80-250; ☎ 9am-11pm) This colourful gem boasts a fine location in the middle of Glinka Garden. The exquisitely wrought woodwork covering its several dining rooms make a fine setting for its classic Russian cuisine.

Zarya (☎ 380 239; ul Konenkova 2/12; meals R110-180) Facing the Hotel Tsentralnaya, Zarya is an old favourite for its elegant dining room and decent Russian dishes. Shashlyk, steak, salads, *pelmeni*, open caviar sandwiches and soups round out the menu.

Farfalle (ul Oktyabrskoy Revolyutsii 7; meals R75-130) A few blocks south of the Glinka Garden, this Italian restaurant strives to play the part, with a painting of Venice along one wall and the occasional aria playing overhead. Though far from authentic (no pasta on the menu!), the decent pizzas and salads provide a nice respite from eggs, mushrooms and bliny. Carlsberg on tap.

Domino (ul Dzerzhinskogo 16; meals R30-90; ☎ 24hr) Though the log-cabin interior borders on kitsch, the food at this popular restaurant is actually quite good. In addition to Russian faves, Domino serves pizzas and salads, and the small front patio that opens in summer is good for a drink. English menu available. A smaller branch on ul Lenina, open 10am to 11pm, serves mostly bliny and pizza.

Kafe Absinthe (☎ 385 100; Tukhachevskogo 1; meals R80-120) Below street level, this multiroom restaurant serves Russian fare in a medieval-inspired setting. Perch, beef stroganoff, caviar and, yes, absinthe are among the offerings.

Vanil (☎ 382 224; Oktyabrskoy Revolyutsii; ☎ 9am-11pm) The deep-red walls and wood furnishings of this charming café make a fine setting for conversation, cappuccino and, most importantly, Vanil's desserts. The apple strudel is served warm with vanilla ice cream and drizzled with pine nuts.

Stary Gorod (☎ 386 675; ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya 21; meals R25-80) If the Brady Bunch were Russian, this is what their basement would look like. Lights fancifully strung along the walls of the various dining rooms don't improve the 1960s den interior, but the cheeseburgers, omelettes and *butterbrod* (open sandwiches) are passable. Enter through the courtyard.

Gastronom Pushkinsky (ul Lenina 7; ☎ 24hr) Near the Glinka Garden, this grocery store stocks fresh bread, cheese, beer, wine and

all the other items needed to put together a decent picnic.

Smolensk's main market is the **Zadneprovsky** (Kolkhoznaya pl), north of the river. Pick up fresh veggies or colourful undergarments here.

Entertainment

Glinka Concert Hall (☎ 32984; ul Glinki 3; box office ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 1-7pm Sat & Sun) Attending a concert is the best way to get a look at the reconstructed hall where Glinka once entertained Russian nobility and launched the history of secular art music in Russia. The local orchestra uses balalaikas in lieu of violins and is quite good. Tickets run from R50 to R800, depending on who's in town; some shows are free.

Drinking in Smolensk is easier still than eating; there is at least one bar per block in the centre, though the ambience isn't much to speak of.

Mig 24 (ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya 20) A young crowd of beer drinkers and chain smokers congregate nightly at this pleasant café's tables; it is one of the few bars in town with a good view of the street scene.

Nautilus (ul Bolshaya Sovetskaya 18) Next door, a similar crowd gathers at this nautically inspired bar with a blue-tiled floor, fish tanks along the walls and a gloomy, cavernous feel to the place.

Beer pub (Pivnoi bar; ul Glinka 11) Around the corner from Mig 24, this watering hole is as no-nonsense as its name, serving only beer at two tables and two stools in the former gatehouse to the building beyond.

Kafe 12 Stools (Dvenadsat stulyev; ul Dzerzhinskogo 2) Near pl Smirnova, this is another tiny spot for a drink or a light bite, with a friendly bartender and Baltika on tap.

Getting There & Away

Smolensk is on the Moscow-Minsk-Warsaw railway with several daily trains to/from Moscow (R500, six hours), Minsk (R400, four hours) and Brest (R1970, eight hours); as well as regular trains to Warsaw (R2136, nine hours), Prague (R3130, 24 hours) and Berlin (R3740, 41 hours). International rail tickets are sold from window 12 at the **train station** (☎ 395 268; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri).

Smolensk's **bus station** (☎ 218 574; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Sat), just south of the train

station, serves most of the region's smaller towns and offers frequent daily services to Moscow. International bus tickets are available from window No 7. Buses to Moscow also leave from the train station across the footbridge.

Getting Around

From the train station, you can take the bus or tram (R4) to the centre of town. Many buses and trams stop in front of the station; choose one that stops by the green structure to the right beyond the parking lot. Some buses stop at the bus station, across the footbridge from the train station. Taxis to town cost around R50.

AROUND SMOLENSK

Flyonovo Флѣново

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, top Russian art and music names such as Stravinsky, Chaliapin, Vrubel and Serov visited the Flyonovo estate of singer Princess Maria Tennisheva, near Talashkino, 15km southeast of Smolensk on the Roslavl road. The visitors joined in applied-art workshops, which the princess organised for her peasants, and helped in building projects.

The most striking result is the dramatic, almost psychedelic murals and mosaics on the brick Holy Spirit Church – particularly the one of Christ over the entrance. Much of the painting is by well-known landscape painter Rerikh. One house called Teremok, decorated with ornate peasant-style carving, is now a **folk-art museum** (☎ 72106, 371 505; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed last Thu of month). Take bus 104 or 130 from Smolensk's bus station to Talashkino. You can also catch a *marshrutka* to Talashkino from pl Smirnova.

Katyn Forest Катынский Лес

In 1990 the Soviet authorities finally admitted that the NKVD (predecessor of the KGB) had shot more than 6000 Polish officers in the back of the head in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk in 1940. The bodies of the officers, who had been imprisoned by the Soviet occupying troops in Poland in 1939, were left in four mass graves.

Until 1990, Soviet authorities had blamed it on the Nazis. Victims were trucked from Gnezdovo, a country station, to Kozyi Gory, site of the graves. The graves have not been disturbed and are now marked by memo-

rials. About 11,000 other Polish officers almost certainly suffered similar fates elsewhere in the USSR.

Less well known is the fact that, according to a 1989 *Moscow News* report, the Katyn Forest was also the site of massacres of 135,000 Soviet prisoners of war by the Nazis (out of an estimated one million Soviet POWs shot by the Germans in WWII) and of thousands of Soviet 'enemies of the state' exterminated by the NKVD in the 1930s.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting there on your own is simple; take bus 101 (direction Smolensk Smetanino) from the Smolensk bus station to Kozyi Gory. It's easy to miss, so look for the sign saying 'Memorial Polskim ofitseram pogibshim v Katyni' about 1km past the highway flyover. If you get to Katyn, you've gone too far. The memorial is marked in two places: the first designated by a simple wooden cross and a marble headstone dedicated to the Russian dead, while the more impressive Polish memorial lies further up the path.

Przhevalsky National Park

Национальный парк имени
Пржевальского

Lying 60km north of Smolensk, the birthplace of adventurer Nikolai Przhevalsky is a beautiful national park, a favourite spot for locals to spend a long weekend camping by one of the many lakes. The road to the park is asphalt and after that there are dirt roads and footpaths. A park ranger might be at the post at the entrance to the park, where you may have to pay a small fee. If no one is there, don't be surprised if one of the rangers stops by your campfire to collect the fee.

SOUTH OF ST PETERSBURG

NOVGOROD НОВГОРОД

☎ 8162 / pop 240,000 / ☎ Moscow

One of Russia's gems, Novgorod is a beautiful town of solid old churches, peaceful tree-lined streets and a magnificent kremlin full of historic treasures. These attributes, coupled with the town's friendly, laid-back residents and its access to lovely countryside, make Novgorod a highly rewarding destination.

The name means 'new town', but Novgorod was here by the 9th century and for 600 years was Russia's most pioneering artistic and political centre. Methodically trashed by the Nazis, it's a sign of the city's historical importance that its old kremlin was one of the Soviet government's first reconstruction projects.

In a sense, Russian history began here. This was the first permanent settlement of the Varangian Norsemen who established the embryonic Russian state. By the 12th century the city, called 'Lord Novgorod the Great', was Russia's biggest: an independent quasidemocracy whose princes were hired and fired by an assembly of citizens, and whose strong, spare style of church architecture, icon painting and down-to-earth *byliny* (epic songs) would become distinct idioms.

Spared from the Mongol Tatars, who got bogged down in the surrounding swamps, Novgorod suffered most at the hands of other Russians. Ivan III of Moscow attacked and annexed it in 1477, and Ivan the Terrible, whose storm troopers razed the city and slaughtered 60,000 people in a savage pogrom, broke its back. The founding of St Petersburg finished it off as a trading centre.

Orientation

Novgorod is only three hours by road from St Petersburg and is just off the M10 highway connecting Moscow and St Petersburg. The town has two main centres: the kremlin on the west bank of the Volkhov River; and the old market district, Yaroslav's Court, on the east bank. The kremlin side fans outward like a pheasant's tail, while the east side is gridlike.

Though the Soviet street names were officially scrapped long ago, some locals still use them, so we've left the more prominent ones in parentheses. City maps in Russian and English are available at the tourist office behind the Novgorod Fine Arts Museum, or at bookshops, hotels and museums.

Information

Novgorod is ready and waiting for visitors. You will find English-language menus, hotels that welcome foreigners and plenty of ATMs. You can change money at hotels.

Main telegraph & telephone office (cnr ul Lyudogoshchaya/Sovetskaya & ul Gazon/Gorkogo; ☎ 24hr) Conveniently located.

NOVGOROD

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WESTERN EUROPEAN RUSSIA

Post offices (ul Bolshaya Dvortsovaia 2; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) There are many around town; this branch, just east of the bridge, has a small Internet salon (per hr R20; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat).

Prometheus (ul Bolshaya St Peterburgskaya 13; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) This bookshop sells Russian-language maps.

Sberbank (ul Bolshaya St Peterburgskaya 13; ul Bolshaya Moskovskaya 20) With several branches, including north-west of the kremlin and across from Yaroslav's Court.

Tourist office (☎ 773 074; www.tourism.velikiy-novgorod.ru in Russian; Sennaya pl 5; ☎ 10am-6pm) Travellers who have been to other Russian towns will not believe their good luck in encountering this central tourist office, behind the Fine Arts Museum. Staff hand out Russian- and English-language maps (extensive maps available for R50) and other literature, but the real treat here is the friendly, thorough, English-language advice. Staff can arrange a variety of excellent English-language tours around town. Sample tours and prices per person are kremlin (€11), Chamber of Facets (€8) and Yurev Monastery and Vitoslavitsy (€13). Another worthwhile website is www.novgorod.ru/english.

Sights & Activities

KREMLIN

Overlooking the smooth Volkhov River, the **kremlin** (☎ 73608, information ☎ 77187; ☎ 6am-midnight) is one of Russia's oldest. Formerly known as the Detinets, the fortification was first built in the 9th century, though it was later rebuilt with brick in the 14th century (which still stands today). It houses the city's most famous sites, and is surrounded by a pleasant wooded park. It's worth see-

ing with a guide. English-language tours can be arranged, usually a day or two in advance, through the tourist office.

Cathedral of St Sophia

Finished in 1052, the handsome, Byzantine **Cathedral of St Sophia** (☎ 8am-8pm) is the town's centrepiece and one of the oldest buildings in Russia. The simple, fortresslike exterior was designed to withstand attack or fire (flames had taken out an earlier, wooden church on the site); ornamentation was reserved for the interior. The onion domes were probably added during the 14th century – even so, they are perhaps the first example of this most Russian architectural detail. The west doors, dating from the 12th century, have tiny cast-bronze biblical scenes and even portraits of the artists. The icons inside date from the 14th century, and older ones are in the museum. In comparison, the interior frescoes are barely dry, being less than a century old. During the Soviet days, the church was turned into a museum of religion and atheism. Today, services are once again held in the church, usually taking place between 6pm and 8pm daily. Nearby are the 15th-century belfry and a leaning 17th-century clock tower.

Millennium of Russia Monument

One of Novgorod's most famous landmarks, this massive, 300-tonne sculpture was unveiled in 1862 on the 1000th

THE SAVIOUR OF NOVGOROD

The most important icon in the Cathedral of St Sophia is that of the patron saint of Novgorod, Our Lady of the Sign (Znaniyena Bozhney Mater), which, according to legend, saved the city from destruction in 1170. Accounts vary, but one colourful story goes something like this...

The Prince of Suzdal and his large army were preparing to attack Novgorod. Things looked pretty bleak for the Novgorodians, and the bishop desperately prayed for the city's salvation. The night before the attack, he had a vision that an icon of the Virgin could save Novgorod, so he had the icon moved from the church to a pillar of the fortress. The next day Suzdal began the siege and, not surprisingly, the icon was hit with an arrow. It then turned back to face Novgorod; tears were in the virgin's eyes. Darkness fell upon the land, and the army from Suzdal began attacking one another in confusion. The Novgorodians then rode out from the city and attacked, quickly dispatching their enemies.

If it all sounds a little far-fetched, take a close look at the icon while you're in the church. You can still see a notch over the saint's left eye, said to be where the original arrow hit. If you visit the Museum of History and Art, you should also check out the 15th-century painting from the Novgorod School depicting three scenes from the battle. It's one of the first icons ever painted to depict an event strictly from Russian history.

anniversary of the Varangian Prince Rurik's arrival. A veritable who's who of Russian history over the last millennium, it depicts some 127 figures – rulers, statesmen, artists, scholars and a few fortunate hangers-on as well.

The women at the top are Mother Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church. Around the middle, clockwise from the south, are Rurik, Prince Vladimir of Kyiv (who introduced Christianity), tsars Mikhail Romanov, Peter the Great and Ivan III, and Dmitry Donskoy trampling a Mongol Tatar. In the bottom band on the east side are nobles and rulers, including Catherine the Great with an armload of laurels for all her lovers. Alexander Nevsky and other military heroes are on the north side, and literary and artistic figures are on the west.

The 16-metre-high statue is fortunate to have survived WWII. The Nazis cut it up, intending to ship it to Germany, but fled before realising their plan.

Chamber of Facets

The Gothic **Chamber of Facets** (adult/student R40/20; ☎ 10am–6pm Thu–Tue, closed last Fri of month), part of a palace built in 1433, has a collection of icons and lavish church booty from the region, including some beautiful illuminated manuscripts.

Museum of History & Art

Undergoing renovation at the time of research, the **Museum of History & Art** (adult/student R60/30; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Mon) is said to be one of the best research museums of its kind in Russia, with a huge collection of early icons, birch-bark manuscripts, paintings, early wooden sculpture and applied art. It's located just south of the Millennium of Russia Monument.

YAROSLAV'S COURT

Across a footbridge from the kremlin is old Novgorod's market, with the remnants of a 17th-century arcade facing the river. Beyond that is the market gatehouse, an array of churches sponsored by 13th- to 16th-century merchant guilds, and a 'road palace' built in the 18th century as a rest stop for Catherine the Great.

The 12th-century Kyiv-style **Court Cathedral of St Nicholas** (Nikolo-Dvorishchensky sobor;

☎ 636 187; adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Sun, closed last Fri of month) is all that remains of the early palace complex of the Novgorod princes, from which Yaroslav's Court (Yaroslavovo dvorishche) gets its name. The cathedral, which is still undergoing restoration, holds church artefacts and temporary exhibitions of local interest. Downstairs you can see fragments from the church's original frescoes.

CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR-AT-ILINO

On the outside, the 14th-century **Church of Our Saviour-at-Illino** (ul Ilina; adult/student R60/30; ☎ 10am–5pm Wed–Sun) has graffiti-like ornaments and lopsided gables that are almost playful. Inside are the only surviving frescoes by legendary Byzantine painter Theophanes the Greek (and they came close to extinction when the church served as a Nazi machine-gun nest). Recent restoration has exposed as much of the frescoes as possible, though they are still faint. A small exhibit upstairs includes reproductions with explanations in Russian. Note Theophanes' signature use of white warlike paint around the eyes and noses of his figures, and their piercing expressions. The church itself, east of Yaroslav's Court, is pure Novgorod style.

OTHER CHURCHES & SIGHTS

In contrast to the Church of Our Saviour-at-Illino, the 17th-century Moscow-style **Cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign** (adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am–5pm Thu–Tue) across the street is more complex.

Another interesting study in contrasting styles, the 1557 Muscovite **Trinity Church** (ul Dukhovskaya 20) and Novgorod-style **St George's Church** (ul Dukhovskaya 31) sit directly across the street from one another. Trinity Church, a dark brick edifice with silver-hued cupolas, is still closed and in rather bad shape; St George's opens erratically during the week. Other churches in Novgorod style include the 1406 **Church of Peter & Paul** on ul Bredova-Zverinaya near Hotel Intourist. It's a small, crumbling brick structure occupying its own little field amid a neighbourhood in the process of Euro-transformation. Nearby, the former Zverin Monastery, built in 1468, now houses the **Novgorod House of Folk Costumes** (☎ 739 607; ul Bredova-Zverinnaya 14; ☎ noon–6pm), which contains exhibits on Novgorod costume production. The craft

shop sells some exquisitely woven dresses, dolls, hats and the like.

Across the river, the 1361 **Church of St Theodore Stratelates** (ul Fyodorovsky Ruchey 19/pr Yuriya Gagarina; adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am–6pm Thu–Tue) has some faded frescoes and displays on the church's history.

YUREV MONASTERY & MUSEUM OF WOODEN ARCHITECTURE

Set amid peaceful marshlands just outside of town, these two sights feel worlds away from the city, and make for a splendid excursion. The 12th-century **Yurev Monastery** (☎ 10am–8pm) still functions as a working Orthodox monastery. It features the heavily reconstructed Cathedral of St George and a clutch of 19th-century additions. Services are held in the Church of Exaltation of the Cross (1761), which is attached to the monks' dorms. The monastery grounds are worth a visit, but what really warrants the trip out here is the windswept river setting, with gorgeous views out across the marshes and towards the centre of Novgorod.

Roughly 1km up the road is the beautiful **Vitoslavitsy Museum of Wooden Architecture** (adult/student R60/30; ☎ park 10am–6pm, houses close at 4.30pm), an open-air museum of peasant houses and beautiful, intricate wooden churches from around the region. There's a café and souvenir shop on the grounds.

To get to either place, take bus 7 (R4, 15 minutes). The bus back into town stops just outside the Vitoslavitsy gates; the bus makes a loop out to these sights, so you will be re-boarding a bus continuing in the same direction you were heading when you arrived.

NOVGOROD FINE ARTS MUSEUM

The cool halls of Novgorod's **Fine Arts Museum** (☎ 73763; Sofiyskaya pl 2; adult/student R60/30; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) showcase paintings by 18th- and 19th-century Russian artists, including Andropov, Bryullov and Ivanov. The 3rd floor features Novgorod artists. The collection is a strong provincial one, though not spectacular. Local crafts are among the offerings at the art shop in the lobby.

RIVER TRIPS

The Volkhov River flows out of Lake Ilmen, about 10km south. On a good day, the surrounding marshes are lovely, with churches

rising up majestically from the countryside. From May to September, you can catch a boat for a one-hour cruise (R100) at the dock below the kremlin.

BANYA

For a good sweat with a proletarian price tag, visit the public **banya** (☎ 72019; ul Velikaya 4; admission R75; ☎ 4–9pm Wed–Fri, 12.30–9pm Sat & Sun). In addition to just joining the fray, you can rent a four-person private cabin for R220 for three hours. The cabin provides privacy and comfort, and you can order in food and drinks. There is an extra charge to rent a *venik* (birch branch, R25) with which to whip yourself, if so inclined.

Sleeping

Hotel Akron (☎ 136 918; fax 136 934; ul Predtechenskaya 24; s/d from R700/900) This old favourite should be completely renovated by the time you read this. Rooms, though small and uninspiring, get good light from the windows (the fluorescents are unfortunate) and have modern bathrooms, shiny new wallpaper, cable TV and minifridge. Other pluses include friendly service, decent prices and a good location.

Hotel Volkhov (☎ 115 505; fax 115 526; www.novgorod-hotels.com/volkhov-hotel; ul Predtechenskaya 24; s/d with breakfast from R1200/1800) Catering mostly to business travellers, the Hotel Volkhov has modern, nicely furnished rooms with lots of amenities. A sauna is available to guests.

Beresta Palace Hotel (☎ 186 914; www.beresta.palace.com; ul Studencheskaya 2; s/d with breakfast from US\$85/100; ☎) On the east bank of the Volkhov, the Beresta is Novgorod's best hotel, with comfortable rooms and good service. It has a health club, sauna and tennis courts. The biggest drawback is the location, which is a bus or taxi ride from the centre.

Hotel Rossiya (☎ 634 185; nab Aleksandra Nevskogo 19/1; s/d from R610/800) On the edge of the River Velikaya, the battered Rossiya looks abandoned at first glance (entry around the back), but inside things are still holding together. Although the hallways are smelly and the bathrooms are cramped and dark, the rooms themselves have been renovated, and boast fine views of the kremlin. Table tennis on 1st floor.

Hotel Sadko (☎ 663 004; sadko@novline.ru; ul Fyodorovsky Ruchey 16; s/d with breakfast from R650/1300) Along a busy street a bit outside the centre,

the Sadko has bright, spacious rooms with modern furnishings and welcoming staff. The bathrooms are small, but overall the place is decent value if you don't mind the location. German spoken.

Hotel Intourist (☎ 775 089; www.intourist.natm.ru; ul Velikaya 16; s/d R900/1200) Easily spotted by the fascinating but rather tacky mural of Mother Russia above the entranceway, this old Soviet stalwart is literally crumbling to the ground. Fortunately for guests, the rooms are in better shape. Each boasts USSR-issued red curtains and red comforters, and is clean if not terribly charming. The biggest minus is the state of the ageing, cramped bathrooms (bring your own shower curtain).

Eating & Drinking

No longer the culinary desert it was a few years ago, Novgorod has a handful of decent restaurants. During summertime, several open-air cafés facing the kremlin's west side make pleasant spots for a drink.

Ilmen (☎ 176 310; ul Gazon 2; meals from R50; bistro ☎ 10am-10pm, restaurant ☎ noon-midnight) This polished, new complex has a casual bistro on the 1st floor where you can enjoy sandwiches, salads and drinks on the back terrace. Upstairs, the more formal restaurant has fresh-roasted meats, a good wine selection and a menu packed with Russian and Scandinavian dishes. English menu.

Kafe Charodeyka (☎ 730 879; ul Volosova-Meretskova 1/1; meals R60-180; ☎ 11am-5pm & 6-11pm) A favourite with homesick foreigners and Novgorodians alike, this café has Tuborg on tap and features an eclectic menu with dishes like fresh salmon, breaded pork with vegetables, salad Rosalina (with king prawns) and chicken fingers (stuffed with prunes and dried apricots and baked in cream). In warmer weather, enjoy one of many cocktails at the open-air seating in front. English menu.

Restoran Pri Dvore (☎ 774 343; ul Lyudogoshchaya 3; meals R120-275) A nicely set dining room and professional service await guests at this somewhat formal restaurant near the Hotel Akron. The eclectic menu includes selections such as chicken salad with fruit, French onion soup, chicken Creole (served with tomatoes, white wine and smoked bacon) and salmon steak. An English menu is available, but it doesn't list all the dishes.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

The medieval seems downright glamorous at the handsome **Restoran Detinets** (☎ 774 624; dishes R50-250; ☎ noon-5pm & 7-11pm) inside the kremlin's Pokrovskaya Tower. Amid castle walls lit by iron chandeliers, sample the city's best Russian cuisine. Delicious fish soups, rich sweet borsch and plates of grilled perch come as expertly prepared. Down a winding staircase, the bar serves strong coffee, cocktails and *medovukha*, a honey-brewed mead. The tables are tucked in the brick alcoves of what was the kremlin's Intercession Church. English menu available.

Caffè Giòia (☎ 731 722; ul Velikaya 11; pizzas R80-180; ☎ 11am-11pm Tue-Sun) This simple, welcoming café serves tasty, thin-crust pizzas, nicely suited to the Russian and imported beers. The capriccioso pizza is a good prelude to cappuccino and tiramisù. English spoken.

Pri Dvore (ul Lyudogoshchaya 3; meals around R75; ☎ 10am-9pm) This popular, cheery little cafeteria serves good prepared salads and hot dishes by the kilogram. Try the tasty pastries or fruit ice creams for dessert.

Caffè Asia (☎ 772 227; ul Yakovleva 22; meals R100-300) Aiming for Eastern exoticism, this downstairs restaurant is divided into private rooms with rice-paper screens, silky red walls and gauzy curtains. The food is hit-or-miss and includes Korean, Uzbek and Japanese fare. The outdoor terrace opens during summer.

Kofeinya Sudarushka (☎ 679 202; ul Bolshaya Moskovskaya 32) This small restaurant on the east side of town is set with pleasant light wood furnishings and rustic country touches. The menu (English available) features the usual Russian standards (steak, salmon, bliny) as well as fresh juices and coffees.

Kafe Istok (☎ 11am-midnight) This small café behind the monastery serves simple fare and overlooks a nice little beach.

Outside the kremlin's east entrance you'll find the small open-sided bar Pivnaya Gavan, a popular place for a beer and people watching.

Entertainment

Concert Hall (☎ 634 232; Kremlin 6; tickets from R60) Novgorod's Concert Hall is an excellent place to catch live symphony or opera.

Shopping

Souvenirs are plentiful around Novgorod. A row of vendors near the tourist office sell woven birch boxes, mini wooden churches, *matryoshka* dolls and lacquer boxes. You can find a wider assortment of souvenirs at **Sloboda** (☎ 730 793; Kremlin 8; ☎ 10am-6pm) inside the kremlin and at **Na Torgu** (☎ 664 472; ul Ilna 2; ☎ 10am-7pm) near Yaroslav's Court.

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (☎ 739 380) is 1.5km west of the kremlin, at the end of pr Karla Marksa. A fast train runs daily to St Petersburg's Moscow Station (R210, three hours); a slower *elektrichka* runs to/from St Petersburg's Vitebsk Station (R105, four hours). There are also trains twice a week to Kyiv and three times a week to Murmansk.

The modern **bus station** (☎ 739 979), next to the train station, serves St Petersburg half a dozen times daily (R190, four hours). There's also direct bus service to/from Pskov twice daily (R206, 4½ hours).

Getting Around

From the bus and train stations, buses 4 and 20 (R4) pass in range of the Hotel Volkhov (in between the first and second stops from the stations, or a 15-minute walk), Intourist (Universam Kremlyovsky/Kremlyovsky Park stop, about 500m from the hotel), Sadko (the stop on the corner of ul Bolshaya Moskovskaya and pr Fyodorovsky Ruchey right after the bus crosses the river; the hotel is 200m further along Fyodorovsky Ruchey) and Beresta Palace. For the Beresta, get off at the stadium and cut through the park. Returning to the stations, you'll need to catch bus 4 or 19 instead of bus 20. A taxi from the train station to the Beresta or Sadko should cost about R80.

AROUND NOVGOROD Khutin Monastery

The working **Orthodox convent** (☎ 9am-8pm) at Khutin was founded in the 12th century on sinful land. Early nuns prayed long and hard to exorcise evil spirits abiding here, and were so successful the site is now known for miracles and its holy water springs. Buses from Novgorod station (R4, 30 minutes) run from 9am to 2.30pm daily.

STARAYA RUSSA СТАРАЯ РУССА

☎ 81652 / pop 40,000 / ☎ Moscow

Set along the banks of the tranquil Polist River, Staraya Russa has the idyllic charm of a 19th-century village. Here, Dostoevsky spent summers and wrote much of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the town is still today something of a mecca for literary enthusiasts.

You can pick up a map at the **Magazin Kniga** (ul Lenina 6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) bookstore, near the main square.

The simple, two-storey **Dostoevsky House** (☎ 21477; ul Dostoyevskogo 42; adult/student R40/20; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) on the small Pereritsa River is now open as a museum. The house never left the family's possession before becoming a museum, and some original pieces remain. Dostoevsky's desk has copies from his mazelike drafts, and you can see his doodlings on the pages. His bookcase holds books from the period, and his wife's bedroom still contains her bed and chest. A keyboard instrument that Dostoevsky supposedly tinkered with sits by a window overlooking the river. Russian-language guides lead you through, pointing out every detail in a half-hour tour. In summer you might be able to arrange an English-language tour (R50) ahead of time by contacting the **Dostoevsky cultural centre** (☎ 37285; ul Dostoyevskogo 8; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri & Sun). The centre also offers tours of the town (R300, two hours) and hosts temporary exhibitions (R40). Staraya Russa was the setting for *The Brothers Karamazov*, so fans will want to visit the streets and churches that the characters frequented.

Other attractions in Staraya Russa include the **Local Lore Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 35866; pl Timura Frunze 6; adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon), which is housed in a 12th-century church and displays old religious relics; you can also see fragments from the church's original frescoes.

Next door to the museum is a **picture gallery** (Kartinnaya galleriya; ☎ 35989; adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon), with a small but noteworthy selection of paintings (and also a few sculptures) of artists who spent time in Staraya Russa. On the same street, ardent war buffs can check out the small but earnest **Museum of the Northwest Front** (☎ 35285; ul Volodarskogo 20; adult/student R40/22; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon).



Sleeping & Eating

For those who must wake up to the morning air that inspired the master, **Hotel Polist** (☎ 37547; ul Engelsa 20; s/d from R430/520) is an option. Rooms are a bit shabby and in serious need of modernising, but the view of the park across the street is pleasant.

Dining options are scarce. Near the sanatorium, the **Kafe Ilmen** (☎ 31968; ul Mineralnaya 43; meals around R120; ☎ 1pm-2am) is your best bet, with basic Russian fare. If you're desperate, there's always the Soviet-era cafeteria **Rushanka** (ul Filipova; meals R20-30; ☎ 8am-8pm) near the main square.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from Novgorod's bus station (R92, two hours, six daily), returning about every 90 minutes. From Staraya Russa bus station, buses 1, 4, 6 and 11 head to the centre, though expect long waits between buses. On foot, it takes about 30 minutes to walk to the main square. Once there, follow the river south to reach Dostoevsky's house. A taxi from the bus station straight to the museum is far simpler and should cost about R50.

PSKOV ПСКОВ

☎ 8112 / pop 200,000 / ☎ Moscow

Situated 265km southwest of St Petersburg and close to both the Latvian and Estonian borders, Pskov is a pretty town with a long, proud history, which you'll be confronted with at nearly every turn. At the heart of Pskov lies a riverside kremlin with a beautiful cathedral inside, and from the old walls that still encircle the original settlement you can spot dozens of great-domed churches, most designed by Pskov's own school of architects and icon painters. Unfortunately, many of the churches are closed, with few marked for renovation. However, there is an excellent museum, the Pogankin Chambers, where a great deal of the iconographic art from these churches has been collected and displayed.

In addition to its cultural treasures, Pskov has some lovely parks and a riverside promenade along the Velikaya's east bank. These offer respite from the city's traffic-choked main streets.

As a border town (30km from Estonia), Pskov's history is saturated with 700 years

of war for control of the Baltic coast. German Teutonic knights captured it in 1240, but Alexander Nevsky routed them two years later in a famous battle on the ice of Lake Peipus. The Poles laid siege to it in the 16th century and the Swedes wrecked it the following century. Peter the Great used it as a base for his drive to the sea, and the Red Army fought its first serious battle against Nazi troops nearby.

This is also Pushkin country. The poet's grave and Mikhailovskoe, his family's estate, are a two-hour drive away.

Orientation

Hotel Rizhskaya is three long blocks west of the Velikaya River, while almost everything else is on the east side. The town's axis is Oktyabrsky pr, ending at Oktyabrskaya pl.

Information

Most hotels in town have travel agencies offering city excursions or day trips to Izborsk and Pushkin's house at Mikhailovskoe. Purchase maps at bookshops or the train station.

Baltiysky Bank (ul Yana Fabritsiusa 27) Near the train station, this bank with ATM changes money.

Books for You (Knigi dlya vas; Oktyabrsky pr 22) One of several bookshops on Oktyabrsky pr that sell maps of town (R25).

Internet Café (pl Lenina; per hr R35; ☎ 10am-11pm) A youth-filled Internet café below the Oktyabr theatre.

Main post office (Oktyabrskaya pl; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) In addition to postal services, you can change money here.

Sberbank (Oktyabrsky pr 23) With money exchange and 24-hour ATM.

Telephone office (Oktyabrsky pr 17; per hr R35; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat) Two blocks from the main post office, this telephone office is also a pleasant place to get online. ATM inside.

Tourist information (☎ 724 568; www.tourism.pskov.ru) Pskov recently lost its tourist office; in the meantime, you can phone the director or obtain city info from travel agencies.

Sights

OLD CITY

Pskov's walls formerly had four layers. The kremlin (*krom*) was the religious and ceremonial centre. Its stone walls and the southern annexe, Dovmont Town (Dovmontov gorod), date from the 13th cen-

tury. The Central Town (Sredny gorod), around ul Pushkina, was the commercial centre, though little remains of it or its 14th-century walls. The walls and towers of the 15th- to 16th-century Outer Town (Okolny gorod) can still be seen along ul Sverdlova, the Velikaya River embankment and across the tributary Pskova River. You can walk along portions of the ramparts, including behind the kremlin.

Two new museums have opened in the Old Town, though they're both modest affairs and non-Russian speakers will find them rather impenetrable. The **Pskov State Museum** (Pskovskyy Gosudarstvenny muzey; admission R30; ☎ 722 563; ☎ 11am-6pm) shows fragments from the settlement's earliest days when Scandinavian Vikings lived in the area. There are a few displays of knives, jewellery and old keys as well as information on burial methods.

In the same area, but up the stairs, is the fairly dry **Chancery Chamber** (Prikaznaya Palata; admission R15; ☎ 11am-6pm), which presents old documents on the administration of Pskov during the 17th century.

Kremlin & Dovmont Town

In **Dovmont Town** (named after an early prince), the foundations of a dozen 12th- to 15th-century churches are scattered around. Through a passage is the kremlin, where the *veche* (citizens' assembly) elected its princes and sent them off to war, and Trinity Cathedral where many of the princes are buried.

You can book guided tours next to the Pskov State Museum (tours in Russian/English R400/850). There's also a small **gift shop** (☎ 11am-6pm) in the grounds. A budget **excursion office** (☎ 21906; ☎ 10am-6pm) next door offers Russian-language kremlin tours (R200), city tours (R400) and guided excursions further afield to Pechory Monastery (see p340) and Izborsk (see p338).

Trinity Cathedral

The grandeur of the 1699 **Trinity Cathedral**, Pskov's principal sight, is heightened by the simplicity of the skeletal kremlin surrounding it. The gilded centre dome, as high as a 28-storey building, can be seen from 30km away on a clear day. The interior, with a large collection of bejewelled icons of the Madonna, is still undergoing restoration, though services have returned.

POGANKIN CHAMBERS & MUSEUM

A very rich 17th-century merchant built his fortress-like house and treasury here in the heart of Pskov, with walls 2m thick. The original building and a newer addition now house the **Pskov National Museum of History, Architecture & Art** (☎ 163 311; ul Nekrasova 7; combination ticket adult/student R100/60; 🕒 11am–6pm Tue–Sun, closed last Tue of month), which comprises three separate museums and a wide range of displays. The 2nd floor of the new building houses the war collection, with photos and artefacts from WWII, as well as information on more recent conflicts like Afghanistan and Chechnya. More interesting is the 1st-floor picture gallery, which has works from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, including paintings by Nikitin, Tropinin and Zhukovsky, as well as representations from the Russian avant-garde, including a couple of Petrov-Vodkins.

The original house showcases the real gems of the collection. The maze of galleries holds 13th- to 18th-century pottery, weaving and weaponry – including the original 15th-century sword of one of Pskov's princes. A series of icons depicts the life of Christ, most from Pskov churches that have closed. It is a rare chance to thoroughly examine one particular style of iconography at close range. Note, for instance, the bulbous noses and otherwise harsh realism that characterises the Pskov school, as well as a predominance of subdued earth tones. One impressive 17th-century icon on display relates the history of Pskov's development. The museum entrance is on Komsomolsky per.

MIROZHSHY MONASTERY

The attraction here is the Unesco-protected, nonworking **Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour** (Spaso-Preobrazhensky sobor; ☎ 46702; adult/student R100/80; 🕒 11am–5.30pm Tue–Sun), whose 12th-century frescoes are considered to be one of the most complete representations of the biblical narrative to have survived the Mongols. The frescoes have been beautifully restored after centuries of damage from flooding, whitewashing and scrubbing; 80% of what you see today is original. The artists are unknown but were almost certainly from Greece, based on the style of the frescoes. The guided tour takes 1½ hours and will fascinate art-lovers and historians. The cathedral itself was based on a 12th-century

Greek model, formed around a symmetrical cross. Later additions and demolitions have altered the footprint, but you can still see traces of the original structure along exterior walls. The church closes often due to inclement weather: too hot, too cold or too wet; it's best to call in advance.

The monastery is also a working iconography school; ask to see any current activity. The whole complex is across the Velikaya River from the centre; take bus 2 from the vicinity of Hotel Rizhskaya.

PARKS

Along the Pskova tributary, near a small spillway and the Epiphany Cathedral, is a lovely stretch of park, nice for strolling, picnicking or short hikes. **Gremyachaya Tower**, a decaying 16th-century fortress tower on the north bank, is open to explorers. **Detsky Park**, right in the centre of town, is less bucolic but still pleasant. During summer, children enjoy the park's mechanised rides – and pony rides, no less.

Sleeping

Hotel Rizhskaya (☎ 462 223; Rizhsky pr 25; s/d R700/1200) Overlooking a small square a few blocks west of the Velikaya River, this old Intourist has Pskov's best rooms, with decent furnishings, wood floors, good lighting and modern bathrooms. You'll also find friendly staff (some speak English), a laundry and ATM. The hotel is 15-minute's walk to pl Lenina, though bus 17 whisks you there in minutes.

Hotel Oktyabrskaya (☎ 164 246; fax 164 254; Oktyabrsky pr 36; s/d without bathroom R380/760, s/d with bathroom R650/1300) More convenient, this tired hotel has unrenovated rooms that are pretty shabby, while at the higher end you'll have more comfortable quarters with better lighting and more space. It's located halfway between the train station and the centre.

Hotel Krom (☎ 39007; ul Metallistov 5; dorm per person from R200, s/d with bathroom R880/1760) Housed in a former dormitory, the bare-bones Hotel Krom is still a student-favourite for the cheap, shared rooms and a quiet location near the banks of the Pskova River. There's a café/bar on the 1st floor.

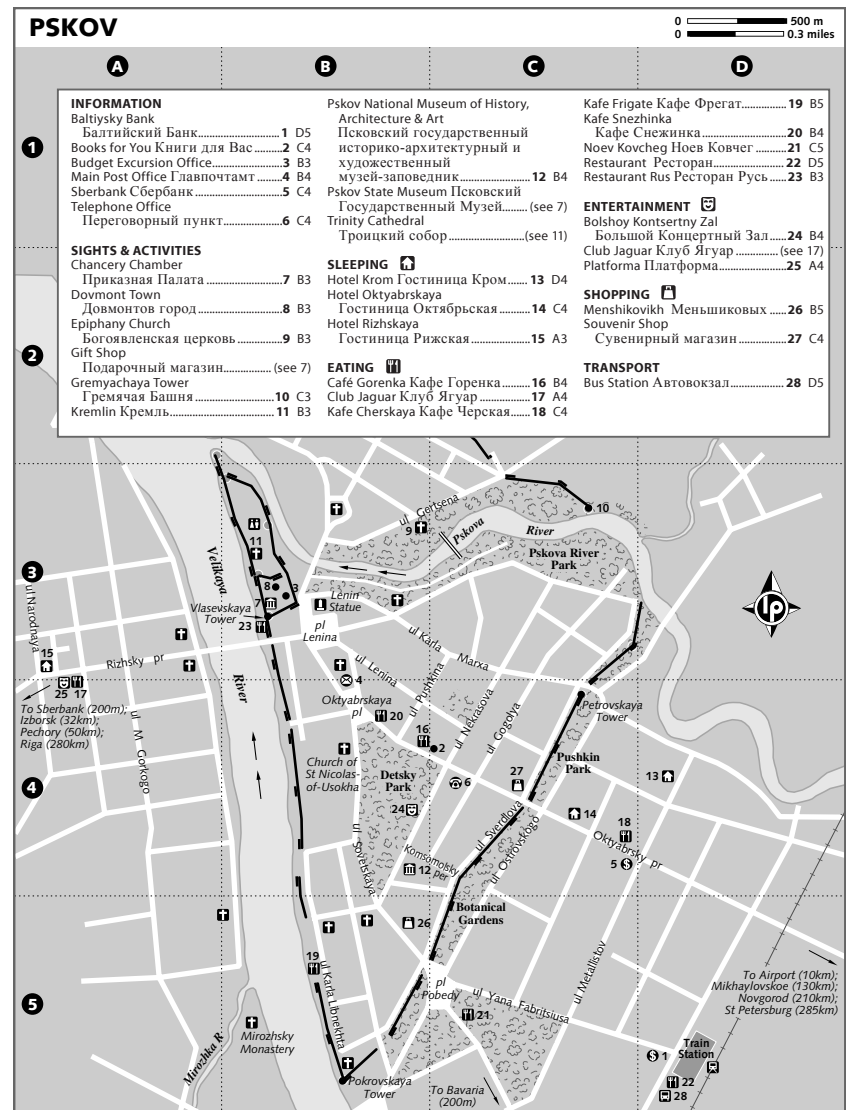
Eating & Drinking

Restaurant Rus (☎ 720 090; meals R150–300) Set in the old kremlin tower overlooking Dovmont

Town, this elegant restaurant exudes atmosphere (from the tables in the tower's alcoves, you can peek out at the river through cross-bow slits). Dishes are unspectacular but fresh: marinated mushrooms and potatoes; crab and tomato salad; and salmon with tomatoes and mushrooms. The ambience is marred only by the cheesy lighting and

obtrusive Russian pop. Downstairs from the restaurant is a cosy bar. English menu.

Kafe Cherskaya (☎ 723 829; Oktyabrsky pr 40) One of several restaurants along this stretch of Oktyabrsky, Cherskaya has a casual vibe and boasts a cocktail menu as extensive as the food list. Cabbage soup, schnitzel and all the Russian favourites are on hand.



Bavaria (☎ 163 782; ul Sovetskaya 83; meals R70-160) Although the ambience is lacking, Bavaria's eclectic menu (English available) and friendly service make it a good find. Dishes include perch in cabbage, stewed with beer; omelette with ham and mushrooms; and pork stuffed with plums, walnuts and cheese. The only drawback is Bavaria's location; it's about 200m south of pl Pobedy.

Kafe Frigate (☎ 121 317; ul Karla Libknekhta 9, 2nd fl; meals R50-180; ☎ 9am-6am) Overlooking the Velikaya River, Kafe Frigate specialises in seafood and the usual Russian favourites (bliny, borsch, chicken Kiev). The almost elegant, red-hued dining room is strung with rigging ropes and other nautical devices, although the real kitsch arrives in the evening when the ballad-singing band takes the stage.

Club Jaguar (☎ 445 142; Rizhsky pr 16; mains R100-375) Featuring an eclectic menu and friendly service, Club Jaguar is a fine place for a meal. In addition to a good three-course business lunch for R95, you can order sushi, salads, seafood and bliny.

Kafe Snezhinka (☎ 723 086; Oktyabrsky pr 14; meals R60-100; ☎ 24hr) A rather minimalist affair, this music-filled café attracts Pskov's youth, who gather for coffee, beer and light Russian meals. Picture windows look out across Oktyabrsky pr onto Detsky Park.

Noev Kovcheg (☎ 23829; ul Sovetskaya 62; meals R75-150) This smoky, underground restaurant is worth going to on Friday through to Sunday when the chef serves *khach*, a hearty Armenian dish made of meat (from cow's feet), chilli peppers, garlic and vodka, and served with lavash. If shin meat doesn't entice, you can always opt for shashlyk or dolmas.

Café Gorenka (☎ 121 537; Oktyabrsky pr 22; meals around R40; ☎ 9am-10pm) A good place for a snack or coffee, Gorenka has desserts displayed in the front counter; you can also order pizza, sandwiches, salads and ice cream.

Next door to the bus station is a simple **restaurant** (meals R30-60; ☎ 24hr) where you can grab a bite (eggs, bliny, open sandwiches) before catching your bus out of town.

Entertainment

Pskov has a small but friendly nightlife scene. The popular entertainment area at the moment is on Rizhsky pr, a few blocks west of the bridge.

Platforma (☎ 445 142; Rizhsky pr 16; ☎ noon-6am) This complex has a bowling alley (per hour

R300-800), billiard tables (per hour R60-120), an Internet café (per hour R80) and a tiny sports bar. It's on the 4th floor.

Club Jaguar (☎ 449 647; Rizhsky pr 16; admission R50-150; ☎ 10pm-6am) You'll find an equally young crowd a few doors down at this disco, located atop the restaurant of the same name.

Bolshoy Kontsertny Zal (☎ 62737; ul Nekrasova 22; tickets from R50; box office ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Sat) This venue stages musical theatre, comedy acts and concerts.

Shopping

Menshikovkh (☎ 161 575; ul Sovetskaya 50) This souvenir shop has a good selection of pottery (particularly teapots and teacups), photos of Pskov's churches and the odd frog figurine. There's also an unsigned **shop** (Oktyabrsky pr 32) with scarves, linen tablecloths, so-so lacquer boxes, teaware and enamelled jewellery.

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (☎ 536 237) has limited amenities, although you can check a bag here (per bag, per day R40). The only direct trains to St Petersburg are night trains (R450, six hours) to the Vitebsk Station; during the day you have to travel to Luga and transfer. One night train goes to Moscow (R1130, 12 hours), Riga (R1265, eight hours) and Vilnius (R1130, 10 hours).

There are no easy train connections to Novgorod, but two buses daily (R206, 4½ hours) leave from the **central bus station** (☎ 24002). Buses for Pushkinskie Gory via Izborsk leave regularly (R94, two hours). Buses to Pechory (R44, 1½ hours) also leave every three hours. There's one daily bus to Smolensk (R370, seven hours), two to Riga and one to Tallinn.

Getting Around

Buses 1, 11 and 17 run from the train station past Hotel Oktyabrskaya and through the centre (R5). Bus No 2 or 17 takes you to Hotel Rizhskaya from the station (taxi charge about R80).

AROUND PSKOV

Izborsk Изборск

On a ridge with wide views over the countryside, Izborsk was once the equal of Pskov, chosen as a base by one of the original Varangian princes who ruled over early Russia. Now it's a sleepy village by the ruins of the

oldest stone fortress in Russia. Inside the old walls is the 14th-century **Church of St Nicholas**, a small green-trimmed building that was undergoing restoration at the time of research. There's also a stone tower (Bashnya Lukovka), older than the walls, which has a **viewing platform** (R15; ☎ 10am-6pm) at the top. A path around the back of the fortress walls leads down to a lake. The locals you'll pass toting water bottles are coming from the 12 Springs of Happiness, Love, Health and nine other virtues.

Outside the fortress the 17th-century **Church of St Sergius** has a tiny exhibit on local archaeology; some pieces date from the 8th century. A second museum in town, the **State Historic-Archaeological Museum 'Izborsk'** (☎ 96696; ul Pechorskaya 39; admission R5; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), houses archaeological finds from Izborsk and contains written explanations, in Russian, of the town's extremely rich history.

SLEEPING & EATING

A crisp, modern cabin behind the fortress harbours an unlikely **guesthouse** (Gostevoy dom; ☎ 96612; s/d with shared bathroom R400/800, ste with bathroom R1200) overlooking the valley. Six of the rooms share a very nice bathroom, while the two-room 'lux' suite has a broad private balcony. It's a good find, though you'll want to call in advance.

Beyond the kremlin walls, near the Church of St Sergius, is **Blinnaya** (☎ 96713; bliny around R35; ☎ 9am-6pm), a sweet little bliny restaurant boasting 'Izborskian' bliny. You can order them with butter, jam, condensed milk or ham. Outdoor tables and benches are a good spot for an afternoon beer.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's 32km from Pskov to Izborsk on the Riga road. Buses run regularly from Pskov's bus station (R27, 45 minutes); be sure to take the bus towards Stary (Old) Izborsk, not Noviy (New) Izborsk.

Mikhailovskoe Михайловское

☎ 246 (within Pskov region), ☎ 81146 (from elsewhere)

Walking around Pushkin's inspiring estate at daybreak, it's easy to see where Russia's greatest poet received his inspiration. As you pass through the moist forest air, you soon reach the edge of a lake, offering magnificent views of tall, regal pines lining the

far shore. A silvery mist rises off the smooth surface of the water as a lone fisherman casts his line out across the reeds.

The family house of Russia's most loved writer is open as part of the **Pushkin Museum Reserve** (☎ 22321; admission R150; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Dec-Mar, 9am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, closed Apr & Nov), a 2½-hour bus ride from Pskov. Alexander Pushkin spent two phenomenally productive years in exile at Mikhailovskoe, his family's estate near the settlement of Pushkinskie Gory (Pushkin Hills), 130km south of Pskov. The family first came to the area in the late 1700s, when Pushkin's great-grandfather Abram Hannibal was given the land by Empress Elizabeth. The family house was destroyed during WWII and has since been rebuilt.

The 20-hectare park is closed on the last Tuesday of the month. The attraction is Pushkin's writing room with his comfy leather chair, portraits of Byron and Zhukovsky (Pushkin's mentor, also a poet) and a small statue of Napoleon. The thick religious book on his writing table is the one he supposedly grabbed from the family bookcase and pretended to be reading whenever he saw the local priest coming for a visit.

At Pushkinskie Gory, about 800m north of the bus stop, is the **Svyatogorsky Monastery**, where Pushkin is buried. Not far from the monastery is **Hotel Druzhba** (☎ 21651; ul Lenina 8; s/d from R420/600), which has simple but nice rooms with bath and shower. Odd-numbered rooms boast pleasant views of the forest. To get to the hotel, walk from the bus stop along the road away from the monastery and bear right.

This is lovely countryside and can be seen as part of a day trip.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most agencies run excursions from Pskov; check at the hotel where you're staying or contact the tourist office (p335) to find one that matches your schedule. Alternatively, you can do it yourself by catching a bus to Pushkinskie Gory from the Pskov bus station. There are several buses a day (R95, 2½ hours).

The Pushkinskie Gory bus station is about 8km from the Pushkin house; there may or may not be a short-distance bus to cover the last leg. You could also hire a taxi (R80 one way) and return on foot as the walk

PASSION & TRAGEDY: THE SHORT BUT FEBRILE LIFE OF RUSSIA'S GREATEST POET

Born in 1799, the son of nobility with a dollop of African blood in his lineage, Alexander Pushkin grew up in the French-speaking high society of St Petersburg. He went to school at the Lyceum in the shadow of the royal family's summer palace. Before he reached puberty, this precocious youth was using his perfect pitch, sharp wit and flawless sense of timing to hit on court women, diplomats' wives, peasant girls and the like. He and his school friends, many of them also poets, would spend their idle hours, between balls, composing odes and love poems. A child of his time, the Romantic Age, Pushkin was obsessed with obsessions – war, male honour, and beautiful and unattainable women – and he is said to have had a foot fetish. His heroes were Lord Byron and Napoleon.

Pushkin wrote everything from classical odes and sonnets to short stories, plays and fairy tales. He is best loved for his poems in verse, *The Bronze Horsemen* and *Eugene Onegin*, in which he nearly answered that eternal question – why do Russians (like to) suffer so much? Politically, he was a hot potato and the tsars exiled him from St Petersburg thrice, once to his home estate in Mikhailovskoe and twice to the Caucasus, where his romping with the local beauties and war-loving men added more fuel to his poetic fire. At home in Mikhailovskoe, he is said to have spent long evenings drinking with his childhood nanny. Pushkin himself admitted she told him many of the tales which he then turned into national legends. While on long walks, he would compose aloud. To keep his arm in good shape for duelling, he carried a cane filled with rocks.

It did not help. In 1837, Pushkin was mortally wounded in a duel over his wife, the Russian beauty Natalia Goncharova. He lay dying for two days while all of St Petersburg came to pay homage, dramatically directing taxi drivers, 'To Pushkin!' Even today the Russian rumour mills are producing versions of this 166-year-old scandal; only the theories about JFK's assassination come close in weirdness and speculation. During the night, Pushkin's body was carried from Chyornaya Rechka in St Petersburg and buried at the monastery near his home estate. For a riveting account of the duel and the events that preceded it, read Serena Vitale's *Pushkin's Button*.

is pleasant. To get there, take a left out of the bus station and walk for 1km along the road where you'll see the Svyatagorsk Monastery on your left. From there a road leads off to the right, which leads to Mikhailovskoe – keep following the signs from here.

Another option is hitching a ride on an excursion bus leaving from Hotel Druzhba in Pushkinskie Gory or asking a local driver. Be sure to find out when the last bus back to Pskov departs from Pushkinskie Gory. At research time, the last bus back left at around 3.25pm Monday to Thursday. On weekends, the last bus departs at 6.40pm.

Pechory Monastery Печорский Монастырь

Founded in 1473 in a ravine full of hermits' caves, this monastery has been a working cloister ever since. With all the high ground outside, it's an improbable stronghold, but several tsars fortified it and depended on it. A path descends under the 1564 **St Nicholas Church** (Nikolskaya tserkov) into a sea of colours and architectural styles, where several dozen monks still live and study.

Taking photos of the buildings is acceptable if you make a contribution at the front gate; photographing the monks is taboo.

The central yellow church comprises two buildings. At ground level is the original **Assumption Cathedral** (Uspensky sobor), built into the caves; upstairs is the 18th-century baroque **Intercession Church** (Pokrovskaya tserkov). Below the belfry on the left is the entrance to the caves, where some 10,000 bodies – monks, benefactors and others – are bricked up in vaults, with more dying to get in.

You can wander the monastery grounds and visit most of the churches on your own, but to visit the caves you'll have to find a monk willing to lead you down through the spiderweb of dark, spooky, nearly freezing sand tunnels. Everyone carries a candle, which in places you can thrust through holes in the tunnel walls to see the wooden coffins lying lopsided on top of each other. The monks insist that there has never been the smell of decay. At the exit to the caves, you'll be shown an ancient coffin burned around the edge (supposedly

this happened when some evil-doer tried to open it).

On the grounds is the summer carriage of Peter the Great's daughter, the licentious Anna Ioanovna, who – as the story goes – came to have some fun with the monks and didn't leave until winter, on a sleigh. Before WWII, this area was in independent Estonia, thereby avoiding the frequent stripping or destruction of churches during that time; the 16th-century bells in St Nicholas Church are original, a rarity in Russia.

There's a booth outside the monastery gates housing an **excursion office** (☎ 81148-21493; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm). The office offers tours in Russian for about R200, depending on the number of people. On the monastery grounds, women must wear skirts and cover their heads; you can borrow wraparound skirts and shawls at the entrance. Men should wear long pants, and both men and women should cover their shoulders. It's possible for men to stay at the monastery and eat with the monks in their modest cafeteria, with special permission. Ask at the front gate, and explain why you are interested in staying.

There are several buses a day from Pskov to Pechory (R33, 1½ hours). In addition, one early morning and one evening train run here.

KALININGRAD REGION
КАЛИНИНГРАДСКАЯ
ОБЛАСТЬ

Overlooking the Baltic Sea, the Kaliningrad region boasts some striking scenery. Among the region's attractions, you'll find a vibrant city with 700 years of Prussian history, pleasant coastal towns facing the sea, and the wild Curonian spit, a narrow landmass lined with some of Europe's highest sand dunes, deserted beaches and verdant marshland. You'll also find a colourful array of wildlife hidden in the region's thick forests.

Yet more than its natural wonders, Kaliningrad is known for its history, which differs markedly from the rest of Russia. From the 13th century until 1945, the entire region was German, part of the core territory of the Teutonic knights and their successors, the dukes and kings of Prussia.

Its capital, now named Kaliningrad, was the famous German city of Königsberg, capital of East Prussia, where Prussian kings were crowned. Scant Prussian legacy remains in the city of Kaliningrad, but the countryside is sprinkled with picturesque, moss-covered ruins of Prussian castles. 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 it in 1945 was one of the fiercest of the war, with hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides.

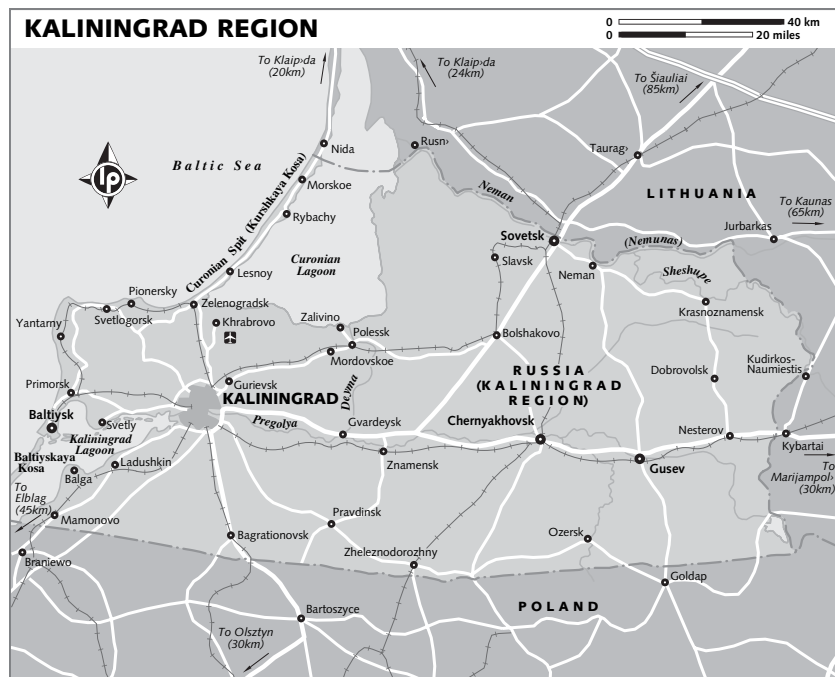
Kaliningrad is also Russia's smallest, newest and most westerly province, and its connection to Mother Russia is a complicated one. It often gets left off maps of Russia altogether, which is not an entirely inappropriate omission as Kaliningrad, now surrounded by EU countries, has a strong pull to the west. A different air pervades this region – while its citizens are not quite European in outlook, they seem more Westernised and open than in other parts of Russia. There's still talk of turning Kaliningrad into a fourth 'Baltic state', yet this is far from likely, as Russia would have much to lose by granting autonomy to this prosperous region. The world's largest amber mine, which still produces 90% of the world's amber, lies in Kaliningrad (in Yantarny). The Baltic fleet is still headquartered in the heavily militarised region of Baltiysk, and the area has always been of strategic importance, particularly in light of recent EU expansion east. In fact, foreigners were forbidden to enter the region until 1991.

Visas

Unless you're flying, to reach the Kaliningrad region from anywhere else means you must be in possession of either a double or multiple-entry Russian visa, and/or visas for its neighbouring countries. These must be arranged in advance. This can be done at the main **PVU office** (☎ 228 274, 228 282; Sovetsky pr 13, room 9) in Kaliningrad.

Disabled Travellers

Inaccessible transport, lack of ramps and lifts and no centralised policy for people with physical limitations make the region challenging for wheelchair-bound travellers. In Kaliningrad, Hotel Kaliningrad and several restaurants are wheelchair-accessible.



Baltma Tours offers further information or assistance for disabled tourists.

KALININGRAD КАЛИНИНГРАД

☎ 22 (within the region), ☎ 4112 (from elsewhere) / pop 423,000 / 🕒 Moscow -1hr Old photos attest that until 1945 Königsberg was one of Europe's finest-looking cities: regal, vibrant, cultured and an architectural gem. But WWII, later Soviet destruction of German-era constructions and misguided building projects saw to it that today's Kaliningrad is not exactly eye-candy.

However, there are lovely residential corners of the city that predate the war, a forestlike park and a few large ponds which work as effective antidotes to all the concrete. A number of central areas have been given a recent and friendly face-lift. It's also a vibrant, fun-loving city that feels larger than its population would suggest.

Founded as a Teutonic fort in 1255, Königsberg joined the Hanseatic League in 1340, and from 1457 to 1618 was the residence of the grand masters of the Teu-

tonic order and their successors, the dukes of Prussia. The first king of Prussia was crowned here in 1701. The city centre was flattened by British air raids in August 1944 and the Red Army assault from 6 to 9 April 1945. Many of the surviving Germans were killed or sent to Siberia – the last 25,000 were deported to Germany in 1947–8, one of the most effective ethnic cleansing campaigns in European history.

The city was renamed on 4 July 1946 (City Day celebrations are thus held on the first weekend in July) after Mikhail Kalinin, one of Stalin's henchmen who had conveniently died just as a new city name was needed. After opening up in 1991, it struggled through extreme economic difficulties. A wave of elderly German tourists revisiting their *Heimat* (Homeland), often weeping upon seeing what it had become, resulted in a complete reconstruction of Königsberg's cathedral thanks to their donations. Slowly, Kaliningrad has emerged as one of Russia's most Western-minded cities and, due to its mix of historical legacies, one of its most intriguing.

Orientation

Leninsky pr, a north-south avenue, is the city's main artery, running over 3km from the bus and main train station, Yuzhny vokzal (South Station), to Severny vokzal (North Station). About halfway it crosses the Pregolya River and passes the cathedral, the city's major landmark. The real heart is further north, around sprawling pl Pobedy.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

E-Type (Sovetsky pr 1; per hr R30; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sun) In room 155 of the State Technical University.

Internet Café (pr Mira; per hr about R80; 🕒 11am-11pm) This popular, new Internet café serves drinks; frustratingly, they charge by the MB, rather than by time.

Kiberda (☎ 511 830; ul Komsomolskaya 87; per hr R32; 🕒 noon-11pm) A funky, grotto-like Internet café that also serves decent meals.

Post offices (ul Chernyakhovskogo 74; per hr R30; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat; ul Chernyakhovskogo 56; per hr R30; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) Many post offices in the city now provide Internet access, including these branches.

MAPS

You can purchase good city maps from any kiosk in town for around R35.

MONEY

There are exchange bureaus at most hotels, often with 24-hour service. Many shops along Leninsky pr and elsewhere have ATMs.

Sberbank (ul Chernyakhovskogo 38 & Leninsky pr 2) This ubiquitous bank has locations throughout the city.

Stroivestbank (ul Gendelya 10) Gives good rates on credit-card advances and exchange.

POST

Main post office (ul Kosmonavta Leonova 22) Located about 600m north of pr Mira.

Post office branch (ul Chernyakhovskogo 32) A smaller, more convenient branch, opposite the central market.

TELEPHONE

International phone calls can be made from card-operated public phone booths (St Petersburg cards work in these). Cards are available from post offices, kiosks and most major hotels.

Hotel Kaliningrad (☎ 469 440; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; Leninsky pr 81) Has a handy phone-fax office that's open 24 hours.

Telephone & fax centre

(☎ 24hr) Get better rates by ordering calls here. Self-dial long-distance calls can be made one block south at its second office.

TOURIST INFORMATION

A free Russian/English guide to the region and city called *Welcome to Kaliningrad* is available in hotel lobbies. In Your Pocket guide (available only online) has the latest city listings at www.inyourpocket.com/russia/kaliningrad/en.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Baltma Tours (☎ 211 880; www.baltmatours.com; pr Mira 49; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) This is the best travel agency in town and by far the best source of regional information. There's nothing it can't do – from arranging visa support and accommodation to any kind of tour. It offers boat cruises throughout the region and excursions with friendly, knowledgeable guides to every corner of Kaliningrad. Car rental with a driver is typically US\$10 per hour, guides cost about US\$40 a day extra. Pick up a copy of Baltma's regional guide at the office.

Golden Orchid (☎ 538 553, 01145-21 098; www.enet.ru/~goldorch not in English; ul Frunze 6) Specialises in arranging extremely interesting trips to nearby military port Baltiysk (formerly Pillau), with permission, transport, guide and overnight accommodation costing about US\$50, or around US\$15 for six-hour excursions.

Sights

CATHEDRAL & AROUND

A Unesco World Heritage site, the red-brick Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 446 868; adult/student R70/35; 🕒 9am-5pm) is an outstanding remnant from the German past. Founded in 1333, it was severely damaged during WWII and, since 1992, has been undergoing total reconstruction. On the 1st floor are small Lutheran and Orthodox chapels; upstairs are displays of old Königsberg and objects from archaeological digs. On the top floor is an austere room with the death mask of Emanuel Kant, whose rose-marble **tomb** lies outside on the outer north side. The 18th-century philosopher was born, studied and taught in Königsberg.

The fine blue Renaissance-style building, just across the river to the south of the cathedral, is the **Former Stock Exchange** (Leninsky pr 83), built in the 1870s and now a 'Sailors' Culture Palace'.

North of the cathedral is Tsentralnaya ploshchad (Central Square) on which sits one of the dourest, ugliest of Soviet creations,

the upright H-shaped **Dom Sovietov** (House of Soviets). On this site stood a magnificent 1255 castle, damaged during WWII but dynamited out of existence by narrow-minded Soviet planners in 1967–68 to rid the city of a flagrant reminder of its Germanic past. Over 10 long years this eyesore was built in its place, but it has never even been used. Money ran out, and it was discovered that the land below it was hollow, with a (now flooded) four-level underground passage connecting to the cathedral.

Further north, near the university, is the popular **Bunker Museum** (☎ 536 593; Universitetskaya ul 2; adult/student R40/30; 🕒 10am–6pm), the German command post in 1945, where the city's last German commander, Otto van Lasch, signed capitulation to the Soviets.

WORLD OCEAN MUSEUM

Another of Kaliningrad's star attractions, this four-section **museum** (☎ 340 244; nab Petra Velikogo 1; each section adult/student R50/25; 🕒 10am–6pm Wed–Sun Apr–Oct, 11am–5pm Wed–Sun Nov–Mar) has some fascinating exhibits hidden among the three ships docked in the river. *Vityaz*, a former expedition vessel, has displays on its past scientific life as well as on other Russian research expeditions. The *Viktor Patsaev*, named after one of Kaliningrad's famous cosmonauts, was once part of the 'space flotilla' and its exhibits relate to space research. The B-413 submarine gives

a glimpse of life for the 300 seamen who served aboard the ship. There's also a pavilion with the skeleton of a 16.8m-long sperm whale, and the fairly uninteresting main hall, with a row of small aquariums and general information about the ocean. Visits to the *Vityaz* and *Viktor Patsaev* are by guided tour (every 45 minutes or so); you can wander freely through the sub.

OTHER SIGHTS

Kaliningrad's outstanding **History & Art Museum** (☎ 453 844; ul Klinicheskaya 21; adult/student R40/30; 🕒 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) is housed in a reconstructed 1912 concert hall by the banks of the pretty Prud Nizhny (Schlossteich, Lower Pond), a favourite recreation spot. The museum displays a fairly open history of the city. Though it mainly focuses on Soviet rule, the German past comes through as the city's spine. There are chilling posters of the castle's destruction.

On the edge of the shimmering Prud Verkny (Upper Pond), the **Amber Museum** (☎ 461 563; pl Vasilevskogo 1; admission R60; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) has some 6000 examples of amber artworks, the most impressive being from the Soviet period. In addition to enormous pieces of jewellery containing prehistoric insects suspended within, some of the more fascinating works include an amber flute and a four-panelled amber and ivory chalice depicting Columbus, the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and

the *Santa Maria*. You can buy amber jewellery in the museum or from the vendors outside. The museum is housed in the attractive **Dohna Tower**, a bastion of the city's old defensive ring sitting at the lower end of a small lake surrounded by parkland. The adjacent **Rossgarten Gate**, one of the old German city gates, contains a decent restaurant.

At the city's northern border, along Sovietsky pr, is the **Fifth Fort** (Pyaty Fort). One of the city's 15 forts constructed between 1872 and 1892 as a second line of defence, and the only one open to the public, it's a heavily wooded ruin that's fun to explore for hidden passages. Take trolleybus 1 to the Pyaty Fort stop.

The **Kaliningrad Art Gallery** (☎ 467 166; Moskovsky pr 62; 🕒 11am–7pm Tue–Sun) features exhibitions by local artists.

PROSPEKT MIRA

Pl Pobedy is the current city centre, which is the site of a massive cathedral that should be complete by the time you read this. The gold domes of the **Cathedral of Christ the Saviour** will be visible from many points in the city.

Extending west of the square is pr Mira, a pleasant artery lined with shops and cafés leading to some of the city's prettiest areas. Some 300m from pl Pobedy is the 1927 **Kaliningrad Drama & Comedy Theatre** (☎ 212 422; pr Mira 4) which was restored in 1980.

Another 200m further on is the **zoo** (☎ 218 924; pr Mira 26; adult/student R100/40; 🕒 9am–9pm Jun–Aug, 10am–5pm Sep–May), which before WWII was considered the third best in the world, but is now in a sorry state (donations accepted – and needed!). Some animals have been sold for funding, and while signs discourage feeding, zoo keepers actually encourage the public to feed the hungry bears, monkeys and other animals on display.

Further west is the splendid **Cosmonaut Monument**, a gem of Soviet iconography. This honours the several cosmonauts who hail from the region. Just west, as pr Pobedy branches out from pr Mira, is the entrance to **Kalinin Park**, an amusement ground and splendid, forestlike park on the grounds of an old German cemetery.

Walks through the linden-scented, tree-lined German neighbourhoods are the best way to experience old Königsberg. The entire area between prs Pobedy and Mira is par-

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Kaliningrad's most stylish hotel, the **Dona Hotel** (☎ 351 650; www.dona.kaliningrad.ru; pl Vasilevskogo 2; s/d from R1920/2480) has handsomely furnished rooms with ultramodern design touches worthy of a Philippe Starck protégé. Top-end rooms are pricier but offer spacious digs, with globe lighting, huge windows and flat-screen TVs. The hallways, with Miro-esque carpeting, are a tribute to sleek modernism. You'll also find friendly English-speaking staff, pleasant buffet breakfasts, and one of the city's best restaurants – Dolce Vita.

ticularly enchanting (ul Kutuzova especially), despite looking somewhat dishevelled.

Sleeping

Kaliningrad's hotels are often booked solid during the week by business travellers. To avoid disappointment, call ahead.

Chaika (☎ 210 729; ul Pugacheva 13; s/d from R1000/1200) One of the most pleasant hotels in town, the 24-room Chaika is set in an old German home, in a leafy, residential area. Rooms are cosy with some nice old touches.

Cherepakha (☎ 957 500; www.turtle-hotel.ru; Zoologicheskyy Tupik 10; s/d from R2200/2900) This charming guesthouse has 11 snug rooms, each with darkwood furniture, artwork on the walls and views of the park across the street. It's in a peaceful, tree-lined neighbourhood behind the zoo.

Hotel Moskva (☎ 352 300; pr Mira 19; s/d from R1800/2000) This 171-room hotel has been reborn after extensive renovations and boasts bright spacious rooms, friendly atmosphere and a good location.

Hotel Kaliningrad (☎ 350 500; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; Leninsky pr 81; s/d from R1000/1200) The town's principal hotel is conveniently placed and offers many services. The renovated rooms are clean and comfortable, but pretty charmless. Try to avoid rooms facing the city centre, which are noisy due to the traffic.

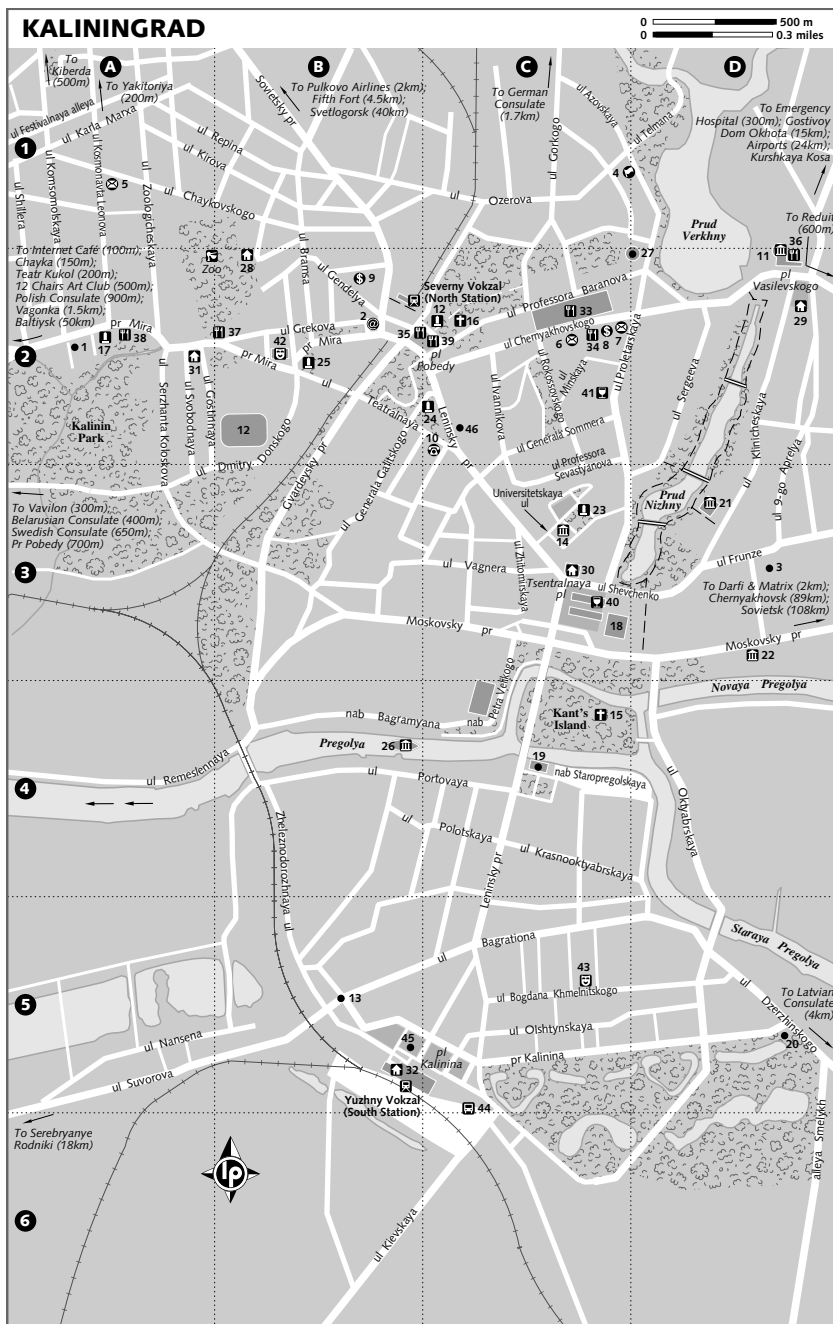
Gostivoy Dom Okhota (☎ 226 994; Petrovo village; s/d R600/800) For those who don't mind staying out of the city, this wooden chalet is a small slice of paradise. Rooms are modern, bright and clean, and the surroundings peaceful. There's horse riding nearby

RENAMING THE PAST

When Soviet authorities decided to rename the German city of Königsberg, 'Kaliningrad' was decided upon purely by chance. Mikhail Kalinin, the former president of the Supreme Soviet, had never even visited the region. He was, however, a great pal of Stalin's, and when he died in June 1946, Stalin immortalised him by plastering his name upon the town. Not surprisingly, few residents have any association with Kalinin; and those who do know his deeds would rather forget him. While less infamous than Stalin, Kalinin was pretty rotten: he turned his back on the famine in Ukraine in 1932 when millions starved; he also authorised the massacre of thousands of Polish officers in Katyn forest, which was later blamed on the Nazis (see the boxed text, p326).

Given the spate of renaming that has happened elsewhere in Russia, one might wonder why Kaliningrad has been so slow to follow suit. The problem is that there is no past to return to – at least no Russian one. For some, Königsberg, which means 'king's mountain', still conjures unpleasant associations of German conquest. This has given rise to the search for a new name, free of any past associations. Baltiysk – city of the Baltics – has been put forward, and would be an excellent idea, if only there weren't already a Baltiysk. Others are lobbying for Kantgrad, or city of Kant, which would be a fitting, if rather unpoetic, tribute to a man admired by Russians and Germans alike.

While the search for a new name seems like trivia to some residents, others see it as an apt metaphor as Kaliningrad searches for a new identity in a rapidly changing region.



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Dom Sovetov (House of Soviets)

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and meals can be ordered. It's on the main road to Zelenogradsk, 15km north along Sovetsky pr.

Komnaty Otdykha (☎ 586 447; pl Kalinina; s/d R280/560) Considering it's inside the south train station, the rooms here are surprisingly quiet and clean, and the shared bathrooms are OK.

Eating

12 Chairs Art Club (☎ 955 900; pr Mira 67; mains R200-300; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat, 1pm-1am Sun) Dark and atmospheric, this antique-filled cellar in an old German house serves tasty dishes like shrimp with kiwi sauce, trout with almonds, chocolate fondue and a wide range of cocktails, coffees and teas. On cold days you can warm yourself by the fire.

Dolce Vita (☎ 351 612; Vasilevskogo pl 2; meals R400-600; ☎ 1pm-1am Tue-Sun, 3pm-1am Mon) Next to the Dona Hotel, this lovely restaurant is a good place for a splurge. The European-influenced menu includes lobster cream bisque with crayfish, prosciutto with melon, roasted citrus turbot with eggplant chips and many other delectable temptations. The outdoor terrace opens during the summer.

Universal (☎ 216 931; pr Mira 43; meals R100-350; ☎ 10am-3am) This stylish complex comprises a café, restaurant (mains R100 to R150), cinema and nightclub. The restaurant is considered one of the city's top three; if you just want a casual meal, the café, with its various rooms of antique furnishings, makes a fine spot for dishes like French onion soup, vegetable risotto with mushrooms and chocolate truffle tart. English menu.

Valencia (☎ 433 820; pl Pobedy 1; meals R300-600) One of the city's best restaurants, Valencia has an elegantly set dining room, with good Spanish dishes (the paella is a favourite), an extensive wine list and a stately front parlour well-suited for afternoon tea or an aperitif.

Razgulyay (☎ 716 753; pl Pobedy 1; meals R50-180; ☎ 10am-2am Mon-Sat, noon-2am Sun) The extensive buffet features roasted meats, salads, fresh juices and many other tasty selections in a cheery, folk-style setting.

Solyanka (☎ 279 203; pr Mira 24; meals R65-90; ☎ 9am-11pm) There may be a doorman here, but this setup is basically cafeteria-style (non-Russian speakers can point to what they like), serving tasty dishes at great prices.

Yakitoriya (☎ 563 156; ul Leonova 59; meals R200-400) This late-night Japanese restaurant is a welcome addition to the Kaliningrad dining scene. Although the food is far from authentic, the *gyoza*, sashimi and other dishes aren't bad, and the lively, mixed crowd adds to the fun. English picture menu.

Planeta (☎ 465 235; ul Chernyakhovskogo 26; pizzas R60-180) The adjoining arcade, the loud music and the cheap pizzas draw a youthful crowd to this popular hang-out near the market. In addition to beer and pizzas, you can order soups, salads and desserts. In the same building is one of Kaliningrad's more popular nightclubs. Across from Planeta, you can stock up on fresh produce at the city's main market.

Таверна Дикый Дюк (☎ 465 235; ul Chernyakhovskogo 26; meals R190-500) Generous portions of scrumptious Russian, French

and Lithuanian dishes are served at this medieval-themed restaurant.

Solnechny Kamen (☎ 539 106; pl Vasilievskogo 3; meals R150-300) In the old Rossgarten Gate, this atmospheric restaurant specialises in seafood, with Russian dishes also well represented. In addition to the brick walls, stained glass and Teutonic touches in the main dining room, there's a pleasant outdoor terrace at the back.

Drinking

Redut (☎ 461 951; Litovskiy Val 27; meals R100-300) Although there's lots of food on the menu, the main reason to come to this lively pub is the decent selection of beer brewed on the premises. Try the delicious unfiltered brew. Simple beer-hall atmosphere prevails.

V Teni Zamka (Tsentralnaya pl, kiosk No 63; cappuccino R40-56) The city's best espresso, coffee cocktails and ice cream are served in this tiny but charming space, seating only 20, inside the aptly named kiosk village.

Vostochniy Kafé (☎ 147 121; ul Proletarskaya 3a; meals R150-300) The sounds of gurgling water pipes greet visitors upon entering this basement-level tea salon. Gauzy curtains, strings of Christmas lights and New Age music set the scene for lounging over pipefuls of flavoured tobacco and potfuls of green tea. Waiters are summoned via the red button dangling from the paper lanterns.

Entertainment NIGHTCLUBS

The city is full of discos and upscale nightclubs. Most charge a cover of around R150-300, though women typically get in free. Both **Planeta** (p347) and **Universal** (p347) are among the city's more popular nightclubs. Universal also has a cinema.

Vagonka (☎ 556 677; Stanochnaya ul 12; ☎ 11pm-4am) A lively, slightly alternative crowd fills this stylish nightclub west of Kalinin Park. Good DJs and elaborate dance shows make Vagonka a good pick. It's tricky to find, so it's best to take a taxi there.

Darfi & Matrix (☎ 457 777; Yaltinskaya ul 66) Darfi is a bowling and billiards emporium, that's a fun place for a game. Matrix is a house-music club with a young attractive crowd sweating it out on weekends. Both places are east of Dom Sovietov.

THEATRE, MUSIC & PUPPETS

Drama & Comedy Theatre (☎ 212 422; pr Mira 4; admission R100-180) Plays, ballets and classical concerts are staged here throughout the year. Stop by the box office to see what's on.

Philharmonic Hall (☎ 448 890; ul Bogdana Khmel'nitskogo 61a; admission from R30) This beautifully restored neo-Gothic church, which boasts excellent acoustics, hosts organ concerts, chamber music recitals and the occasional symphony orchestra.

Teatr Kukol (☎ 214 335; pr Pobedy 1; admission R50) Housed in a 19th-century Lutheran church, this puppet theatre is a big hit with young and old alike. Performances take place on Saturdays and Sundays at noon.

Plans have been made to hold classical concerts in the cathedral in the near future.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Kaliningrad's **domestic airport** (☎ 459 426) and **international airport** (☎ 446 666) are 16km north of the city, near Khrabrovo village.

Pulkova Airlines (☎ 716 663; pl Pobedy 4) flies two to three times daily to St Petersburg; **Aeroflot** (☎ 954 805; pl Kalinina 1) flies four times daily to Moscow. **Kaliningrad Airlines** (☎ 355 095; pl Kalinina 1) flies twice daily to Moscow, thrice weekly to St Petersburg. There is also a daily flight to Warsaw on **LOT** (☎ 342 707; www.lot.com; Leninsky pr 5). In the future, there may be flights connecting Kaliningrad with Copenhagen. Contact Baltma Tours to find out if other international routes have been added.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 443 635; international tickets ☎ 446 261; pl Kalinina) is next to Yuzhny vokzal. Buses depart from here to every corner of the region, including one or two per hour to Svetlogorsk, eight daily to Chernyakhovsk and four daily to Smiltynė, Lithuania, along the Kurshkaya Kosa. One bus daily goes to Klaipėda (R135) via Sovetsk, and there are two daily each to Kaunas (R255) and Vilnius (R360). Daily buses go to Riga (R360), Tallinn (R670) and Warsaw. There are two buses daily to Gdansk and Olshtyn, three weekly to Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen, and weekly buses to Hanover, Essen and Stuttgart. Buses to Poland and Germany are operated by **König Auto** (☎ 430 480).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From the south it is possible to enter Kaliningrad from Poland although the lines at the Lithuanian borders at Kybartai or on the Kurshkaya Kosa at Nida are not as monstrous. Petrol is widely available.

SEA

Baltfinn (☎ 728 401; www.baltfinn.ru; ul Suvorova 45) offers a weekly ferry service on the *George Ots*, travelling between Baltiysk and St Petersburg. Passengers can also travel on **Baltic Line** (www.baltics.ru/bl/eng) and **Trans Russia Express** (www.tre.de); both travel weekly between Lubeck, Germany, and St Petersburg, stopping at Baltiysk en route. Check their websites for the latest prices and schedules.

TRAIN

There are two stations in the city: **Severny vokzal** (North Station; ☎ 499 991) and the larger **Yuzhny vokzal** (South Station; ☎ 492 675). All long-distance and many local trains go from Yuzhny vokzal, passing through but not always stopping at Severny vokzal.

Local trains include nine a day to Svetlogorsk (R42), six to Zelenogradsk (R35) and two to Chernyakhovsk (R70). There are four to Vilnius (R1000, six hours), one daily to Berlin (R2400, 14 hours), at least one daily to Moscow (R1400, 23 hours) and St Petersburg (R1400, 26 hours), and every other day to Kyiv (R1180, 25 hours).

Getting Around

At being time, many of the city's streets were recently repaired and transit routes were in flux. By the time you read this, routes should be back in operation. Tickets for trams, trolleybuses, buses and minibuses are sold only on board (R10). To get to the domestic airport, take bus 128 from the bus station (R30). Taxis ask at least R400 from the airport, and less to the airport.

SVETLOGORSK СВЕТЛОГОРСК

☎ 253 (within the region), ☎ 41153 (from elsewhere) / pop 13,000 / ☎ Moscow -1hr

A pleasant but sleepy town on the edge of the sea, Svetlogorsk (formerly Rauschen, founded in 1228) lies just 35km northwest of Kaliningrad and makes for a quick and pleasant getaway from the city. The narrow beach is backed by steep sandy slopes, and pretty wooden houses set among tree-lined

streets dot the little town. Avid sunbathers head to Zelenogradsk or the Kurshkaya Kosa for heavier beach action.

The city was fairly untouched by WWII. On Oktyabrskaya ul is a 25m **water tower** and the curious red-tile-domed Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) **bathroom**. About 200m east of the main beach promenade is an impressive, colourful **sundial**, believed to be the largest in Europe.

At the eastern end of ul Lenina there is a **Commemorative Chapel**, opened in 1994 on the former site of a kindergarten. It is a memorial to the 23 children and 11 adults who died after an A-26 Soviet military transport plane crashed into the building. The tragedy was hushed up for almost 20 years and only came to light when the Orthodox Church built the chapel.

On ul Lenina, by turning right at the soccer fields, you'll soon reach an **Organ Hall** (☎ 21761; ul Kurortnaya), where you can hear concerts of Bach, Handel and others throughout the week. Most begin at 5pm.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several hotel options in town, including inexpensive ex-sanatoriums and a camping ground, all on Kaliningradsky pr, about 500m west of the Svetlogorsk II train station. One block east of the train station you'll find open-air drinking and eating options in the summer, with a sizzling grill selling shashlyk for R150.

Stary Doktor (☎ 21362; www.alter-doctor.ru not in English; ul Gagarina 12; s/d R1550/1850) One of the more charming options in town, Stary Doktor has warm and cosy rooms in an old German home. One of the town's best restaurants and souvenir shops are also at this address.

Dom Ryaka (per Beregovoi 1; meals R200-500) Overlooking the waterfront promenade, this restaurant is a popular but pricey place for a meal. The selection of fresh fish and seafood is decent, but it's the sea views that draw most diners.

Kuk-Si (☎ 21364; Oktyabrskaya ul 3; mains R90-180) One of Svetlogorsk's more surprising options, this nicely appointed Korean restaurant serves tasty dishes, made with fresh ingredients.

Kafe Blinnaya (Oktyabrskaya ul 22; bliny R10-20; ☎ 10am-6pm) This simple café serves a variety of inexpensive bliny.

Max (☎ 22040; Oktyabrskaya ul 36) This nightclub and bar attracts buzzing crowds of 20-somethings that come from Kaliningrad just to party for the evening.

Getting There & Away

Nine trains a day make the trip from Kaliningrad (R42, 1¼ hours). Be sure to get off at Svetlogorsk II, not I. More convenient and faster (45 to 60 minutes) are more than 20 buses and taxi buses which make the trip daily, leaving from the bus station and stopping outside the Severny vokzal on Sovetskyy pr (timetables are posted on the street at the bus stop). Svetlogorsk's bus station is 500m west of the train station, at the corner of ul Lenina and Kaliningradskyy pr.

KURSHKAYA KOSA КУРШКАЯ КОСА

☎ 250 (within the region), ☎ 41150 (from elsewhere) / 🚗 Moscow –1hr

Tall, windswept sand dunes and dense pine forests full of wildlife lie along this dramatic strip of land dividing the tranquil Curonian lagoon from the Baltic Sea. A paradise for both migratory birds and those interested in one of Russia's most fascinating – and least visited – sites, the Kurshkaya Kosa is the Russian half of the narrow, 98km-long Curonian Spit. It's a Unesco World Heritage Site, and a lovely place for exploring.

Fishing and holiday villages dot the eastern coast. The main ones, from south to north, are: Lesnoy (formerly Sarkau); Rybachy (formerly Rossitten), the largest with a population of 1200; and Morskoe (formerly Pillkopen). Highlights include admiring the dunes (the most magnificent are just south of Morskoe) and quiet walks by the sea or lagoon and through the pine forests.

The **Kurshkaya Kosa National Park** (☎ 21346; Lesnaya ul 7; 🕒 9am–6pm), the first national park in Russia, is headquartered in Rybachy, but runs a fascinating bird-ringing centre 7km north of Lesnoy, on the site of what was the world's first ornithological station. Some 25,000 visitors a year come by to see some of the world's largest bird-trapping nets (one is 15m high, 30m wide and 70m long), which trap an average of 1000 birds a day. A highly worthwhile, by-donation tour of the facilities (best prear-

ranged) will show you how they catch and ring hundreds of birds, including the blue-tit, scarlet chaffinch and middle spotted woodpecker, before releasing them. There is also a museum at the headquarters in Rybachy.

In Rybachy, also worth a visit is the red-brick church **Temple of Sergei Radonezhsky** (1873), reopened in 1990 after being used as a storage room for fishing equipment. The simple interiors are charming.

The **Ecotourism Information Centre** (☎ 28275; Tsentralnaya ul) in Lesnoy works in collaboration with the national park and organises excursions, transport and accommodation. You can also rent bikes there – the perfect way to explore the spit.

Sleeping & Eating

Kurshkaya Kosa (☎ 28242; Tsentralnaya ul 17; s/d/ste 15 Jun–25 Aug US\$60/65/70, other times US\$25/30/40) Located in Lesnoy, this is one of the best choices – cheery, modern and steps from the beach. The suites fit four people and are great deals. There's also an excellent res-taurant here.

Postoyalny Dvor (☎ 41296; s/d with breakfast €51/65) On the main road at the turn-off to Rybachy, this popular motel has small but pleasant rooms with nice wood furnishings. In the summer, the idyllic charm wanes as crowds descend on the adjoining restaurant's outdoor terrace. The restaurant (open 10am to midnight), which has the feel of a hunting lodge, has a solid reputation throughout the region – particularly for its seafood – though its dishes are good but not spectacular (meals R200 to R300). Some English spoken.

Dom Otdykha (☎ 21244; Pogranichnaya ul 11; s/d R250/350) This hotel in Rybachy has sparse, recently renovated rooms, some overlooking the lagoon.

Morskaya vezda (☎ 41330; Dachnaya ul 6; s/d from R2500/3500) Also near the beach, this handsome new guesthouse in Morskoe has 13 nicely furnished rooms, a sauna and billiard table. Guests can rent bicycles or beach gear.

Getting There & Away

Four buses a day from Kaliningrad (via Zelenogradsk) take the road to Smilnyne in Lithuania on the northern tip of the peninsula. There are about three others that run daily between Zelenogradsk and Morskoe.

CHERNYAKHOVSK ЧЕРНЯХОВСК

☎ 241 (within the region), ☎ 41141 (from elsewhere) / pop 43,000 / 🚗 Moscow –1hr

On the shady banks of the Inster River stands the old Georgenburg castle, its striking brickwork harkening back to the days when Teutonic knights ruled the land. Although its best days are behind it, much of the Georgenburg remains, making it one of the region's best-preserved castles. Aside from this, few visitors make the trip to Chernyakhovsk, the second-largest city and former Prussian city of Insterburg. First mentioned in 1390, when the Teutonic knights built the Georgenburg castle here, the city has been trampled by war several times and remains run down compared to the capital.

In castle ruins is a small **museum** (☎ 32424; Zamkovaya ul 1; admission by donation), open by appointment. The castle was damaged but

not ruined in WWII, but the Soviets subsequently destroyed parts of it and turned the rest into a town dump. Volunteers continue the endless renovations to this day. Every Sunday at noon, the local Knight's club meet and engage in medieval fencing matches, using handmade armour and weapons.

Nearby is one of Prussia's most famous horse-breeding sites, the **Georgenburg Stud Farm** (☎ 32301; www.georgenburg.com in Russian; ul Tsentralnaya 18), a tradition resurrected in the 1990s. Equestrian-lovers shouldn't miss the Georgenburg Cup, the international show-jumping tournament with entrants from some 20 different countries. It is typically held on the second weekend in September.

At least eight buses and minibuses a day make the 110-km, 1¼-hour trip from Kaliningrad. There are at least as many trains a day – all eastbound trains stop there.

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