

Russia Россия

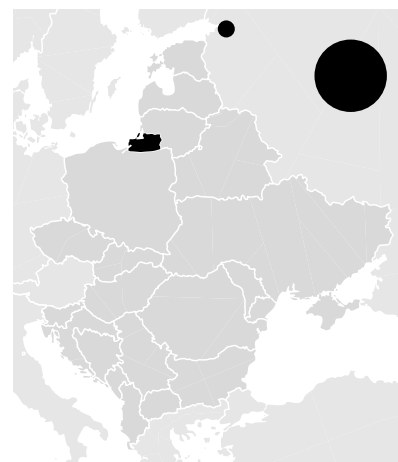
Looming over the rest of Europe with its immense, inhuman size and dark, brutal history, Russia is an essential and fascinating destination, the flip side of modern Europe and still an unknown quantity to most travellers. Somehow Russia manages to pull off the truly impressive feat of being both a really exciting place to travel while never relenting on its tediously bureaucratic approach to life. Stay in the EU if you want things easy and hassle-free, but venture east for one of the last truly adventurous and unpredictable destinations on the continent.

Brash, vulgar but totally fascinating, Moscow is the biggest city in Europe, home to more billionaires than anywhere else in the world and the economic motor driving Russia's resurgence as a great power. Its rich history, vast highways, startling architecture and frenzied pace of development makes it a must on any trip to Eastern Europe. The flip side of the coin is St Petersburg, the former imperial capital of Russia and still its most beautiful and alluring city. With its colourful and often crumbling Italianate mansions, winding canals and enormous Neva River, this is one of the incontestable highlights of the continent.

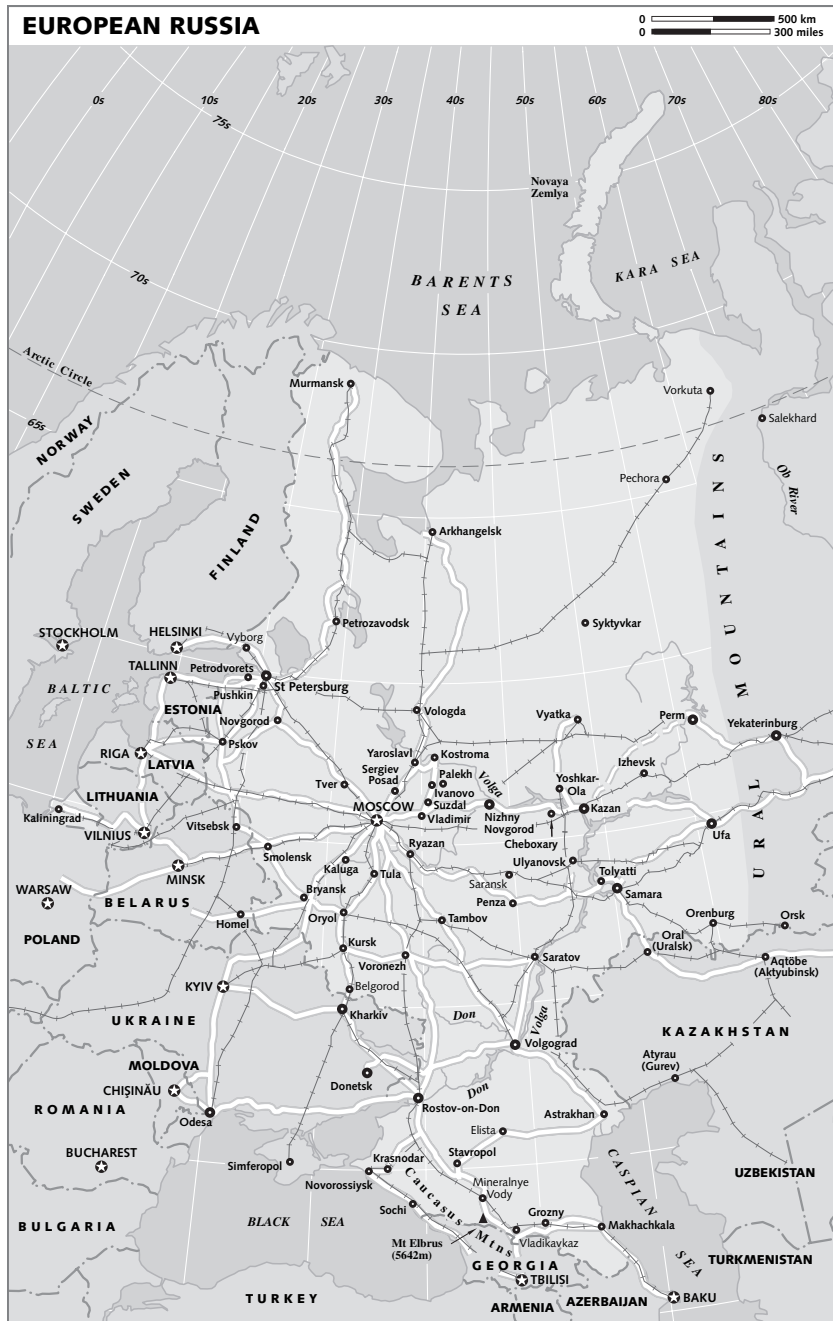
If you want to really be *outré*, drop into ignored little Kaliningrad, the former German city of Königsburg, and an enclave of Russia wedged between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea, and probably the least visited area in this entire book.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 16,995,800 sq km
- **Capital** Moscow
- **Currency** rouble (R); €1 = R34; US\$1 = R27; UK£1 = R51; A\$1 = R20; ¥100 = R23; NZ\$1 = R18
- **Famous for** vodka, communism, oil, gangsters
- **Official Language** Russian
- **Phrases** *privyet* (hi), *do svidaniya* (good-bye), *spasiba* (thanks), *izvinitye* (excuse me), *mozhno yesho stakanchik?* (may I have another little glassful?)
- **Population** 147 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 7; international access code 8 (wait for second tone) 10, or just + from a mobile phone
- **Visas** required by all and can be a real headache – begin preparing well in advance of your trip! For more details, see p744



EUROPEAN RUSSIA



HIGHLIGHTS

- Smell the power in the air at the **Kremlin** (p707), the nerve centre of the world's largest country, and see Lenin on daily display at fabulous **Red Square** (p705).
- Take in a visual feast on St Petersburg's **Palace Sq** (p723), home to the **Winter Palace** (p723), and enjoy the art collection of the world-famous **Hermitage** (p723).
- Experience a city that truly never sleeps during the **St Petersburg white nights** (p726) in late June.
- See the real Russia in the 'Golden Ring' – the historic towns of **Suzdal** (p716), **Vladimir** (p716) and **Sergiev Posad** (p717) – famed for their beautiful monasteries and churches and just a short trip from Moscow.
- Ride in style on the **Moscow metro** (p715), one of the most efficient and beautiful mass-transit systems in the world.

ITINERARIES

- **Three days in Moscow** Red Sq and the Kremlin have to be your first stop, followed by the Pushkin Museum and Church of Christ the Saviour on the Moscow River. On day two go south of the river to the sublime Novodevichy Convent, then take the stunning metro to the State Tretyakov Gallery. Check out Moscow's legendary nightlife in the evening. On day three strike out and see one of the delightful Golden Ring towns.
- **Three days in St Petersburg** Wander up Nevsky Prospekt, see Palace Sq, the mighty Neva River and the unforgettable Hermitage, where you can lose yourself for hours in the magnificent collection. Day two allows time for the historic St Peter & Paul Fortress, the Church on Spilled Blood and the Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo (Alexander Nevsky Monastery). On day three take an excursion out of the city and visit either Pushkin or Petrodvorets for a taste of how the tsars lived.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

If Russia can be called a land of extremes, then its weather is no exception. The winters are extremely cold – temperatures are regularly as low as -10°C or even -20°C in both Moscow and St Petersburg – while summers are hot and humid. Spring and autumn are both notional concepts, each lasting about a month.

HOW MUCH?

- **Second-class overnight train between Moscow and St Petersburg** R500 to R1300
- **Standard taxi fare within a city centre** R100
- **Metro journey in Moscow** R15
- **Bootleg DVD** R100
- **George W Bush novelty nesting doll** R800

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** R16
- **Litre of water** R30
- **Bottle of Baltika beer** R30
- **Souvenir T-shirt** R300 to R500
- **Street snack (blin)** R40 to R50

Despite its extremes of temperature, most times of year can be good for visiting Russia. The snow and ice make St Petersburg look quite magical, and Moscow surprisingly clean. If possible, avoid March and early April – the 'thaw' is the least pleasant time. The snow and ice melt, creating a ubiquitous brown sludge and general muddiness that makes walking about unpleasant. The best months to visit are May, June and September. See p911 for more information on Russia's climate.

HISTORY

Russia has its origins in countries it nowadays likes to think of as its satellites, effectively springing forth from Ukraine and Belarus in the Dark Ages, while taking its alphabet from Bulgaria, from where Christianity spread. The birth of the Russian state is usually identified with the founding of Novgorod in 862 AD, although until 1480 Russia was effectively a colony of the Mongols.

The medieval period in Russia was a dark and brutal time, never more so than during the reign of Ivan the Terrible (r 1547–84), whose sobriquet was well earned through his fantastically cruel punishments, such as boiling his enemies alive and, most famously, putting out the eyes of the architects who created his magnificent St Basil's Cathedral (p705) on Red Sq.

Despite Ivan the Terrible's conquest of the Volga basin and obsession with reaching the Baltic (at that time controlled by the Lithuanians and Swedes), it was not until the Romanov dynasty (1613–1917) that Russia began absorbing sparsely populated neighbouring regions and filling them with Russians. Territorial expansion between the 17th and 19th centuries saw the country increase in size exponentially to include Siberia, the Arctic, the Far East, Central Asia and the Caucasus, a massive land grab that created the huge country Russia is today.

Peter the Great (r 1689–1725) can in many ways be seen as the father of modern Russia. It was he who dragged the country kicking and screaming out of the dark ages, setting up a Russian navy, educational centres and beginning the construction of a new capital – St Petersburg – in 1703. Russia's capital moved north from Peter's hated Moscow in 1712, and was to remain the capital until the Bolsheviks moved it back to Moscow more than two centuries later.

Catherine the Great (r 1762–96), a provincial German princess with no legitimate claim to the throne, assumed power, having plotted to have her histrionic, pointless husband Peter III dispatched by palace guards. Catherine continued Peter the Great's progressive yet authoritarian policies to create a world power by the mid-18th century. Her 'enlightened despotism' saw the founding of the art collection that was to become the Hermitage, a huge expansion in the sciences and arts, a correspondence with Voltaire, and the strengthening of the nation. However, it also saw her brutal suppression of a Cossack rebellion and intolerance for any institution that would threaten her authority.

The 19th century saw feverish capitalist development undermined by successively autocratic and backwards tsars. Alexander I (r 1801–25) was too preoccupied with Napoleon (who invaded Russia and torched Moscow in 1812, but was eventually beaten by the Russian winter), and despite Alexander II's (r 1855–81) brave freeing of the serfs in 1861, which paved the way to a modern capitalist economy, political reform was nowhere on the cards.

The revolutionary movement grew in the late 19th century, mainly in Switzerland, where many exiled radicals had based themselves. Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, ascended the throne in 1894, and was even

weaker and more scared of change than his predecessors. It was his refusal to countenance serious reform that precipitated the 1917 revolution. What began as a liberal revolution was hijacked later the same year in a coup led by the Bolsheviks under Lenin, which resulted in the establishment of the world's first communist state.

Between 1917 and 1920 the Bolsheviks fought a bloody Civil War against the 'whites', who supported the monarchy. The tsar and his family were murdered in 1918 to deprive the whites of any figurehead, and eventually resistance to the communists trickled out.

By the time Lenin died in 1924 – since when he has lain in state at his purpose-built mausoleum (p705) on Red Sq – Russia had become the principal member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a communist superpower absorbing some 14 neighbouring states between 1922 and 1945. It was Stalin who, with incredibly single-minded brutality, dragged Russia into the 20th century. His forced industrialisation of the country involved the deaths of millions, but he got his results, making him an oddly ambivalent figure in Russia today. He saw Russia through the devastation of WWII, during which some 20 million Soviets died, and by the time he himself died in 1953, the USSR had a full nuclear arsenal and half of Europe as satellite states.

After Stalin, Khrushchev (r 1957–64) began a cautious reform programme and denounced Stalin before being removed and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, whose rule (1964–82) was marked by economic stagnation and growing internal dissent. Finally, Mikhail Gorbachev's period of reform, known as *perestroika*, began in 1985. Within six years the USSR had collapsed alongside communism, and reformer Boris Yeltsin was elected the first ever president of Russia in 1991.

Yeltsin led Russia into a new world of cut-throat capitalism, which saw the creation of a new superclass of oligarchs – businessmen who made billions from buying once state-owned commodities and running them as private companies – while prices soared and incomes dropped in real terms for the vast majority of the population.

Since 2000 Russia has been led by Vladimir Putin, an ex-KGB officer who has steered a careful course between reform and centralisation, alarming the West with his control of the media and brutal clampdown on the

independence movement in Chechnya. The Beslan school siege in September 2004 was the latest large-scale terrorist assault on Russia from Chechen separatists, whose activities have bedevilled Putin's presidency. Despite this, Putin remains an extremely popular president and Russia is in the grip of very healthy economic growth, even though there's clearly still a long way to go. Russia looks set to regain its position as a superpower through its vast gas and oil reserves rather than its nuclear arsenal, something most people would have laughed at just a few years ago. With WTO membership on the cards and Putin's hosting of the G8 summit in 2006, economically at least things are looking up, although any real reform of the lumbering bureaucracy remains a distant dream.

PEOPLE

There's some truth to the local saying 'scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tatar'. Russia has absorbed people from a huge number of nationalities: from the Mongols, the Tatars, Siberian peoples, Ukrainians, Jews, Caucasians and other national minorities who have all been part of Russia for centuries. This means that while the vast majority of people you meet will describe themselves as Russian, ethnic homogeneity is not always that simple.

On a personal level, Russians have a reputation for being dour, depressed and unfriendly. In fact, most Russians are anything but, yet find constant smiling indicative of idiocy, and ridicule pointless displays of happiness commonly seen in Western culture. Even though Russians can be unfriendly and even downright rude when you first meet them (especially those working behind glass windows of any kind), their warmth as soon as the ice is broken is quite astounding. Just keep working at it.

SPORT

Russia remains a formidable sporting presence in the world arena: at the 2000 Sydney Olympics Russia came away with 32 gold medals, second only to the USA, although at Athens in 2004 Russia found itself squeezed into third place by China, winning a still hugely impressive 28 gold medals. It excels at producing top-notch tennis stars, ice-hockey players and gymnasts.

On the ground, football is the game that interests Russians most, although many people care more passionately about the English premier league than their own teams, especially since Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich bought London club Chelsea for himself in 2003.

RELIGION

The vast majority of Russians identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, although the proportion of those who actually practise their faith is small. The Russian Orthodox Church is led by Patriarch Alexei II. The church has become ever-more political in recent years, virulently condemning homosexuality, contraception and abortion.

Religious freedom exists in Russia – St Petersburg boasts the world's most northerly Mosque and Buddhist Temple. There can be unbelievable residual prejudice against Jews, although this is very rarely exhibited in anything other than the odd negative comment and some deeply entrenched stereotypes. There is certainly no reason for Jewish travellers to worry about coming to Russia.

ARTS

Blame it on the long winter nights, the constant struggle against authoritarianism or the long-debated qualities of the mysterious 'Russian soul', but Russia's artistic contribution to the world is nothing short of gobsmacking.

Literature

Russia's formal literary tradition began relatively late. It was set in motion in the early 19th century by playwright Griboyedov before reaching its zenith with the poetic genius of Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), whose epic poem *Yevgeny Onegin* stands out as one of Russian literature's greatest achievements, an enormous, playful, philosophical poem from which any Russian can quote at least a few lines.

Pushkin's life was tragically cut short by a duel, and though his literary heir Mikhail Lermontov had the potential to equal or even surpass Pushkin's contribution – his novel *A Hero of Our Time* and his poetry spoke of incredible gifts – only a few years later Lermontov, too, was senselessly murdered in a duel in Southern Russia.

By the late 19th century Russia was producing some of the world's great classics – Leo

Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky were the outstanding talents, two deeply different writers of unquestionable genius. Tolstoy brought the world enormous tapestries of Russian life, such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, while Dostoyevsky wrote dark and troubled philosophical novels, such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The early 20th century saw a continued literary flowering during what was widely known as the Silver Age, an enormously productive era of poetic creation, seeing movements as disparate as the acmeists, mystics and symbolists combine in unpredictable and often brilliant ways. This incredible literary ferment, which brought Blok, Akhmatova and Mandelstam worldwide fame, was dramatically curtailed by the revolution. Seismic changes in literature occurred in Russia post-1917. Despite an initial burst of creative energy – some of Russia's best writing, virtually unknown to audiences in the West, was written during the period between 1917 and 1925 – by the late 1920s, with Stalin's grip on power complete, all writers not spouting the party line were anathematised. Dissenting writers were either shot, took their own lives, fled or were silenced as Stalin revealed his socialist realist model of writing, which brought novels with titles such as *Cement* and *How the Steel Was Tempered* to the toiling masses. Despite this, many writers kept on writing in secret, and novels such as Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and poems such as Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem* survived Stalinism to become classics known the world over.

Despite Khrushchev allowing some literary debate to begin again (he allowed Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to be published, a novella depicting life in one of Stalin's gulags), censorship continued until the mid-1980s when, thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness), writers who had only been published through the illegal network of *samizdat* (the home printing presses), and were thus read only by the intelligentsia, suddenly had millions of readers.

Since the end of the Soviet Union Russian literature has developed quickly and embraced the postmodernism that was creatively proscribed by the Soviet authorities. Current literary big-hitters include Boris Akunin

and Viktor Pelevin, both of whose works are widely available in English.

Cinema & TV

Russia has produced some of the world's most famous film images – largely thanks to the father of the cinematic montage, Sergei Eisenstein, whose *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–46) are masterpieces and reference points for anyone serious about the history of film. Despite constant headaches with authority, Andrei Tarkovsky produced complex and iconoclastic films in the 1960s and 1970s; *The Mirror* and *Andrei Rublev* are generally considered to be his two greatest works.

In recent times Nikita Mikhalkov and Alexander Sokurov have established themselves as internationally renowned Russian directors. Mikhalkov was awarded the best foreign film Oscar in 1994 for his *Burnt by the Sun*, and seemed to find a more sentimental and Hollywood-friendly style for his underwhelming *The Barber of Siberia* (1999), the biggest-budget Russian film ever made. Alexander Sokurov has made his name producing art-house historical dramas, including *Taurus*, *Molokh* and 2002's astonishing *Russian Ark* – the only full-length film ever made using one long tracking shot. Andrei Zvyagintsev's stunning debut feature, *The Return* (2003), which scooped the Golden Lion at Venice is a sublime visual treat. *Night Watch* (2004), one of the few Russian thrillers to have been a hit internationally, is a blockbuster-style movie about Moscow's gangland.

Russian TV is not nearly as rich a feast, although the recent big-budget adaptation of *Master and Margarita* by national channel Rossiya was hailed as a great success. There are several channels available, although this varies across the country. The past few years have been characterised by a barely disguised attempt on the part of Putin's government to claw back the media control that the Kremlin had lost since *perestroika*. The takeover of once-trailblazing NTV, Russia's first professionally run TV station (and crucially, one critical of the Kremlin), has had a long-term effect on the vibrancy of the Russian media as a whole. In 2001 the Putin government effectively staged a takeover of the station on spurious legal grounds, leading to the mass resignation of NTV's journalists and edi-

tors. Since then NTV has been unable to re-establish the high standard of political journalism that was its trademark. There are currently no national TV channels independent of the Kremlin operating in Russia. Most channels run a dismal array of chat shows, old Soviet movies, chronic pop concerts and American straight-to-video movies clumsily dubbed into Russian with one voice.

Music

Russia is, of course, famous for composers such as Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, and despite the enormous and almost universally horrific Russian pop-music industry, music is taken extremely seriously in modern Russia. Indeed, on any night of the week in Moscow or St Petersburg there's likely to be a good choice of concerts, gigs, ballet and opera to choose from.

Girl duo TATu remains one of the few Russian groups to be known beyond the former Soviet Union, although ginger matriarch Alla Pugacheva (a kind of Russian female version of Elton John complete with wardrobe) enjoys a cult following in some quarters.

Painting

Russian painting is fairly unknown in the West, the most celebrated artists being the avant-garde painters of the early 20th century, such as Vasily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich. Most Russians will be surprised if you have heard of them and not the 'greats' of the 19th century, such as Ilya Repin and the *peredvizhniki* (wanderers) – the generation of painters who rejected the strict formalism of the St Petersburg Academy and painted realistic rural scenes with deep social messages.

Anyone visiting Russia will want to see the collection of foreign art held at the Hermitage (p723). The best galleries for Russian art are the Russian Museum (p725) in St Petersburg and the State Tretyakov Gallery (p709) in Moscow.

Theatre & Dance

Theatre is one of the more vibrant art forms in Russia today. Since Chekhov revolutionised Russian drama in the late 19th century, Russia has seen countless innovations, from Stanislavsky, who created method acting, to Meyerhold, the theatrical pioneer whom Stalin had arrested and murdered.

Among the most celebrated contemporary theatre directors today are St Petersburg-based Lev Dodin and Moscow-based Roman Vityuk. The world-famous Bolshoi (p708) and Mariinsky (Kirov; p729) theatres have worked hard to reinvent themselves since the end of the Soviet Union, and their performances are regularly seen around the world on lucrative tours.

ENVIRONMENT

While Russia as a country encompasses almost every conceivable type of landscape, European Russia around Moscow and St Petersburg is characterised by flatness. You can take the train from one city to the other and barely pass a hill or a valley.

Kaliningrad is strikingly different, with its half of the Kurshkaya Kosa (Curonian Spit), the Curonian Lagoon and the world's largest supply of amber.

The disastrous environmental legacy of communism is enormous. As well as both Moscow and St Petersburg being polluted from traffic and heavy industry, the countryside is frequently blighted by factories and other industrial plants. Environmental consciousness remains relatively low, although things are slowly changing with the emergence of a small but vocal Russian environmental movement.

FOOD & DRINK

There's no denying it, Russian food is quite bland by most people's standards: spices are not widely used and dill is overwhelmingly the herb of choice, sprinkled onto almost everything. That said, you can eat extremely well in Russia – Caucasian food is popular throughout the country and is delicious. Moscow and St Petersburg both overflow with restaurants serving cuisine from all over the world. While the variety is hardly as great in Kaliningrad, world cuisine has also caught on and you can eat well there, too.

Staples & Specialities

Russian soups are very good. Delicious *borsch* (beetroot soup), *solyanka* (a soup made from pickled vegetables) and *ukha* (fish soup) are always reliable. *Pelmeni* are Russian ravioli – beef parcels wrapped in dough and served with *smetana* (sour cream) – and are the lowest common denominator in Russian cooking. Other more interesting possibilities

are *zharkoye* (literally 'hot' – meat stew in a pot), blini, caviar, beef Stroganov, *goluptsy* (mincemeat wrapped in cabbage leaves) and fish specialities, such as sturgeon, salmon and pikeperch.

Where to Eat & Drink

Traditional cheap Soviet eateries have been almost entirely edged out by slick fast-food chains and upscale restaurants serving the latest fashionable cuisine. You can still find the odd *stolovaya* (canteen) or *cheburechnaya* (specialising in Caucasian lamb dumplings, or *chebureki*) in most places for an ultra-cheap eat or a flash back to 1982.

Russian restaurants themselves tend to be quite formal, although there's an increasing number of relaxed diner-style eateries in evidence in Moscow and St Petersburg. Cafés, a Western import, have become extremely popular, although bars and beer halls are where most Russians prefer to drink. These relaxed, generally cheap places usually combine beer and hearty Russian fare with live music of some description.

Vegetarians & Vegans

Russia can be tough for vegetarians, and near impossible for vegans. Vegetarians will find themselves eating blini with sour cream, mushrooms, cheese or savoury *tvorog* (whey); mushroom julienne (mushrooms fried in garlic, cheese and cream); and visiting Georgian restaurants often. Vegans might be wishing they could go home.

Habits & Customs

Food etiquette is fairly straightforward. Symbolic of its importance in Russian culture, it's drinking that is full of unspoken rules. First of all, never drink vodka without *zakuski* (snacks) – you'll get drunk otherwise, whereas (according to any Russian) that will never happen if you consume pickled herring or gherkins with your vodka. Once a bottle (vodka or otherwise) has been finished, it's considered rude to put it back on the table – always put it on the floor instead. Don't talk during toasts, and always appear to drink to the toast (even if you dribble it down your chin or drink nothing at all). Men should always down a vodka shot in one. Women are let off this requirement, although being able to down a large shot will garner respect from all quarters.

MOSCOW МОСКВА

☎ 495 / pop 10 million

Moscow's sheer size is something most people aren't prepared for – while many come knowing this is the biggest city in Europe by far, this fact alone does not prepare most for the inhuman scale of the Russian capital. Brazen, ugly, intimidating, exciting and unforgettable, Moscow is many things to many people, and most visitors find their memories are a combination of positive and negative. History, power and wild capitalism hang in the air, beautiful buildings are demolished to build casinos, people continue to go about their never-easy lives as they have done here since time immemorial, and the city continues its maddening whirl.

That said, Moscow is a fascinating city full of museums, cathedrals, monumental architecture and exciting nightlife, and it's quite possible to find a quiet neighbourhood and create your own refuge from the chaos, or alternatively embrace the city and its infectious energy; few cities in the world have so much to spare.

HISTORY

While Moscow has been inhabited for more than five millennia, it was mentioned for the first time only in 1147 by Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, who to this day is acknowledged as the founder of the city by a huge equestrian statue of him on Tverskaya ul (p708). It was Yuri who built wooden walls around the city and oversaw its rise as an economic centre. During the reign of the Mongol Horde in the 13th to 15th centuries Moscow outstripped rivals Vladimir and Suzdal as the principal town of the Muscovy principality. Under Ivan the Great and Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century the city expanded enormously, as Russia became a vast state absorbing Slav lands to the west, the Baltic, the Urals and the north. The Crimean Tatars sacked the city in 1571, burning much of it, which prompted the construction of stone walls around Kitay Gorod (p708) that can still be seen today. By the early 17th century Moscow was the biggest city in the world.

The 18th century saw a huge decline for Moscow – Peter the Great moved the capital to his new northern city of St Petersburg in 1712, and fire, economic downturn and bubonic plague took their toll. Napoleon's onslaught on

MOSCOW IN TWO DAYS

Red Square (p705) and the Kremlin (p707) have to be your first stops, followed by the Pushkin Museum (p709) and the Church of Christ the Saviour (p709) on the Moscow River. On day two go south of the river and enjoy the spectacular collection at the State Tretyakov Gallery (p709) and the magnificent Novodevichy Monastery (p709) before hitting Moscow's legendary nightlife (p713).

Moscow a century later was even more catastrophic – Muscovites burned most of the city rather than surrender to the French, although thankfully the Kremlin survived. Following Napoleon's retreat and eventual rout, Moscow regained its confidence and developed as Russia's economic powerhouse – becoming an industrial city full of factories, slums and revolutionaries by the end of the 19th century.

It was the Russian revolution that restored Moscow's prestige – the resulting Civil War forced Lenin, fearing St Petersburg's proximity to hostile foreign governments, to move the capital back to Moscow in 1918. As capital of the USSR, Moscow became the nerve centre of a superpower. Under Stalin the Nazis were resisted (they came within 30km of the Kremlin, but never managed to take the city), the vast and beautiful Moscow metro was built, countless churches including the now reconstructed Church of Christ the Saviour (p709) were demolished and huge, neo-Gothic buildings such as the Seven Sisters skyscrapers that still define the city skyline became the order of the day. Soviet Moscow's proudest moment came when it hosted the 1980 Olympics – a last big fling for a declining nation that was soon to reform itself out of existence.

Moscow has seen no end of tumult since *perestroika* – the 1991 coup against Gorbachev, Yeltsin's attack on the parliament building in 1993, the terrible Ostankino TV Tower fire in August 2000 (becoming a metaphor for many despairing Muscovites of Russia's disintegrating infrastructure) and several large-scale terrorist attacks. The most famous and horrific terrorist assault was the Dubrovka Theatre Siege of October 2002 when Chechen terrorists took an entire theatre audience hostage, eventually culminating in a botched rescue attempt during which some 129 people were

killed. Despite this, Moscow has reinforced its position as Russia's economic powerhouse and today it's a city looking far ahead into the future.

ORIENTATION

The medieval centre of the city, the Kremlin, is a triangle on the northern bank of the Moscow River. The modern city centre radiates around it, the main streets being Tverskaya ul and ul Novy Arbat. The very centre of the city is defined by the 'garden ring' – a vast eight-lane highway that rings Moscow's central district.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Anglia British Bookshop (Map pp702-3; ☎ 299 7766; www.anglophile.ru; Vorotnikovskiy per 6; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; 🚗 Mayakovskaya) Has an excellent selection of books in English, including some antique Lonely Planet guides.

Moskovsky Dom Knigi (Map pp702-3; ☎ 290 4507; www.mdk-arbat.ru, in Russian; ul Novy Arbat 8; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun; 🚗 Arbatskaya) Moscow's main bookshop, excellent but crowded, stocks books on pretty much anything, including a very decent selection of English-language novels.

Internet Access

Café Max (Map pp702-3; ☎ 741 7571; www.cafemax.ru, in Russian; ul Novoslobodskaya 3; per hr R50-100; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Novoslobodskaya) This chain is in several locations throughout the city, but its most central branch is here on the 3rd floor of the shopping centre opposite the metro station.

Jagganath (Map pp702-3; ☎ 928 3580; ul Kuznetsky Most 11; ☎ 8am-11pm; 🚗 Kuznetsky Most) A pleasant alternative to loud, busy internet cafés – this veg café and health-food shop (p712) is a relaxing place to surf. Wi-fi is free to diners with laptops.

NetCity (Map pp702-3; ☎ 962 0111; www.netcitycafe.ru, in Russian; Kamergersky per 6; per hr R60; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Okhotny Ryad) An excellent spot right in the city centre.

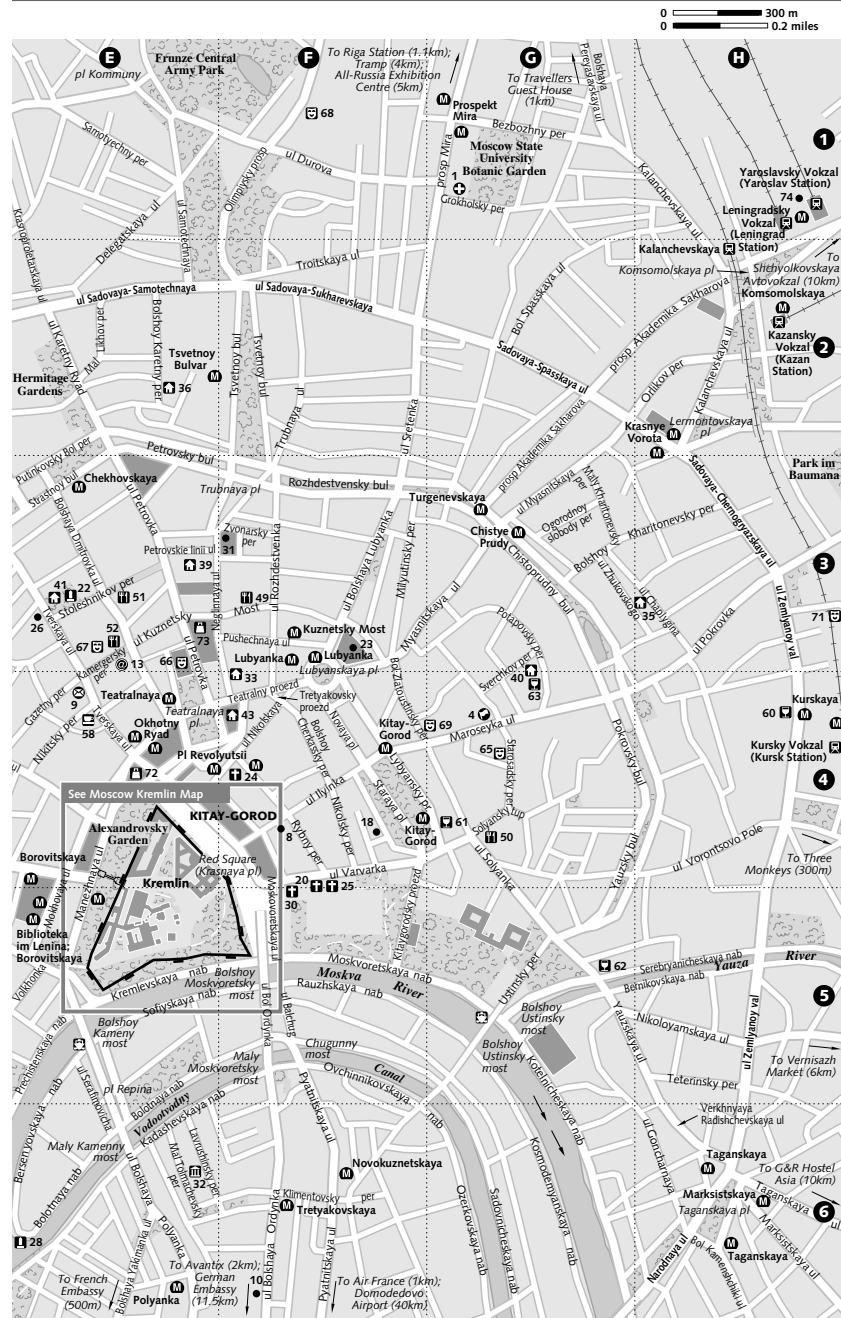
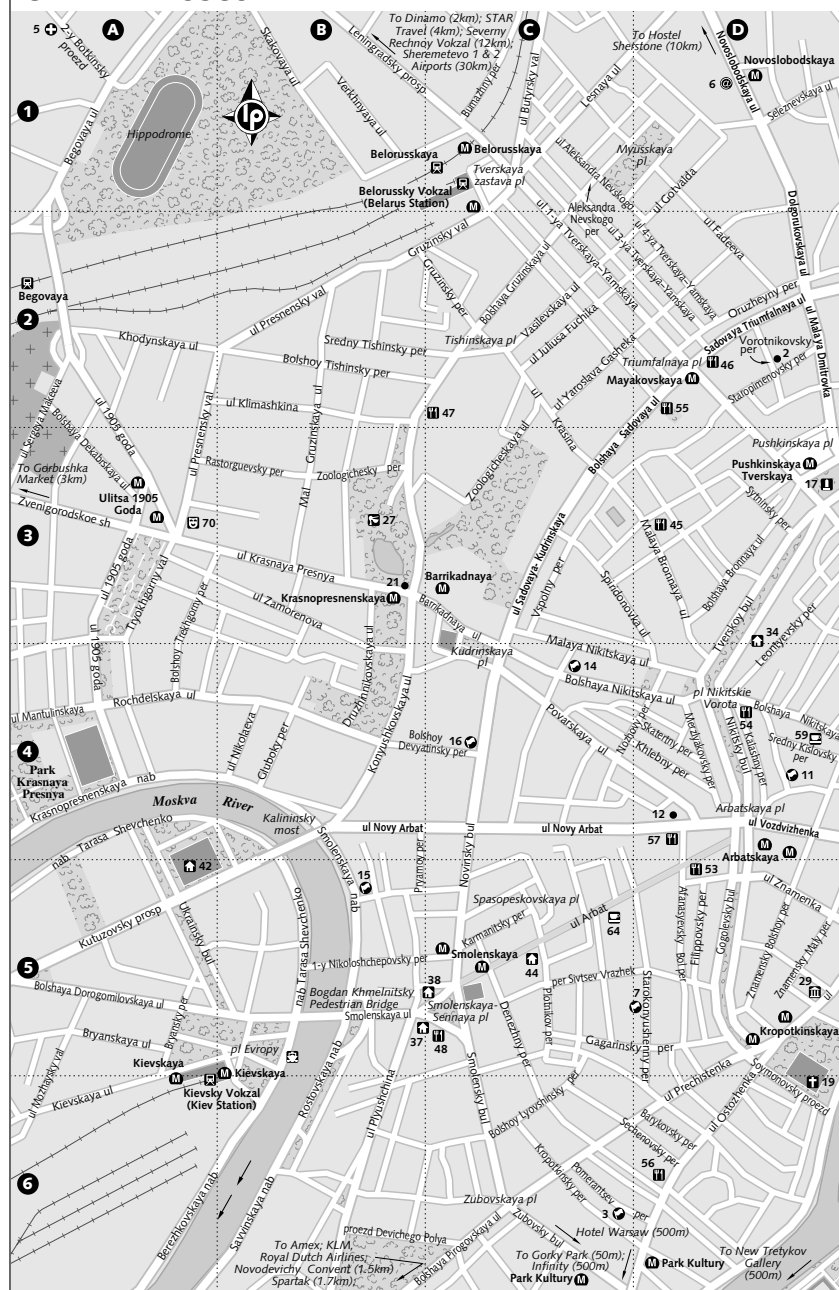
Left Luggage

The many metro stations around Moscow all have left-luggage services, known as *kamera khraneniya*. They charge minimal rates of R30 to R60 per 24 hours, although always check their opening times as even 24-hour ones can have 'technical breaks' of several hours.

Media

Moscow's huge expat population has created a large market for English-language

CENTRAL MOSCOW



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Dutch Embassy.....11 D4	Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow.....33 F4	Proekt OGI.....63 G4	
Jagannath.....(see 49)	East-West Hotel.....34 D3	Shokoladnitsa.....64 C5	
Moskovsky Dom Knigi.....12 D4	Galina's Flat.....35 H3		
NetCity.....13 E3	Godzilla's.....36 E2	ENTERTAINMENT ☑	
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publications. All three newspapers below are free in various bars, cafés and restaurants around the city. For those who can read Russian, *Time Out*, *Ne Spat!* and *Afisha* are the three best-known listings magazines, all available at any newsstand.

Moscow Times (www.themoscowtimes.com) Most reliable is this daily, a professional and well-produced newspaper that is free and available everywhere. Its weekend edition is excellent for visitors and has comprehensive listings for all leisure activities.

The Exile (www.exile.ru) A free, satirical fortnightly paper that has consistently outraged and offended since it began in the late 1990s. It's a great read if you want to know what's really going on in town – its brutally honest bar and restaurant section, Bardak, is legendary and scripture to many.

Element (www.elementmoscow.ru) This weekly entertainment paper is another good source of information, reviews and listings.

Medical Services

There are several expensive, foreign-run health services available in Moscow.

American Medical Centre (Map pp702-3; ☎ 933 7700; www.amcenter.ru/en; Grokholsky per 1; ☎ 24hr; ☑ Prospekt Mira) Features an English-speaking pharmacy (open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday).

Botkin Hospital (Map pp702-3; ☎ 945 0045; 2-y Botkinsky proezd 5; ☎ 24hr; ☑ Dinamo) A Russian facility where English is spoken.

Money

ATMs and reliable moneychanging facilities are located on every corner. Russian banks include Alfa Bank, Bank Moskvyy and Sberbank; banks work full days (usually 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday). Out of hours, most big hotels have a 24-hour bank or moneychanging facility. **Amex** (☎ 933 6636; fax 933 6635; ul Usaheva 33; ☑ Sportivnaya) cashes Amex travellers cheques.

Post

Central Telegraph (Tsentralnyy Telegraf; Map pp702-3; Tverskaya ul 7; ☎ postal counters 8am-10pm; ☑ Okhotny Ryad) This convenient office offers post, telephone, fax and internet services.

Telephone & Fax

Nearly all hotels have IDD from their rooms at exorbitant rates. It's far better to buy a phonecard and call from any pay phone around the city, or go to the Central Telegraph (above) and use the booths there. You can also send faxes from there. The Moscow mobile-phone

MOSCOW TELEPHONES CHANGE

At the time of writing some Moscow telephone numbers changed – those beginning with the number 9 changed to number 6. Therefore if you have a telephone number and it doesn't work, try changing the first digit to a 6. Note also that Moscow's city code has changed from 095 to 495.

market is huge, and most international phones with roaming will automatically switch over to a local network. It's perfectly feasible to buy a local SIM card if you're staying in town for any amount of time – just go to any of the hundreds of mobile-phone shops around the city.

Toilets

As a rule, the more you pay for a toilet, the worse it will be. Free toilets are normally available in museums, and there are nasty temporary toilets, which you pay around R10 for the honour of using, around metro stations. Free toilets in smart hotels, cafés and restaurants remain the best choice.

Travel Agencies

Avantix.ru (☎ 787 7272; www.avantix.ru; ul Shchipok 11; ☑ Serpukhovskaya) One of the leading online ticket agencies, Avantix's office in Moscow sells air and train tickets and can deliver them free of charge to you anywhere in Moscow.

Infinity (☎ 234 6555; www.infinity.ru; Komsomolsky pr 13; ☑ Frunzenskaya) With an office in both south Moscow and St Petersburg, Infinity is well used to dealing with the needs of foreigners. The helpful English-speaking staff can make most travel arrangements.

STAR Travel (☎ 797 9555; www.startravel.ru; 3rd fl, ul Baltiskaya 9; ☑ Sokol) The representative of STA Travel in Moscow, STAR can book student and young person's air and train tickets from its north Moscow office. Check its website for more offices in the city.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Red Sq and the area immediately around it repeatedly feature in travellers' tales of harassment by police. This can often involve document checks where the officers in question find something wrong with your (perfectly above board) visa or registration. See p741 for tips on how to deal with this. Other scams in the area have involved hackneyed tricks, such as someone dropping a wallet and their accomplice pointing this out to you. You pick up

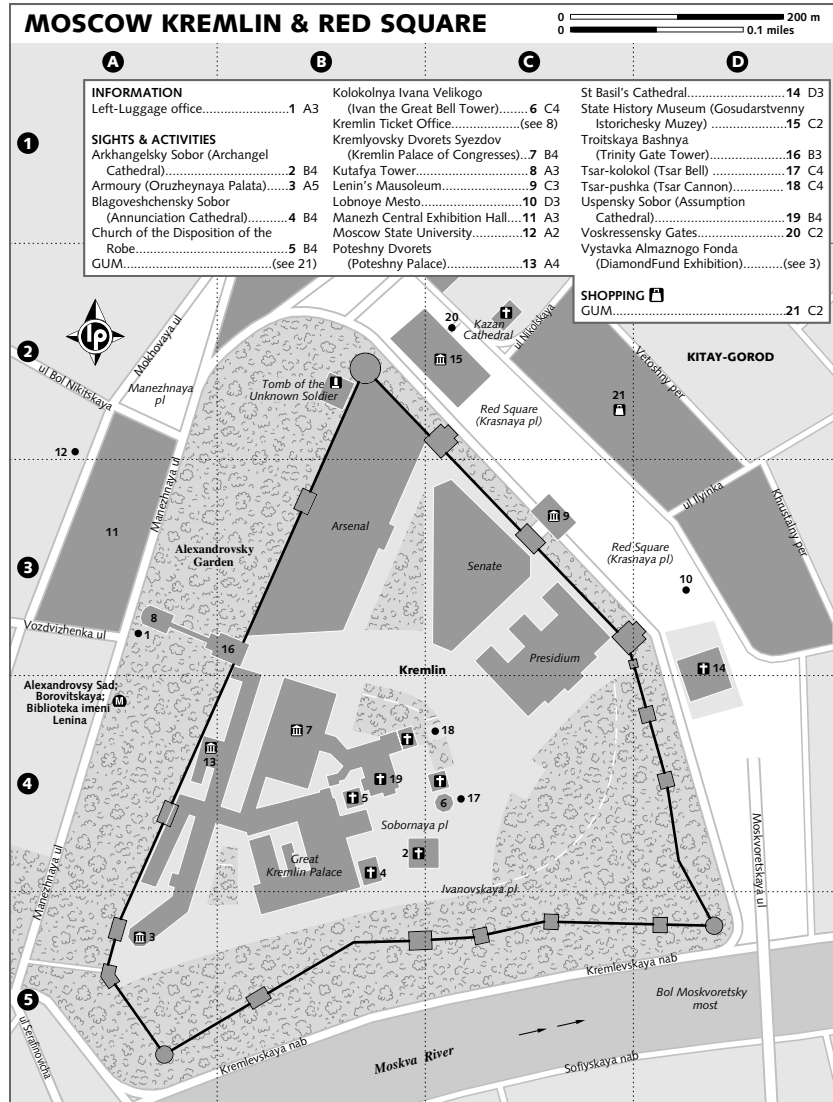
and return the wallet to the man who dropped it, whereupon he miraculously finds lots of cash is missing and demands you pay him the cash back. Just don't get involved if you see someone drop his or her wallet.

SIGHTS Red Square

Palpably the centre of Moscow and even Russia as a whole, **Red Sq** (Map p706; ☑ Pl Revolyutsii) is a massively impressive sight that brings back the full force of the Cold War, despite the two decades that have passed since *perestroika*. Something of a misnomer for this grey and rectangular strip to the east side of the Kremlin, Red Sq is surrounded by Lenin's Mausoleum to the west, the State History Museum to the north, GUM shopping centre to the east and fabulous St Basil's Cathedral to the south. Begin your visit to Moscow by coming here – there's nothing else like it.

Entering Red Sq through the **Voskressensky Gates** (Map p706), you'll emerge with a superb view of the magnificently flamboyant **St Basil's Cathedral** (Sobor Vasilia Blazhennogo; Map p706; ☎ 298 3304; admission R100; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Mon; ☑ Pl Revolyutsii) on the far side. Ivan the Terrible was so keen to immortalise his victory over the Tatars at Kazan that he took the measure of blinding the architects after they completed the cathedral's dazzlingly bright onion domes in 1561 to ensure that nothing of comparable beauty could ever be built. Its design is the culmination of a wholly Russian style that had been developed through the building of wooden churches. The cathedral owes its name to the barefoot holy fool Vasily (Basil) the Blessed, who predicted Ivan's damnation (as yet unconfirmed) and added (correctly) that Ivan would murder his son. It's definitely worth going inside to see the stark medieval wall paintings. Look out for the **Lobnoye Mesto** (Map p706) just in front of the cathedral, a 13m-long circular stone platform from where Ivan the Terrible addressed the Muscovites in 1547 and where historically the tsar's orders, as well as notices of execution, were announced to the townsfolk. Now it's considered good luck to throw a coin into the raised centre of the platform.

Lenin's Mausoleum (Mavzoley V I Lenina; Map p706; ☎ 923 5527; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun; ☑ Pl Revolyutsii) is global ground zero for nostalgic communists. Before joining the queue at the northwestern corner of Red Sq,



drop your camera either at the left-luggage office inside the State History Museum (opposite) or at the **left-luggage office** (Map p706; per bag R60; ☎ 9am-6.30pm; M Pl Revolyutsii) beneath Kutafya Tower, as you will not be allowed to take it with you. The hilariously sombre visit takes you into the very dark crypt under Red Sq where Lenin lies swathed in red velvet. Any

talking will provoke angry shushing from the soldiers who line the route. Bear in mind that Stalin had Lenin's brain removed in a rather fanciful attempt to study the 'pure communist' brain, leaving Vladimir Ilych looking decidedly green around the (probably wax) gills. Following the trip underground, you'll emerge beside the route along the Kremlin

wall, where other greats, such as Stalin, Gagarin and Brezhnev, are buried. Yeltsin-era plans to rebury Lenin in St Petersburg (where he apparently wished to be buried next to his mother) have been abandoned, and it appears that he isn't going anywhere in a hurry.

The **State History Museum** (Gosudarstvenny Istoricheskiy Muзей; Map p706; ☎ 292 4019; www.shm.ru, in Russian; adult/student R150/75; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Wed-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun; M Pl Revolyutsii) is the stunningly ornate red building at the northern end of the square. It has an enormous collection covering the whole of Russian history from the Stone Age on, and has been continually refurbishing its galleries since the 1990s. A joint ticket for the museum and St Basil's Cathedral saves a few roubles at R230.

Finally, drop into **GUM** (Map p706; ☎ 10am-10pm; M Pl Revolyutsii) to see the showpiece Soviet shopping centre turned designer mall for the new rich, with its stunning glass roof and centrepiece fountains.

The Kremlin

The nerve centre of Russian politics, the ultimate goal of Cold War espionage, a symbol of power and intrigue recognised the world over – for most first-time visitors what's most unexpected about the Kremlin are the several huge cathedrals at its heart.

Kremlin simply means 'citadel' in Russian and any medieval Russian town had one. Moscow's is huge – in effect a walled city, the best views of which can be got from across the Moscow River; try standing on either the Bolshoy Moskovetskiy or the Bolshoy Kameny Bridges for a superb view of the complex. The Kremlin (first built in the 1150s) grew with the importance of Moscow's princes and in the 1320s it became the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, which shifted here from Vladimir. Between 1475 and 1516 Ivan the Great brought master builders from Pskov and Italy to supervise the construction of new walls and towers, three great cathedrals and more.

Before entering the **Kremlin** (Map p706; ☎ 203 0349; www.kreml.ru; adult/student R300/150, photography R50; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed; M Aleksandrovsky Sad) deposit your bags at the **left-luggage office** (per bag R60; ☎ 9am-6.30pm; M Aleksandrovsky Sad), beneath the Kutafya Tower, just north of the main ticket office. The Kremlin ticket office, in the Aleksandrovsky Garden, closes at 4.30pm. The ticket covers admission to all buildings,

except the Armoury and Diamond Fund Exhibition (below).

SOUTHWEST BUILDINGS

From the Kutafya Tower, which forms the main visitors' entrance, walk up the ramp and pass through the Kremlin walls beneath the **Troitskaya Bashnya** (Trinity Gate Tower; Map p706). The lane to the right (south) passes the 17th-century **Poteshny Dvoretz** (Poteshny Palace; Map p706), where Stalin lived. The horribly out of place glass and concrete **Kremlinyovskiy Dvoretz Syezzdov** (Kremlin Palace of Congresses; Map p706) houses a concert and ballet auditorium, where incongruously enough lots of Western pop stars play when they are in Moscow.

ARMOURY & DIAMOND FUND

In the southwestern corner of the Kremlin, the **Armoury** (Map p706; Oruzheynaya Palata; adult/student R350/175; M Aleksandrovsky Sad) is a numbingly opulent collection of treasures accumulated over centuries by the Russian State and Church. Your ticket will specify a time of entry. Highlights include the Fabergé eggs in room two, and the reams of royal regalia in rooms six and nine.

If the Armoury hasn't sated your diamond lust, there are more in the separate **Vystavka Almaznogo Fonda** (Map p706; Diamond Fund Exhibition; adult/student R350/175; ☎ closed for lunch 1-2pm; M Aleksandrovsky Sad) in the same building.

SOBORNAYA PLOSHCHAD

On the northern side of Sobornaya pl is the 15th-century **Uspenskiy Sobor** (Assumption Cathedral; Map p706), focal church of prerevolutionary Russia and the most impressive of the Kremlin ensemble. It's the burial place of the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church from the 1320s to 1700. The tombs are against the north, west and south walls.

The iconostasis dates from 1652, but its lowest level contains some older icons, including the *Virgin of Vladimir* (Vladimirskaya Bogomater), an early 15th-century Rublev School copy of Russia's most revered image. The 12th-century original, now in the State Tretyakov Gallery (p709), stood in the Assumption Cathedral from the 1480s to 1930. The oldest icon on display is the magnificent 12th-century red-clothed *St George*, brought here from Novgorod; it is positioned behind glass by the north wall.

The **Tserkov Rizopolozheniya** (Church of the Disposition of the Robe; Map p706), opposite the Assumption Cathedral, was built between 1484 and 1485 and includes a delightful wooden sculpture exhibition and some lovely frescoes. The domes and facades of the cathedrals are being progressively restored.

With its two golden domes rising above the eastern side of Sobornaya pl, the 16th-century **Kolokolnya Ivana Velikogo** (Ivan the Great Bell Tower; Map p706) is the Kremlin's tallest structure. Beside the bell tower stands the world's biggest bell, the **Tsar-kolokol** (Tsar Bell; Map p706), a 202-tonne monster that cracked before it ever rang. North of the bell tower is the mammoth **Tsar-pushka** (Tsar Cannon; Map p706), cast in 1586, but never shot.

Back on Sobornaya pl, the 1508 **Arkhangelsky Sobor** (Archangel Cathedral; Map p706), at the square's southeastern corner, was for centuries the coronation, wedding and burial church of tsars. The tombs of all of Russia's rulers from the 1320s to the 1690s are here bar one (Boris Godunov, who was buried at Sergiev Posad).

Dating from 1489, the **Blagoveshchensky Sobor** (Annunciation Cathedral; Map p706) at the southwest corner of Sobornaya pl contains the celebrated icons of master-painter Theophanes the Greek. He probably painted the six icons at the right-hand end of the diesis row, the biggest of the six tiers of the iconostasis. *Archangel Michael* (the third icon from the left on the diesis row) and the adjacent *St Peter* are ascribed to Russian master Andrei Rublev.

Around Red Square

Manezhnaya pl, at the northwestern end of Red Sq, has transformed into the vast underground **Okhotny Ryad Shopping Mall** (Map pp702–3), worth a look just to shatter images of Russians queuing in the snow for bread. The former **Manezh Central Exhibition Hall** (Map p706), the long, low building on the southern side of the square, was home to some of Moscow's most popular art exhibitions until it was burnt to a shell in a mysterious fire in 2003. On the southwestern side of the square is the fine edifice of **Moscow State University** (Map p706), built in 1793. The classic Stalinist Hotel Moskva, once fronting the northeastern side of the square, was demolished in 2004 to make way for a huge underground car park. A replica of the original hotel (famous internationally for

being on Stolichnaya Vodka labels) is to be built after the car park is complete.

Teatralnaya pl opens out on both sides of Okhotny Ryad, 200m north of Manezhnaya pl. The northern half of the square is dominated by the **Bolshoi Theatre** (Map pp702–3), which was being renovated at the time of writing and is where Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* was premiered (to bad reviews) in 1877. Look out for the stunning Art Nouveau **Metropole Hotel** (Map pp702–3), one of Moscow's most historic, on Teatralny proezd facing the Bolshoi at an angle across the road.

Moscow's main avenue, elegant **Tverskaya ul** (Map pp702–3), replete with fashionable shops and costly cafés and restaurants, meanders uphill from Red Sq and continues pretty much in a straight line all the way to St Petersburg. There are also the lovely pedestrianised side streets of **Kamergersky per** (Map pp702–3) and **Stoleshnikov per** (Map pp702–3) to walk down. Further up on Tverskaya ul there's the **equestrian statue of Yury Dolgoruky** (Map pp702–3), the founder of the city, which now faces the **Moscow Mayor's Office** (Map pp702–3), where the Luzhkov administration concocts many of its hare-brained ideas.

Further up, on Pushkinskaya pl, there's the huge **Alexander Pushkin Statue** (Map pp702–3), a monument to Russia's national poet, behind which is the gaudy Rossiya cinema and casino complex. Another item of note on the square is Russia's first McDonald's, which saw lines stretching around the square when it opened in 1990. To this day it has the dubious honour of being the biggest McDonald's branch in the world, seating 700 burger munchers at any one time.

Kitay Gorod

This 13th-century neighbourhood was the first in Moscow to grow up outside the Kremlin walls. While its name means China Town in modern Russian, do not expect anything Chinese – the name derives from an old Russian word meaning 'wattle', for the supports used for the walls that protected the suburb. This is the heart of medieval Moscow and parts of the suburb's walls are visible. The main places of interest are the collection of churches in the neighbourhood. Look out for the charming, brightly painted **Monastery of the Epiphany** (Map pp702–3) opposite Ploshchad Revolyutsii Metro station and the small churches along ul Varvarka, incongruously

surrounded by general concrete sprawl. These is the 17th-century **Monastery of the Sign** (Map pp702–3), the **Church of St Maxim the Blessed** (1698; Map pp702–3) and **St Barbara's Church** (1795–1804; Map pp702–3). While the horrendous Hotel Rossiya has been demolished now, Sir Norman Foster is slated to build Europe's tallest skyscraper on the site, to be completed in 2011.

Communist history can be seen on Staraya pl, where the western side of the square is taken up with the **Central Committee Building** (Map pp702–3), once the most important decision-making organ of the communist party and thus the whole of the Soviet Union. Further up the hill, past Novaya pl, you'll see the huge and sinister **Lubyanka Building** (Map pp702–3) crowning Lubyanka Hill. This was the headquarters of the dreaded KGB and remains today the nerve centre of its successor organisation, the Federal Security Bureau.

Pushkin Museum & Around

Moscow's premier foreign art museum is a short distance from the southwestern corner of the Kremlin. The **Pushkin Fine Arts Museum** (Map pp702–3; ☎ 203 7958; ul Volkhonka 12; adult/student R300/100, audio guide R200; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun; 📍 Kropotkinskaya) is famous for its impressionist and postimpressionist paintings, but also has a broad selection of European works from the Renaissance onward, mostly appropriated from private collections after the revolution. There are also interesting temporary exhibits on regular display.

Nearby is the gigantic **Church of Christ the Saviour** (Kham Khrista Spasatelya; Map pp702–3; ☎ 201 3847; Prechistsenskaya nab; ☎ 10am–5pm; 📍 Kropotkinskaya), rebuilt at an estimated cost of US\$360

million by Mayor Luzhkov on the site of the original cathedral, which was destroyed by Stalin, and replacing what was once the world's largest swimming pool. It's massively impressive with its vast golden dome, although the Tsereteli-designed interiors wouldn't look out of place in the equally gaudy Okhotny Ryad Shopping Mall (also Tsereteli designed).

State Tretyakov Gallery

The world's best collection of Russian icons is found in the **State Tretyakov Gallery** (Gosudarstvennaya Tretyakovskaya Galereya; Map pp702–3; ☎ 951 1362; www.tretyakov.ru; Lavrushinsky per 10; adult/student R240/140, audio guide R140; ☎ 10am–6.30pm Tue–Sun; 📍 Tretyakovskaya), along with an outstanding collection of other prerevolutionary Russian art, particularly the 19th-century *peredvizhniki* (wanderers) and some incredible landscapes. A second building of the museum is the **New Tretyakov Gallery** (Map pp702–3; ☎ 230 7788; Krymsky Val 10; adult/student R240/140, audio guide R140; ☎ 10am–6.30pm Tue–Sun; 📍 Park Kultury), which houses a similarly brilliant collection of 20th-century art encompassing both socialist realism and the myriad of early 20th-century painting styles, as well as temporary exhibits.

Novodevichy Convent

A cluster of sparkling domes behind turreted walls southeast of the city centre on the Moscow River, **Novodevichy Convent** (Novodevichy Monastery; ☎ 246 8526; adult/student R150/75; ☎ 10am–5pm Wed–Mon; 📍 Sportivnaya) is resplendent with history and treasures. Founded in 1524 to celebrate the retaking of Smolensk from Lithuania, it gained notoriety as the place where Peter the Great imprisoned his half-sister Sofia for her part in the Streltsy Rebellion.

TOP FIVE MOST AWFUL

Mayor Luzhkov and his artist of choice, Zurab Tsereteli, are no strangers to controversy. Their taste for new, shiny, tasteless buildings beggars belief, but sadly for Moscow one has the power and the other has the 'vision' to see through these awful projects. Not all of these are creations of Tsereteli, but they are all classic examples of the horrendous taste that characterises the Russian capital.

- Peter the Great Monument (Map pp702–3; Bersenevskaya nab; 📍 Polyanka)
- Bogdan Khmel'nitsky Pedestrian Bridge (Map pp702–3; Rostovskaya nab; 📍 Kievskaya)
- Interiors of the Church of Christ the Saviour (Map pp702–3; Soymonovskiy pr; 📍 Kropotkinskaya)
- The water park outside the Kievskaya Station (Map pp702–3; pl Evropy; 📍 Kievskaya)
- Okhotny Ryad Shopping Centre (Map pp702–3; Manezhnaya pl; 📍 Okhotny Ryad)

You enter the convent under the red-and-white Moscow-baroque **Transfiguration Gate-Church**. The oldest and dominant building in the grounds is the white **Smolensk Cathedral** (1524–25). **Sofia's tomb** lies among others in the south nave. The **bell tower** against the convent's east wall, completed in 1690, is generally regarded as Moscow's finest. The adjacent **Novodevichy Cemetery** (adult/student R150/75; ☎ 9am–8pm) contains the tombs of Khrushchev, Chekhov, Gogol, Mayakovsky, Stanislavsky, Prokofiev, Eisenstein, Raisa Gorbachev, and other Russian and Soviet notables.

ACTIVITIES

Moscow has some of the swankiest *banyas* (traditional Russian steam baths) in the country, and it would be a shame to leave without trying one out. The most famous is the excellent **Sandunovskiy Bani** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 925 4631/33; Neglinnaya ul 14; ☎ 8am–10pm; M Tsvetnoy Bul), where you can enjoy a range of treats, from a communal bathing session, for R500 to R700, to a private and extremely luxurious bathing chamber from R1200. There are *banyas* everywhere throughout the city – ask at your hotel if you need a local recommendation.

TOURS

Capital Tours (Map pp702-3; ☎ 232 2442; www.capitaltours.ru; ul Ilyinka 4; M Pl Revolyutsii) offers both a city tour (US\$25, 11am and 2.30pm daily) and a Kremlin Cathedrals and Armoury tour (US\$46, 10.30am and 3pm Friday to Wednes-

day) departing from its office off Red Sq. Both options are highly recommended.

SLEEPING

Moscow is pricey, and nothing more so than its hotels. Bent on modernisation, the city has demolished the nasty but budget-friendly Intourist, Moskva, Minsk and Rossiya Hotels, and unfortunately, there are few budget places opening to bridge the gap. The good news is that Moscow has its first genuine hostels with both Godzilla and Sweet opening up in 2005. The bad news is that it's not always plain sailing for hostels, so double-check that they are operating before counting on them.

Budget

Galina's Flat (Map pp702-3; ☎ 621 6038; galinas.flat@mtu-net.ru; Flat 35, ul Chaplygina 8; dm/s/d R350/800/1000; ☎ ; M Chistiye Prudy) Still the cheapest bed in the city despite a recent price hike, Galina's central apartment functions as a homestay and is a wonderful way to see 'real' Russian life. Galina herself is friendly and speaks passable English. There's internet access and a kitchen that guests can use, as well as breakfast for an extra R50. Transfers to/from any Moscow airport are available for R1000.

Sweet Moscow (Map pp702-3; ☎ 241 1446; www.sweetmoscow.com; 8th fl, Flat 31, ul Arbat 51; dm R900; M Smolenskaya) One of Moscow's new breed of small, central hostels located in residential buildings, Sweet was forced to move to new premises on the old Arbat – a superb location

where it offers only dorms (six beds in three rooms). There's a basic kitchen and laundry facilities, but it's friendly and well run, with clean, smart little rooms.

Godzilla's (Map pp702-3; ☎ 629 8957; fax 692 1221; Bolshoy Karetny per 6; dm/s/d R900/2000/2000; M Tsvetnoy Bulvar) At last Moscow has a real hostel! Centrally located, run by a friendly Englishman and with a suitably eccentric name, this is the answer to many people's prayers. There are 49 beds, also laundry facilities, a common room and kitchens, although the shower provision is tight and will hopefully soon be expanded. Grand plans to take over the whole building are afoot, which will be the best news for backpackers since the end of Intourist. Until then book way in advance as it's always fully booked in summer.

Travellers Guest House (☎ 631 4059; www.tgh.ru; 10th fl, Bolshaya Pereyaslavskaya ul 50; dm/r R950/2100; M Prospekt Mira) Once a real boon for budget travellers, the TGH is no longer such a great deal. Resting on its laurels for more than a decade now, the rooms, never great, are fairly crappy and slowly disintegrating. It's in a depressing block a fair way from the metro, and frankly until it refurbishes it's hard to recommend.

Hotel Tsentralnaya (Map pp702-3; ☎ 629 8957; fax 692 1221; Tverskaya ul 10; s/d R1400/2100; M Chekhovskaya) One of the city's best bargains – the Tsentralnaya is on Moscow's main street and offers great value, even if it's rooms are far more simple than the grand entrance suggests. While accommodation is basic and all facilities shared, this is a clean, safe option and highly recommended.

Midrange

Hotel Sverchkov (Map pp702-3; ☎ 625 4978; Sverchkov per 8; s/d R2300/2600; M Chistiye Prudy) This small hotel is really good value for money; set in an 18th-century Moscow residential building in the city centre. Rooms are fairly plain, but are comfortable and secure.

Hotel Warsaw (☎ 238 7701; warsaw@sovintel.ru; Leninsky pr 2; s/d R3200/3950; M Oktyabrskaya) Despite sounding like the worst Intourist horror hotel imaginable, the Warsaw is in fact brand new. It's in a fairly ghastly building just off Oktyabrskaya Sq, but it's actually modern, clean and well run inside, and good value at these prices.

Hotel Belgrade (Map pp702-3; ☎ 248 2692; Smolenskaya ul 8; s/d R3200/4160; M Smolenskaya) Once a

notorious fleapit, the Belgrade has made a concerted effort to clean itself up. Rooms aren't great – and indeed, many have barely been touched since the 1980s – but this is a very well-located midrange option and its exterior neon lights at night have to be seen to be believed!

Hotel Budapest (Map pp702-3; ☎ 623 2356; www.hotel-budapest.ru; Petrovskiy liniy ul 2/18; s/d €110/155; M Teatralnaya) An unassuming hotel in a small central side street, its rooms are stylishly decked out and the whole place has a rather elegant old-world feel. A new addition opened at the time of writing, the Pyotr Pervy Hotel (Peter the First Hotel), is smarter and gives itself four stars.

Hotel Ukraina (Map pp702-3; ☎ 243 3030; fax 956 2078; Kutuzovskiy pr 2/1; s/d R4200/4650; M Kievskaya) The magnificent Gothic-Stalinist façade of the Hotel Ukraina leaves you in no doubt that this was once one of the best hotels in the USSR. There are some stunning views over the river and the rooms are suitably grand. The whole place is set for total refurbishment, so prices will soon rise.

East-West Hotel (Map pp702-3; ☎ 290 0404; www.eastwesthotel.ru; Tverskoy bul 4; s/d R10,500/11,500; M Pushkinskaya Tverskaya) Quite unlike any other Moscow hotel, this old mansion has been done up in very Russian (read garish) décor, and is gated from the street and thus very secure. The rooms are comfortable, although similarly located in interior-design purgatory.

Top End

Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow (Map pp702-3; ☎ 783 1234; www.moscow.park.hyatt.com; Neglinnaya ul 4; r 12,000, ste R16,500/47,600; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ; M Teatralnaya) Probably the best hotel in the city, as reflected in its prohibitive prices. The stunning lobby sets the tone, and the 219 extraordinarily luxurious rooms do not disappoint. There are three restaurants and a superb health club, too.

Golden Ring Hotel (Map pp702-3; ☎ 725 0100; www.hotel-goldenring.ru; Smolenskaya ul 5; s/d R12,880/14,500, ste R17,000/61,200; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ; M Smolenskaya) An excellent Swiss-run business hotel. What it lacks in atmosphere it makes up for in views, service and location. The corner suites overlooking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are excellent.

EATING

Moscow food has undergone a massive process of evolution (and a degree of revolution), which is still ongoing. You'll eat well here if

BANYA RITUAL

No experience is more Russian than the *banya*. Many Russians believe that it's the only true way to get clean, and for some it's the only place they ever wash. You can pay for a private (*lyuks*) *banya* if you are a mixed-sex group wanting to bathe together. For a more authentic experience, go to a communal *banya* – far cheaper and usually segregated.

You'll get *tapki* (sandals), and some *prostinya* (sheets) to cover yourself with. Before entering you should buy some snacks and drinks for your (equally important) breaks from the bathing ritual, and a bunch of birch *veniki* (twigs).

Once inside, you strip down, put your sheet around you and head for the dry sauna, where you get nice and hot before plunging into the *parilka* (steam bath). Here you get seriously sweaty and beat the toxins out of your skin with the birch twigs. Normally, people do their own legs and arms, and then lie down and allow their friends to whip their backs and stomachs. It's actually not that painful, unless your friend displays sadistic tendencies. Once you're sweating more than you thought possible and are covered in bits of twig and leaf, run out of the *parilka* and jump into the freezing plunge pool (alternatively, if you are in the countryside run out naked into the snow and roll around in it). After a break to drink beer or tea and snack while discussing the world's problems, repeat – several times over. Don't miss Moscow's superb Sandunovskiy Bani (above) or St Petersburg's Krugliye Bani (p726), with its brilliant heated outdoor pool.

you have money, less so on a budget, but it can be done. Check out ultracool Kamergersky per for a huge range of cafés and restaurants. For snacks on the run, there are plenty of street stands selling hot dogs, *chebureki* (Caucasian meat pasties) and blini around metro stations and on many central avenues.

Lyudi kak Lyudi (Map pp702-3; ☎ 921 1201; Solyansky tup 1/4; mains R150; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6am Sat & Sun; ☎ Kitay Gorod) 'Everyday people' is a tiny but great little refuge popular with after-hours clubbers as well as young workers who swear by the excellent R120 business lunch.

Il Patio (Map pp702-3; ☎ 290 5070; Smolenskaya ul 3; mains R200; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎ Smolenskaya) With more than 15 outlets, this reliable Moscow chain changed its name from Patio Pizza to Il Patio recently. The pizza is the same, though – a big choice at reasonable prices.

City Grill (Map pp702-3; ☎ 299 0953; www.citygrill.ru, in Russian; Sadovaya Triumfalnaya ul 2/30; mains R350; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎ Mayakovskaya) This once-pioneering Moscow institution is now nothing special in a city of such high culinary norms, but it's still a reliable and well-located place to grab a decent modern European meal of above average standard. The music can be quite loud.

Sindibad's (Map pp702-3; ☎ 291 7115; www.sindibad.ru; Nikitsky bul 14; mains R350; ☎ noon-11pm; ☎ Arbat) The previous entirely Lebanese and Arabic menu here has been adapted to Muscovite taste and now includes sturgeon and pikeperch. However, you can still enjoy the excellent hummus, baba ganoush and pitta, among other Levantine specialities, in a cosy, convivial setting. Bookings advised on weekends.

Correa's (Map pp702-3; ☎ 933 4684; www.correas.ru; Bolshaya Gruzinskaya ul 32; mains R350-600; ☎ 8am-midnight; ☎ Barrikadnaya) This New York-style deli has become a Moscow institution in just a few years of existence, often known among the expat community as Isaac's, the name of its American chef. The sandwiches are wonderful, and the fresh supplies unrivalled. There's also a great and extremely popular breakfast menu (book on weekends) and a delivery service available.

Correa's (☎ 725 6035; ul Bolshaya Ordynka 40/2; mains R350-600; ☎ 8am-midnight) This branch, south of the river, is just as good as the original but roomier.

Starlite Diner (Map pp702-3; ☎ 290 9638; www.starlitdiner.com; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 16; mains R400; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Mayakovskaya) A well-deserved favourite –

expats come to this surreal American diner for a taste of home. Food and service are great, and the breakfasts are authentic and wonderfully calorific. There's now a second branch to the south by the Oktyabrskaya metro station, although it's not nearly as nice – stuck on a traffic island without the outdoor seating of the original.

Moskva-Roma (Map pp702-3; ☎ 229 5702; www.moscow-roma.ru, in Russian; Stolesnikov per 12; mains R450; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Teatralnaya) Funky and fun, Moskva-Roma combines a very high standard of modern Italian cooking with a happening atmosphere, with DJs most nights and some of the best staff in the city.

Café Margarita (Map pp702-3; ☎ 299 6534; www.cafe-margarita.ru; Malaya Bronnaya ul 28; mains R500; ☎ noon-1am; ☎ Mayakovskaya) On Patriarch's Ponds, the gorgeous square immortalised by the opening chapter of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, is this great place. Its prices are rather high, but there's nowhere else like it in the city, with its well-read crowd and literary connections, books lining the walls and live music nightly from 8pm (R100 charge per person). The set lunch (R200) is good value, too, and comes with a glass of red wine.

Tiflis (Map pp702-3; ☎ 290 2897; www.tiflis.ru, in Russian; ul Ostozhenka 32; mains R500-800; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎ Park Kultury) A real treat, Moscow's best Georgian restaurant is a fantastic affair, with lots of outdoor seating in a traditional-style, rambling Georgian complex that looks like it's been lifted from Tbilisi. It's not cheap, but its wonderful *lobio* (traditional spicy bean paste), *khachapuri* (cheese pie cooked with runny egg and butter in the middle), *satsivi* (spicy chicken or turkey served cold in a herb sauce) and other classic Georgian dishes make it well worth a splurge.

Cheap Eats

Zhiguli (Map pp702-3; ☎ 291 4144; ul Novy Arbat 11; mains from R50; ☎ noon-2am; ☎ Arbat) Smart self-service canteen with a Brezhnevian theme. Good Russian food and low, low prices just off the Arbat.

Jagannath (Map pp702-3; ☎ 928 3580; ul Kuznetsky Most 11; mains R50-250; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎ Kuznetsky Most) A life saver for vegetarians, this excellent health-food place with a strong Indian theme has both a self-service buffet and a sit-down restaurant. Food is superb, although if you want the really good stuff ordered à la carte you have to sit in the gloomy restaurant rather

than the charming café area. There's free wi-fi and an internet café, too.

Pyat Zvyozd (Map pp702-3; ☎ 737 5545; Kamergersky per 6; sandwiches R75-95; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Globalisation is complete! In a city where it was once said you could buy Prada or a Picasso but couldn't get a decent sandwich to go, here's the Russian franchise version of the UK sandwich chain Pret a Manger. Here you'll find a frighteningly similar setup, with a range of sandwiches, wraps and sushi perfect for eating on the run between sights.

Prime (Map pp702-3; ☎ 737 5545; sandwiches R75-95; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Arbat (ul Arbat 9; ☎ Arbat) Kamergersky per (Kamergersky per 5/7; ☎ Teatralnaya) The original Moscow sandwich shop, also a none-too-subtle rip off of Pret a Manger, has two main locations both near major tourist sights, making them perfect for a takeaway sandwich.

DRINKING

Gravitate toward the **Hermitage Gardens** (Map pp702-3; ☎ Pushkinskaya Tverskaya) or the **Aleksandrovsky Garden** (Map pp702-3; ☎ Okhotny Ryad) during the summer months for relaxed beer drinking amid the greenery. Read the bar guide **The Exile** (www.exile.ru) for the latest cool places. Following are our long-time favourites:

Doug & Marty's Boar House (Map pp702-3; ☎ 917 9986; ul Zemlyanoy val 26; admission R60-100; ☎ noon-6am; ☎ Kurskaya) Run by Doug, the creator of the legendary Hungry Duck (once the wildest bar in Europe due to its famously hedonistic ladies night), the Boar House is busy throughout the week and attracts an expat and local crowd devoted to serious debauchery. Monday and Thursday are particularly busy (on Thursday women drink for free).

Kitaysky Lyotchik (Map pp702-3; ☎ 924 5611; Lyublynsky proezd; admission R150; ☎ 10am-8am; ☎ Kitay Gorod) The 'Chinese Pilot' is a long-standing favourite with the boho crowd, who come here for the live music and lack of aggressive door policy.

Kult (Map pp702-3; ☎ 917 5709; Yauzskaya ul 5; ☎ Kitay Gorod) A pretty laid-back club/bar with good DJs playing a big range of music for a young, up-for-it crowd.

Proekt OGI (Map pp702-3; ☎ 627 5366; www.proektogi.ru, in Russian; Potapovsky per 8/12; ☎ Chistiye Prudy) OGI is the acronym of a publishing house that diversified into bars and cafés and has become a phenomenon – the OGI bar/cafés (all with their own in-house bookshop) can be found all over central Moscow.

Cafés

While it took off first in St Petersburg, the coffee culture in Moscow has grown into a huge industry. Our highest recommendation goes to **Coffee Mania** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 229 3901; www.coffeeman.ru; Bolshaya Nikitskaya ul 13; ☎ Arbat) and **Shokoladnitsa** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 241 0620; www.shoko.ru, in Russian; ul Arbat 29; ☎ Arbat) and **Coffee House** (Map pp702-3; www.coffeehouse.ru, in Russian; Tverskaya ul 6; ☎ Okhotny Ryad) serve decent coffee. All three have branches scattered throughout the city, and they're often the only breakfast venues in town.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Negotiating Moscow's legendarily lavish and hedonistic clubland is a challenge. 'Face control' (the Russian term for an unreasonable door policy administered by thugs) rules. **The Exile** (www.exile.ru) has an up-to-date, un-PC club guide.

While many clubs disappear overnight, some enduringly popular venues include the following:

Propaganda (Map pp702-3; ☎ 924 5732; Bol Zlatoustinsky per 7; admission R50-200; ☎ noon-7am; ☎ Kitay Gorod) Known to one and all as 'propka', this long-time fixture on the Moscow club scene is an oasis of good management and friendly security guards seen in very few other establishments here. Commercial techno and house dominate, with great local and international DJs.

Art Garbage (Map pp702-3; ☎ 928-8745; www.art-garbage.ru, in Russian; Starosadsky per 5; admission free-R250; ☎ 9pm-6am; ☎ Kitay Gorod). Extremely friendly, alternative night spot popular for gigs and late night parties and hugely popular with students and arty types.

Cinemas

There are a few cinemas in Moscow that show films in the original language (usually English). Check the **Moscow Times** (www.themoscowtimes.com), which has a useful English-Language Movies section in its daily entertainment pages. One regular favourite is the **Dome Cinema** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 931 9873; www.domecinema.ru; The Renaissance Moscow Hotel, Olimpiyskiy Pr 18/1; ☎ Prospekt Mira).

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Moscow is the centre of Russian gay life, and even if the gay population is barely visible,

it's certainly a lot more socially acceptable than ever before in Russia to be queer. The first gay pride march in Russian history took place in 2006, despite openly homophobic comments from the city's mayor. The best resource for checking the ever-changing club scene is www.gay.ru/english.

Three Monkeys (☎ 916 3555; Nastavnichesky per 11; admission free-R300; ☎ 7pm-7am; **M** Chkalovskaya) The most fun and accessible gay venue, Three Monkeys is the latest incarnation of the long-standing Moscow gay club, spread over several floors and busy on weekends.

Theatre

Moscow has a long and proud theatrical tradition. A trip to the Bolshoi may be expensive, but it will usually be unforgettable, too. Otherwise, without speaking Russian you won't be able to enjoy the offerings of most theatres. Check the **Moscow Times** (www.themoscowtimes.com) or its weekend edition (out on Fridays) for regular listings and reviews.

Chekhov Art Theatre (Map pp702-3; ☎ 229 8760; www.mxat.ru, in Russian; Kamergersky per 3; tickets R100-500; **M** Okhotny Ryad) The city's most famous dramatic venue is still known to most Muscovites as MKhAT, where, under Stanislavsky, method acting was born at the turn of the last century. It sometimes has performances in English.

Bolshoi Theatre (Map pp702-3; ☎ 250 7317; www.bolshoi.ru; Teatralnaya pl 1; tickets R200-1500; **M** Teatralnaya) Sadly the main Bolshoi Theatre is closed for renovation until the end of 2008. In the meantime performances are held in the building next door. Unless you specifically want to see the Bolshoi troupe, consider going to the ballet in St Petersburg instead. Tickets are available online and through travel agencies at a premium, although the kiosks around the city (*teatralnaya kassa*) often offer some good bargains.

Live Music

Moscow offers a great variety of gigs and concerts, and is an increasingly popular stop-off on European tours for big international acts. The **Moscow Times** (www.themoscowtimes.com) weekend edition (or website) is a useful source of information. The main big gig venues are the Olimpiyskiy Sports Complex (**M** Tsvetnoy Bulvar) and the Kremlin Palace (p707).

Following are more intimate smaller venues, where you can often see good Russian and foreign bands:

Sixteen Tons (Map pp702-3; ☎ 253 5300; www.16tons.ru; ul Presnenskiy val 1; admission for gigs only R200-800; ☎ 6pm-late; **M** Ulitsa 1905 Goda) Atmospheric English-style pub with microbrewery downstairs and great gig and club venue upstairs featuring some of the best small gigs in the city.

Tabula Rasa (Map pp702-3; ☎ 508 4019; ul Kazakova 8A; admission for gigs only R100-400; ☎ 9pm-6am; **M** Kurskaya) A great venue for international bands (indie and rock mainly) with a cosy interior complete with pool table and fireplace.

Kitaysky Lyotchik (Map pp702-3; ☎ 924 5611; Lyublyanskiy proezd; admission R150; ☎ 10am-8am; **M** Kitay Gorod) The 'Chinese Pilot' is relaxed and unpretentious, has nightly concerts and is generally held to be the city's most reliable after hours hang out.

Sport

Football is definitely Moscow's main spectator sport. There are several teams in the city – the best known internationally are **Spartak** (☎ 201 1164; Luzhniki Stadium, Luzhnetskaya nab 24; **M** Sportivnaya) and **Dinamo** (☎ 612 7172; Dinamo Stadium, Leningradsky pr 36; **M** Dinamo). You can usually buy tickets on match days without much problem, either at the gate or from the theatre-ticket kiosks in most metro stations; prices start at R100.

SHOPPING

The new wealth of Russia has created a class of Russians for whom nothing is too expensive or extravagant. If you have the cash, check out the designer boutiques of Tretyakovsky proezd, where Prada, Gucci and Armani jostle for your attention. Nearby Stoleshnikov per is also full of designer labels. **GUM** (Map p706; ☎ 10am-10pm) and **TsUM** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 292 1157; www.tsun.ru; ul Petrovka 2; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun; **M** Teatralnaya) are also great for big brand names.

Old Arbat (Map pp702-3; ul Stary Arbat; **M** Arbatskaya) The Old Arbat is the historic, pedestrian street famous in Moscow for its proliferation of souvenir sellers. It's extremely naff and usually overpriced, but if you want souvenirs – from nesting dolls to Soviet flags and engraved hip flasks – this is the place.

Vernisazh Market (Izmailovskiy Park; ☎ 7am-6pm Sat & Sun; **M** Izmailovskiy Park) Far better value, but rather far-flung, this market has a huge collection of handicrafts, knick-knacks, souvenirs, clothing and art.

Although illegal in the West, pirated DVDs are available everywhere in Russia. In Moscow

you'll see them on sale all over the place, usually in underpasses by metro stations and kiosks around the city.

Gorbushka Market (☎ 730 0006; Barklaya ul 8; ☎ 10am-9pm; **M** Bagrationovskaya) This famous electrical goods and pirate DVD market may be worth a visit if DVDs are your thing. It's a former TV factory that now houses an immense number of shops selling every conceivable type of technology at knock-down prices.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Moscow is served by three main international airports; Domodedovo, Sheremetyevo and Vnukovo, which connect Moscow to every major European city and to major hubs worldwide. For a list of carriers that serve the city and airport information see p745.

Boat

The Moscow terminus for cruises to St Petersburg is 10km northeast of the city centre at the **Severnoy Rechnoy Volkzal** (Northern River Station; ☎ 105 3560; Leningradskoe shosse 51; **M** Rechnoy Volkzal). Take the metro to Rechnoy Volkzal stop, then walk 15 minutes due west, passing under Leningradskoe shosse and through a nice park.

Bus

Buses run to a number of towns and cities within about 700km of Moscow, but they tend to be crowded. However, they are usually faster than the *prigorodny* (suburban) trains, and are convenient to some Golden Ring destinations (p716). To book a seat you have to go 15km east of the city to the long-distance bus station, **Shchyolkovskaya Avtovokzal** (Shchyolkovskaya Bus Station; ☎ 468 0400; Shchyolkovskoye shosse 2; **M** Shchyolkovskaya), beside Shchyolkovskaya metro.

Train

Moscow is the heart of the Russian railway network, and internationally you can catch trains for destinations as far apart as Berlin and Beijing.

Of the nine stations in Moscow, use **Leningradsky Volkzal** (Leningrad Station; Map pp702-3; **M** Komsomolskaya) for trains to St Petersburg, Novgorod, Estonia and Finland; **Rizhsky Volkzal** (Riga Station; **M** Rizhskaya) for Latvia; **Belorussky Volkzal** (Belarus Station; Map pp702-3; **M** Belorusskaya) for Belarus, Lithuania, Kaliningrad, Poland,

Germany and the Czech Republic; and **Yaroslavsky Volkzal** (Yaroslavl Station; Map pp702-3; **M** Komsomolskaya) for Siberia, Mongolia and China.

Besides the train stations proper, tickets are sold throughout the city at railway ticket offices, the main one being the **Moscow Central Train Booking Office** (Tsentralnoe Zheleznodorozhnoe Agentsvo; Map pp702-3; ☎ 266 8333; Komsomolskaya pl 5; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun; **M** Komsomolskaya). Alternatively, travel agencies and other *kassa zheleznoy dorogi* (ticket offices) also sell tickets, sometimes for a small commission, but frankly it's worth it – it's much easier.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airports

Moscow's main international airport today is **Domodedovo** (www.domodedovo.ru), an easy train ride from central Moscow. An express (R120, 40 minutes, half-hourly) runs to/from Pavletsky Station, where you can transfer to the metro.

The other big international airport is ailing **Sheremetyevo 2** (www.sheremetyevo-airport.ru). From here minibuses 48 and 49 and bus 851 go to the nearest metro station, Rechnoy Volkzal, from where you can travel into central Moscow. A taxi can be ordered from the official taxi office in the arrivals area and should cost R700 to R900.

Metro

The magnificent **Moscow metro** (www.mosmetro.ru) is probably the best in the world, and is currently introducing new trains to bring the Stalin-era system up to modern standards. More than 150 metro stations in all parts of the city and a train departure every two minutes make it the best way to get around. The flat fare is R15, although buying in bulk saves a lot of money (eg 10 rides cost R125).

Trolleybus, Tram & Bus

Short-term visitors are unlikely to use public transport beyond the metro. However, a comprehensive and dirt-cheap, although painfully slow, network of buses, trams and trolleybuses exists all over Moscow. In far-flung places it can be necessary to take one of these to get to the nearest metro station. If so, buy tickets on board (around R10 per trip).

Taxi

See p746 for information on hailing unofficial taxis in Russia. The standard rate for short

trips in unofficial taxis is R100, while longer ones cost R150 to R200. Official taxis cost more. You can book through the central **Taxi Reservation Office** (☎ 627 0000; 🕒 24 hr).

AROUND MOSCOW

Do yourself a favour when in Russia and make an effort to see more than just its two most famous cities. Escaping Moscow is vital if you want to get some sense of how ordinary Russians live. The historic towns surrounding Moscow to the northeast (known as the Golden Ring due to their magnificent churches and medieval monasteries) are a great place to start. The most interesting and accessible towns, each of which preceded the present capital as the political and cultural heart of Russia, are Suzdal, Vladimir and Sergiev Posad. The towns' churches, monasteries, kremlins (citadels) and museums make a picturesque portfolio of early Russian art, architecture and history.

Suzdal Суздаль

☎ 49,231 / pop 12,000

If you have the chance to visit only one of the Golden Ring towns, make it lovely Suzdal. Coming here from Moscow is a wonderful experience, as you'll see a traditional Russian town overflowing with old monasteries, convents, churches and intricately decorated *izbas* (wooden cottages) dotted in green fields around the meandering Kamenka River. Green fields reach right into Suzdal's centre, and the whole town is architecturally protected. A greater contrast from Moscow is hard to imagine.

SIGHTS

At the eastern end of ul Kremlyovskaya the 1.4km-long rampart of Suzdal's kremlin encloses the 13th-century **Rozhdestvensky Sobor** (Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral), the 1635 **bell tower** and the **Arkhierieyskie Palati** (Archbishop's Chambers). The latter houses the **Suzdal History Exhibition** (☎ 21624; admission R30; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed-Mon), which includes the original 13th-century door from the cathedral, photos of its interior and a visit to the 18th-century **Krestovaya Palata** (Cross Hall).

Founded in the 14th century to protect the town's northern entrance, the **Spaso-Yevfimievsky Monastery** (Saviour Monastery of St Euthymius; ☎ 20746; all-inclusive ticket R280, photos R100; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is at the northern end of ul Lenina.

Inside, standing before the seven-domed, 12th- and 13th-century **Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour**, a tall **bell tower** chimes a lovely 10-minute concert hourly. The old monastery **prison**, set up in 1764 for religious dissidents, now houses a fascinating exhibit on the monastery's prison life and military history, including displays on some of the better-known prisoners who stayed here.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Rizopolozhenskaya (☎ 24314; ul Lenina; s/d from R680/1100) Although housed in the decrepit 19th-century Monastery of the Deposition, some of the rooms have been renovated, but not all. It's a good bargain, though, and an atmospheric location.

Pokrovskaya Hotel (☎ 20908; www.suzdaltour.ru; ul Pokrovskaya; s/d R1820/2400) This pleasant hotel is located within the walls of the Intercession Convent. The rooms are clean and have some charm, despite being modern.

Kremlin Refectory (☎ 21763; Kremlin; mains R100; 🕒 11am-11pm) Located in the Archbishop's Chambers in the kremlin, the food served is traditional and the atmosphere lively. Be sure to sample the local *medovukha*, a lightly alcoholic, honey-flavoured mead drink that is simply heavenly.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Only buses serve Suzdal. There is one direct connection daily with Moscow's Shchyolkovskaya Avtovokzal, two buses daily to Kostroma, five to Ivanovo and regular services throughout the day to Vladimir. From Moscow it's often easier to take the train to Vladimir and then a bus to Suzdal.

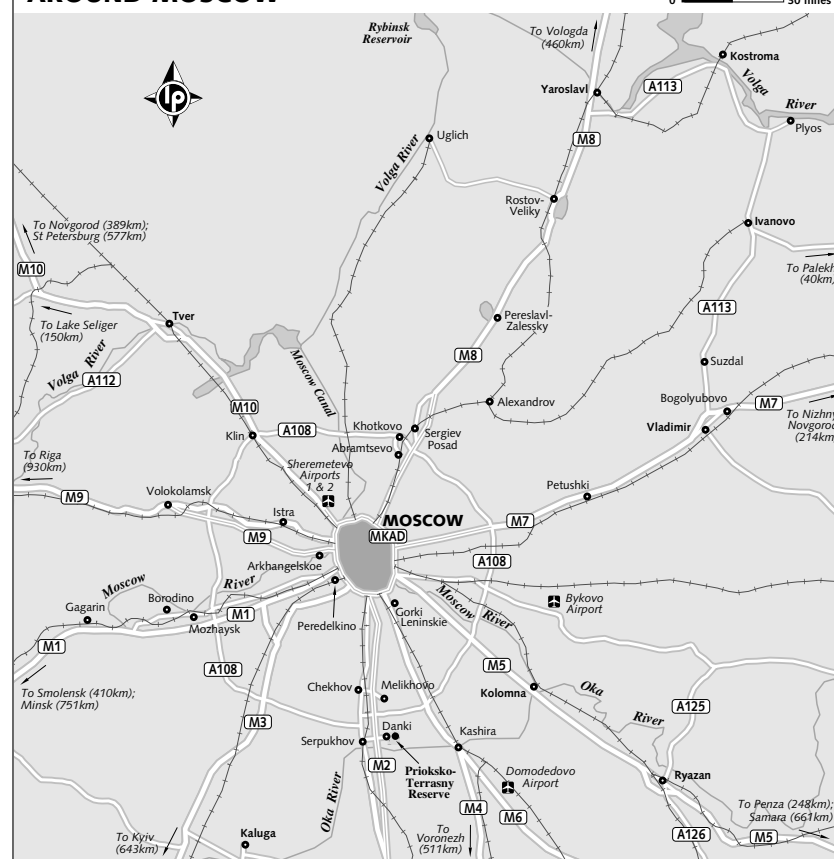
Vladimir Владимир

☎ 4922 / pop 360,000

Little remains in Vladimir, 178km northeast of Moscow, from its medieval heyday as Russia's capital. However, what does remain – several examples of Russia's most ancient and formative architecture – is worth pausing to see en route to or from the more charming town of Suzdal.

Begun in 1158, **Uspensky Sobor** (Assumption Cathedral; ☎ 325201; admission R100; 🕒 1.30-5pm) is a white-stone version of Kyiv's brick Byzantine churches, and contains magnificent frescoes by Andrei Rublev and others. Nearby the **Dmitrievsky Sobor** (Cathedral of St Dmitry), built from 1193 to 1197, is where the art of

AROUND MOSCOW



Vladimir-Suzdal stone carving reached its pinnacle.

From Moscow's Kursky Vokzal (Kursk Station), there are numerous suburban trains and buses to Vladimir. There are also bus services to/from Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Kostroma, Ivanovo, Suzdal and Kazan.

Sergiev Posad Сергиев Посад

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

Charming Sergiev Posad was known as Zargorsk throughout the Soviet era, and many people still refer to it as that today. It's a sleepy town of unexpectedly huge cultural significance, due to the 15th-century Troitse-Sergieva Lavra (Trinity Monastery of St Sergius) –

the reason why it receives a steady stream of visitors year-round. At just 60km from central Moscow, it's a pleasant and easy day trip by train. For its concentrated artistry and its unique role in the interrelated histories of the Russian Church and State, it is well worth the trip.

Troitse-Sergieva Lavra (Trinity Monastery of St Sergius; ☎ 45356; admission free, photos R150; 🕒 10am-6pm) was built in the 1420s; the dark yet beautiful **Troitsky Sobor** (Trinity Cathedral) is the heart of the Trinity Monastery. A memorial service for St Sergius (whose tomb stands in the southeastern corner) goes on all day, every day. The icon-festooned interior is largely the work of the great medieval painter Andrei Rublev and his students. **Uspensky Sobor**

(Assumption Cathedral), with its star-spangled domes, was modelled on the cathedral of the same name in the Moscow Kremlin. Outside the west door is the **grave** of Boris Godunov, the brother-in-law of Tsar Fyodor I and his eventual successor, despite having no legitimate claim to the throne. The **Vestry** (Riznitsa; admission R160; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Wed-Sun), which is behind the Trinity Cathedral, displays the monastery's extraordinarily rich treasury.

It's not necessary to spend the night really, but if you want to, try the **Russky Dvorik** (☎ 75392; fax 75391; ul Mitkina 14/2; s/d R1700/2100), which is a delightful small hotel a short walk east of the monastery. It also has a separate **restaurant** (☎ 45114; ul Krasnoy Armii 134; mains R300-500), which does get overrun with tour groups at lunch, but it's otherwise pleasant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Moscow's Yaroslavsky Vokzal (Yaroslavl Station), buses and *elektrichki* (suburban trains) to Sergiev Posad leave every half-hour or so, taking 75 to 90 minutes.

ST PETERSBURG САНКТ ПЕТЕРБУРГ

☎ 812 / pop 5 million

As elegant as Prague and as enchanting as Budapest but with just a smattering of the tourists due to Russia's intransigent visa regime, St Petersburg really will be the next big thing once visa-free travel arrives, although with that likely to be at least a decade away, you still have St Petersburg pretty much to yourself by the standards of other tourist-filled cities in the Baltics and central Europe.

In fact, comparing this giant warehouse of Russian culture to any other city is unfair. Long before Eastern Europe became known for its incredible cities, St Petersburg was the most important city in the entire region, capital of one of the world's most powerful empires and centre of countless movements in all fields of art. Since being founded by Peter the Great in 1703, St Petersburg has grown to be Europe's fourth-largest city and easily one of its most culturally significant. A 'window on Europe', the city of Dostoyevsky and Shostakovich, cradle of the Russian Revolution, St Petersburg has more to offer the traveller than perhaps anywhere else in Russia.

HISTORY

A brief visual survey of St Petersburg gives little indication that its incredible architectural wealth was originally built on a mosquito-infested swamp. Peter the Great (1682-1725), who wanted to create a modern capital for a country still stuck in the Dark Ages, founded St Petersburg on the shores of the Gulf of Finland in 1703. During his brutal childhood Peter had come to hate Moscow and its plotting coterie of *boyars* (aristocrats), and was determined to create a brand new city through which he could drag Russia into the modern world. The mouth of the Neva River was chosen for its accessibility for trade (Moscow being unnavigable from Western Europe due to its location so far inland) and with all the despotic powers at hand for a tsar, Peter soon had thousands of Swedish prisoners of war toiling in the toughest imaginable conditions to bring about his dream.

St Petersburg became the capital of Russia in 1713 and the court, government and much of Russian economic life was transferred here from Moscow, prompting the city to grow with extreme speed. Much of the look of the city was determined by the reign of Empress Elizabeth (1741-62), which saw favourite architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli give the city the warm, extravagant Italian feel, which is still overwhelmingly evident in the city today. Catherine the Great refined and completed many of Elizabeth's projects, complementing the city's architectural ensemble with the introduction of neoclassicism.

The city reached its zenith in the later 19th and early 20th centuries when it became a breeding ground for movements as diverse as style modern, the avant-garde, symbolist poetry and modern dance. Petrograd (as the city became in 1914, 'St Petersburg' being too Germanic when war broke out) was the setting for the 1917 revolution that saw Nicholas II abdicate, and then the communist coup later the same year, after which Lenin led the socialist government from the Smolny Institute. In 1918, in a significant blow to the city's future, Lenin moved the capital back to more easily defensible Moscow, where it remains today. In 1924, following Lenin's death, the city changed its name yet again to Leningrad.

Leningrad - already the focus of Stalin's brutal purges in the 1930s - experienced its darkest hour during WWII, when the German advance on the city led to a siege last-

ing almost 900 days. During that time more than one million people starved to death, a tragedy still fresh in the psyche of St Petersburgers today. Hitler's failure to take the city was, however, a huge dent to German morale and despite being badly damaged, Leningrad emerged as great a city as ever from the war.

After a 70-year experiment with communism, the city began a new era when it voted finally to change its name from Leningrad back to St Petersburg. With locally born-and-bred Vladimir Putin now running the country, the city has profited from central funding to restore many of its crumbling palaces. The city's 300th anniversary in 2003 set the tone for a new century of optimism and progress for Russia's graceful former capital.

ORIENTATION

St Petersburg is spread out across many different islands, some real and some created through the construction of canals. The central street is Nevsky Prospekt, which extends for some 4km from the Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo (Alexander Nevsky Monastery) to the Hermitage. The vast Neva River empties into the Gulf of Finland, filtered through a number of islands. The most significant of these are Vasilevsky and Petrogradsky Islands.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Anglia Bookshop (Map p724; ☎ 579 8284; www.anglophile.ru; nab reki Fontanki 38; ☎ 10am-7pm;

☎ Gostiny Dvor) Has a decent selection of contemporary literature, history and travel writing.

Dom Knigi (Map p724; ☎ 570 6402; Nevsky pr 62;

☎ 9am-9pm; ☎ Gostiny Dvor) The best place to buy Russian books. It may move back to its historic premises at Nevsky pr 28 soon.

John Parsons Bookshop (Map p724; ☎ 331 8828; nab reki Fontanki 38; ☎ 10am-7pm; ☎ Gostiny Dvor) The best English-language bookshop in the city, John Parsons wins out simply with the space and thus selection of books it has. It's conveniently located in the same building as Anglia Bookshop.

Internet Access
Nevsky pr boasts two internet cafés:
Café Max (Map p724; ☎ 273 6655; Nevsky pr 90/92; per hr R60; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Mayakovskaya)
Quo Vadis (Map p724; ☎ 333 0708; Nevsky pr 76; per hr R60; ☎ 9am-11pm; ☎ Mayakovskaya) Enter from Liteiny pr.

Internet Access

Nevsky pr boasts two internet cafés:
Café Max (Map p724; ☎ 273 6655; Nevsky pr 90/92; per hr R60; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Mayakovskaya)
Quo Vadis (Map p724; ☎ 333 0708; Nevsky pr 76; per hr R60; ☎ 9am-11pm; ☎ Mayakovskaya) Enter from Liteiny pr.

Laundry

There's a centrally located **laundry service** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 273 5806; ul Pestelya 17/25; per kg R22; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun; ☎ Chernyshevskaya); look for the sign '*khimchistka i prachehnaya*'. Otherwise, many minihotels and hostels offer a laundry service at perfectly reasonable rates.

Left Luggage

You can leave your luggage at any *kamera khraneniya* (luggage office) of the big metro stations for R30 to R50 per day.

Media

There is lots of St Petersburg-specific media. In English there's the *St Petersburg Times*, *Pulse* and the bottom-rate *Neva News*. Super useful for visitors is **In Your Pocket St Petersburg** (www.inyourpocket.com), available for free from hotels and hostels.

Medical Services

International Clinic (Map p724; ☎ 336 3333; www.icspb.com; 6 ul Marata; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Mayakovskaya) Pricey treatment is available at this clinic, which offers 24-hour emergency care and direct billing to insurance companies.
Poliklinika No 2 (Map pp720-1; ☎ 316 6272; Moskovsky pr 22; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Technologicheskoy Institut) This service is also recommended - and much cheaper.

Following are two 24-hour pharmacies:

Apteka (Map p724; ☎ 277 5962; Nevsky pr 83; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya)

Apteka Petrofarm (Map p724; ☎ 314 5401; Nevsky pr 22; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Nevsky Pr)

Money

Currency-exchange offices are located through the city. ATMs are inside every metro station, in hotels and department stores, in main post offices and along major streets. Travellers cheques can be exchanged at most Russian banks (with commission, of course).

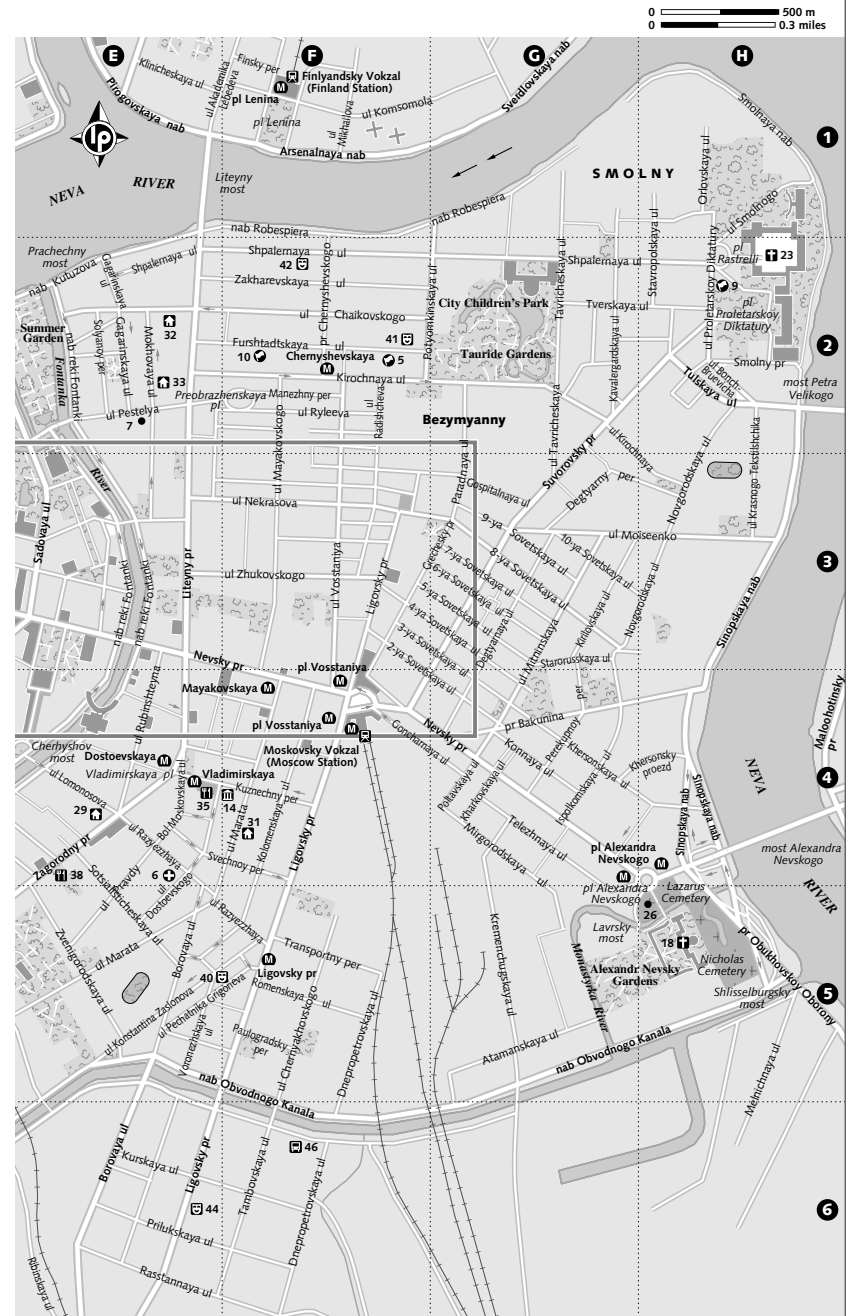
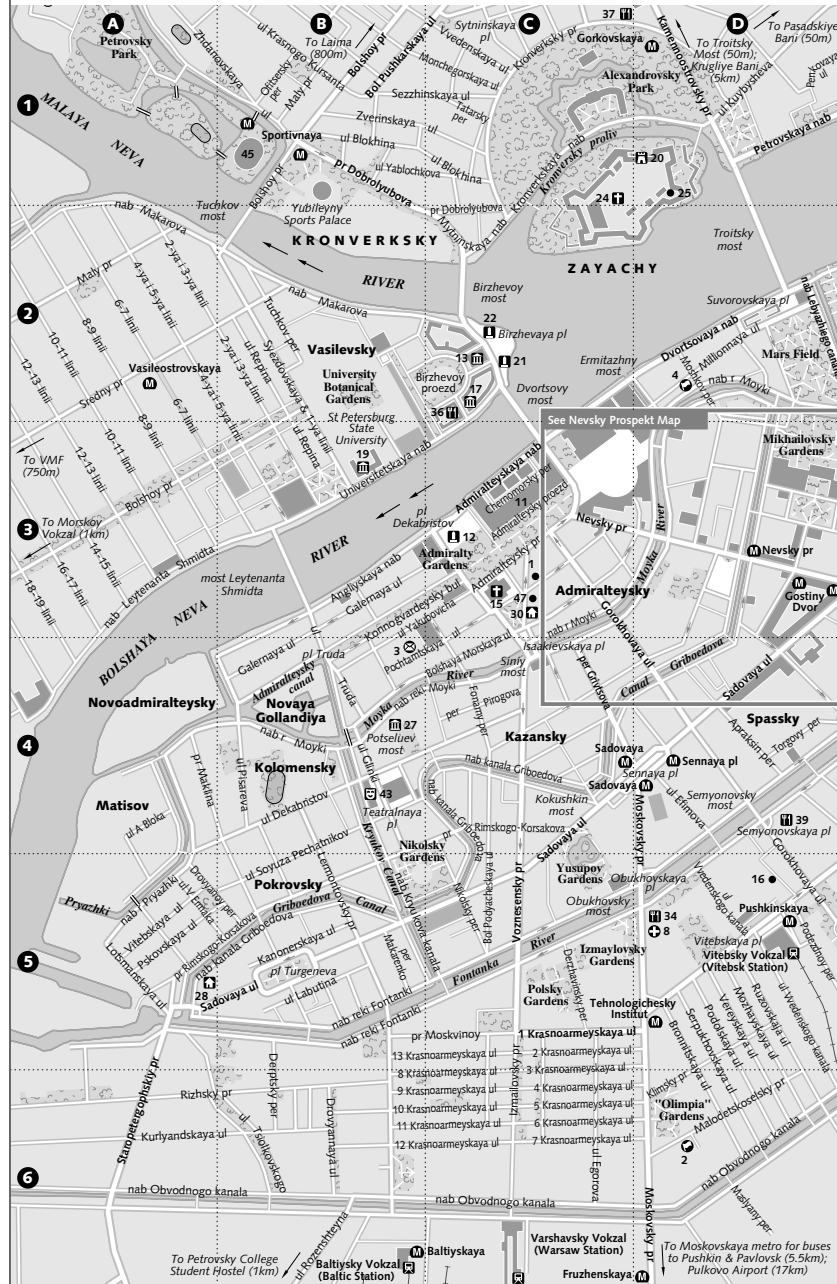
Post

Central post office (Glavpochtamt; Map pp720-1; ☎ 312 8302; Pochtamtakaya ul 9; ☎ 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5.45pm Sun; ☎ Sadovaya) Come here to send large parcels abroad (small post offices will usually refuse to take them).

Telephone & Fax

You can make international calls from most modern call boxes. *Telefonaya karta* (phone-cards) can be bought in kiosks around town, as well as at metro station ticket offices. Call

CENTRAL ST PETERSBURG



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Amex.....	1 C3
Canadian Embassy.....	2 D6
Central Post Office.....	3 B4
French Consulate.....	4 D2
German Consulate.....	5 F2
International Clinic.....	6 E4
Laundry Service.....	7 E2
Poliklinika No 2.....	8 D5
UK Consulate.....	9 H2
US Consulate.....	10 F2
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Dostoevsky Museum.....	14 F4
Isaakievsky Sobor (St Isaac's Cathedral).....	15 C3
Kazachiye Bani.....	16 D5
Kunstkamera (Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography).....	17 C2
Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo (Alexandr Nevsky Monastery).....	18 H5
Menshikov Palace.....	19 B3
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Rostral Columns.....	22 C2
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centres for placing long-distance calls can be found all over the city. One central call centre is located at Nevsky pr 88.

Toilets

There are public toilets all over St Petersburg in varying states of cleanliness and repair.

Convenient ones (R15) are located between the Kazan Cathedral and Kanal Griboyedova (Map p724). There are also toilets around most metro stations, although these tend to be a last resort.

Tourist Information

St Petersburg now boasts two tourist information centres. If you are the victim of crime and don't speak Russian, these offices can help you file a report with the police.

Tourist Kiosk (Map p724; ☎ 310 2822; Dvortsovaya pl 12; ☎ 9am-6pm; M Nevsky pr) A helpful kiosk on Palace Sq next to the Hermitage where you can get information and buy guides in many languages.

Tourist Information Centre (Map p724; ☎ 310 8262; Sadovaya ul 14; ☎ 9am-6pm; M Sadovaya/Nevsky pr) This is a bigger centre off Nevsky pr.

Travel Agencies

Amex (Map pp720-1; ☎ 326 4500; fax 326 4501; ul Malaya Morskaya 23; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; M Sadovaya/Nevsky Pr) Only offers travel services.

Infinity Travel (Map pp720-1; ☎ 313 5085; www.infinity.ru; Hotel Angletterre, ul Bolshaya Morskaya 29; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat; M Nevsky Prospekt) A friendly and efficient service. Staff can book air and train tickets, and organise visa support and hotel bookings.

Ost-West Kontaktservice (Map p724; ☎ 327 3023; www.ostwest.com; 105 Nevsky pr; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat; M Pl Vosstaniya) A reliable outfit, Ost-West can organise registration for all visas, as well as offer visa support.

Sindbad Travel International (Map p724; ☎ 332 2020; www.sindbad.ru, in Russian; 2-ya Sovetskaya ul 12; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat; M Pl Vosstaniya) Sindbad are specialists in discounted travel for students and under 26 year olds.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Never drink tap water in St Petersburg as it contains *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite that can cause horrific stomach cramps and nausea. Bottled water is available everywhere. If you must drink tap water, boil it for a good few minutes first.

The humidity and marshland location of St Petersburg makes it mosquito hell from May until October. Be prepared – bring repellent or the standard anti-mosquito tablets and socket plug. Alternatively you can buy these all over the city – ask for *sredstva protiv kamarov*.

Human pests include the rising number of pickpockets on Nevsky pr in recent years. Be vigilant and look out particularly for the

infamous gangs of children who work the street.

Sadly racist attacks are a reality in the city. Skinhead gangs have killed an unprecedented number of mainly Caucasian and Central Asians in the past few years, and there's a climate of fear among ethnic minorities. Perhaps worst of all, the city Governor, Valentina Matvienko, had not at the time of writing ever publicly decried these attacks. We still encourage nonwhite travellers to visit, but suggest exercising far more caution here than anywhere else in the region. Avoid the suburbs whenever possible and try not to go out after dark alone.

SIGHTS

The Historic Heart

Unquestionably your first stop should be the **Palace Sq** (Dvortsovaya ploschad; Map p724), where the baroque/rococo **Winter Palace** (Zimny dvorets; Map p724) appears like a mirage under the archway at the start of Bolshaya Morskaya ul. Empress Elizabeth commissioned the palace from Bartolomeo Rastrelli in 1754. Along with a number of neighbouring buildings, some of the Winter Palace's 1057 rooms now house part of the astonishing **Hermitage** (Map p724; ☎ 571 3465; www.hermitage.ru; adult R350, students & children free, free for all individuals on the 1st Thu of every month, no flash photo/video ticket R100/350, audio guides R250; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun; M Nevsky Pr), which is one of the world's great art museums. Enter through the courtyard from Palace Sq. To avoid queues in the summer months, you can book tickets online very easily. The collection is vast and can be overwhelming for a first-time visitor. Get an English map at the information desk in the ticket hall.

If your time for visiting is limited, you should look out for the following highlights: the Jordan Staircase (positioned directly ahead of you when you enter); room 100 (Ancient Egypt); rooms 178-97 (the State rooms for the apartments of the last imperial family); room 204 (the Pavilion Hall); rooms 228-38 (Italian Art, 16th to 18th centuries); room 271 (the imperial family's cathedral); and concentrate most of your time on the fabulous 3rd floor, particularly rooms 333-50 for late-19th-century and early-20th-century European art, including a huge array of Matisse, Picasso, Monet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, Pissaro, Rodin and Kandinsky. There

are several cafés, internet access and shops within the museum, so you can easily spend a whole day here. Disabled access is now very good – call ☎ 110 9079 if you require any assistance.

Across the square from the winter palace is the fabulous **General Staff Building** (Map p724; adult/student R200/free; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Nevsky Pr), which also houses a museum and temporary exhibits, including French art of the 20th century and the former apartments of Prime Minister Count Nesselrode, and in the middle of the square, the 47.5m **Alexander Column** (Map p724) commemorates the 1812 victory over Napoleon.

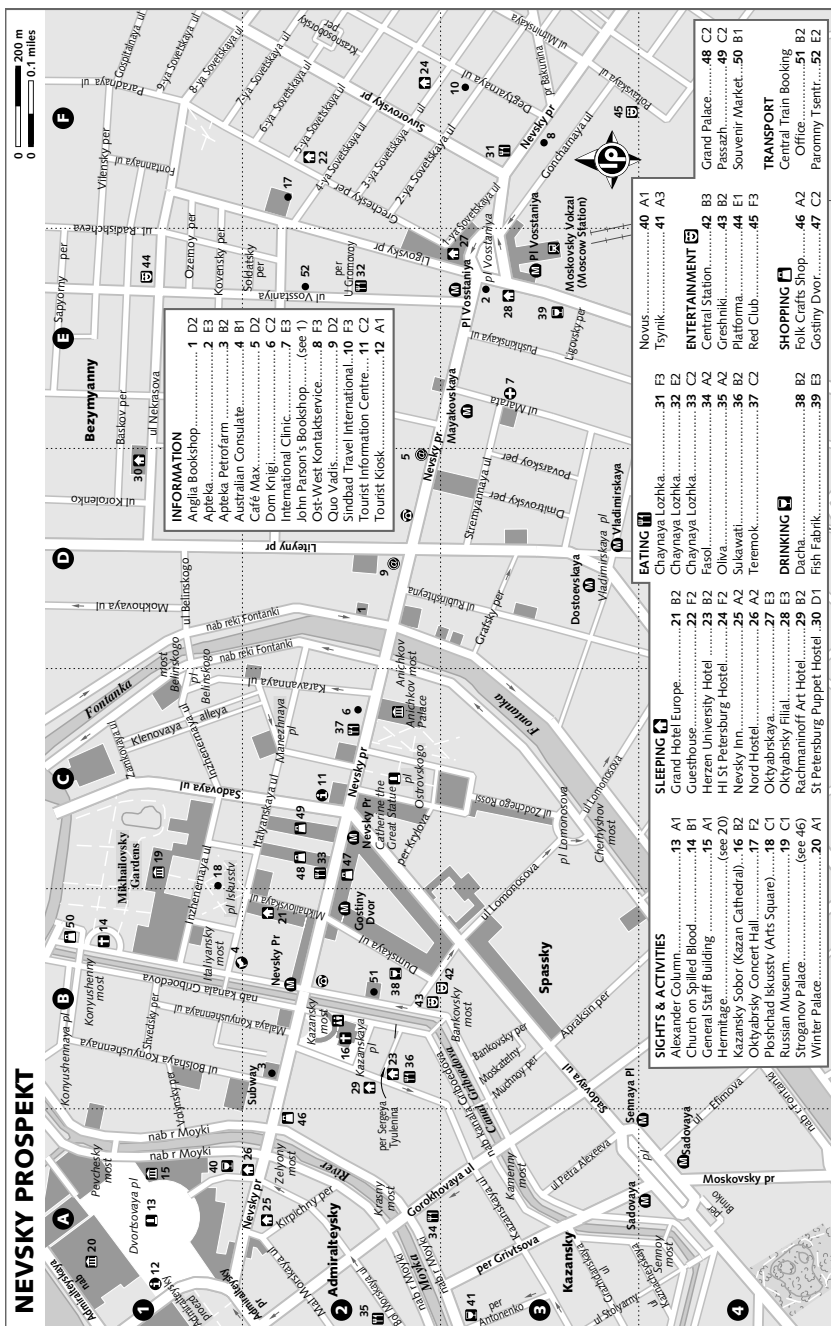
To the west across the road is the gilded spire of the **Admiralty** (Map pp720-1), which used to be the headquarters of the Russian navy. West of the Admiralty is **ploschad Dekabristov** (Decembrists' Sq; Map pp720-1), named after the Decembrists' Uprising of 14 December 1825.

Falconet's famous statue of Peter the Great, the **Bronze Horseman** (Map pp720-1), stands at the end of the square towards the river. Behind looms the splendid golden dome of **Isaakievsky Sobor** (St Isaac's Cathedral; Map pp720-1; ☎ 315 9732; Isaakievskaya pl; admission to cathedral adult/student R300/170, to colonnade R150/100; ☎ 10am-7pm Thu-Tue; M Sadovaya/Nevsky Pr), built between 1818 and 1858. At this price think twice before going into the cathedral unless you like the ornate baroque style. The colonnade is far better value for money, however, giving superb views over the city.

Nevsky Prospekt

The inner part of vast Nevsky pr runs from the Admiralty to Moskovsky Vokzal (Moscow Station) and is St Petersburg's main shopping thoroughfare. The most impressive sight along it is the great colonnaded arms of the **Kazansky Sobor** (Kazan Cathedral; Map p724; Kazanskaya pl 2; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm; M Nevsky Pr), built between 1801 and 1811.

At the end of Nevsky pr is the working **Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo** (Alexander Nevsky Monastery; Map pp720-1; ☎ 274 0409; adult/student R60/40; ☎ dawn-8pm in summer, dawn-dusk rest of year; M pl Alexandra Nevskogo), where you'll find the **Tikhvin Cemetery** (Map pp720-1; admission R60/40; ☎ 11am-dusk Fri-Wed; M pl Alexandra Nevskogo), the last resting place of some of Russia's most famous artistic figures, including Tchaikovsky and Dostoyevsky.



Between Nevsky & the Neva

A block north of Nevsky Pr metro station is lovely **ploshchad Iskusstv** (Arts Sq; Map p724), with a statue to national bard Alexander Pushkin at its centre.

The yellow Mikhailovsky Palace, now the **Russian Museum** (Gosudarstvenny Russky muzey; Map p724; ☎ 311 1465; www.rusmuseum.ru; adult/student R300/150; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon; M Nevsky Pr), housing one of the country's finest collections of Russian art, makes up the far side of the square. This makes the perfect complement to the Hermitage, presenting a wonderful and easily navigable collection of Russian art throughout the ages in the palace's lovely halls. Behind it are the pleasant **Mikhailovsky Gardens** (Map p724), which are popular year-round for walking and relaxing.

The polychromatic domes of the **Church on Spilled Blood** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 315 1636; Konyushennaya pl; adult/student R300/170; ☎ 10am-8pm Thu-Tue; M Gostiny Dvor) are close by and have become a symbol of the city despite being a total stylistic anomaly for St Petersburg with its giddy baroque overstatement. Also known as the Church of the Resurrection of Christ, it was built from 1887 to 1907 on the spot where Alexander II had been assassinated in 1881. The interior is incredible and somewhat overwhelming – having been restored from Soviet times, when the church was used as a potato warehouse – and it's well worth visiting.

The lovely **Summer Garden** (Letny Sad; Map pp720-1; ☎ 9am-10pm May-Oct, 10am-6pm Oct-mid-Apr, closed mid-Apr-late-Apr) is between the open space of Mars Field (Marsovo Pole) and the Fontanka River. Laid out for Peter the Great, with fountains and pavilions along a geometrical plan, it's a lovely place in which to relax.

The greatest thing about the unmistakable Rastrelli-designed **Smolny Cathedral** (Smolny Sobor; Map pp720-1; ☎ 278 5596; pl Rastrelli; admission R150; ☎ 11am-5pm Fri-Wed), 3km east of the Summer Garden, is the sweeping view from atop one of its 63m-high belfries.

South & West of Nevsky Prospekt

A short walk down the Moyka River from Isaakiyevskaya pl (St Issac's Sq) is the fascinating **Yusupov Palace** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 314 9883; nab reki Moyki 94; adult/student R300/250; ☎ 11am-5pm; M Sadovaya). Notorious as the scene of Rasputin's grisly murder in 1916, the palace has some of the most magnificent interiors in

the city. The entry price gets you a walkman, which guides you through the palace in English giving a very interesting tour of its rooms, including the wonderful private theatre. You can also join a special half-hour Rasputin tour (adult/under 16 years/student R300/150/250) that takes you to parts of the palace not visited on the audio tour and traces the last hours of Rasputin's life. It begins daily at 1.15 and 5.15pm.

Across the meandering Kanal Griboyedov is **Sennaya pl** (Map pp720-1), the heart of Dostoyevskiyville. The author lived in several flats around here, and many of the locations turn up in *Crime and Punishment*. To find out more, head to the **Dostoyevsky Museum** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 571 4031; www.md.spb.ru; Kuznechny per 5/2; adult/student R100/50, audio tour in English R100; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Vladimirskaaya), located in the house in which the writer died in 1881. It includes many original pieces of furniture and objects owned by the great man, as well as an interesting exhibit about his life.

The Petrograd Side

The Petrograd Side refers to the cluster of delta islands between the Malaya Neva and the Bolshaya Nevka channels, including the large Petrogradsky Island and little Zaychy Island, home of the Peter & Paul Fortress.

The principal attraction here is the **Peter & Paul Fortress** (Petropravlovskaya Krepost; Map pp720-1; ☎ 230 0340; admission to grounds free, to all buildings adult/student R120/60; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon, 10am-4pm Tue; M Gorkovskaya). Founded in 1703 as the original military fortress for the new city, it was mainly used as a political prison up to 1917: famous residents include Peter's own son Alexei, as well as Dostoyevsky, Gorky and Trotsky. At noon every day a cannon is fired from the **Naryshkin Bastion** (Map pp720-1), scaring the daylighters out of tourists. It's fun to walk along the **battlements** (Map pp720-1). Most spectacular of all is the **St Peter & Paul Cathedral** (Map pp720-1), with its landmark needle-thin spire and magnificent baroque interior. All Russia's tsars since Peter the Great have been buried here. The latest addition was Nicholas II and his family, finally buried here by Yeltsin in 1998 – you'll find them in an anteroom to your right as you enter. Also look out for the famously ugly pinhead **statue** of Peter the Great in the centre of the fortress. The statue was created by Mikhail Shemyakin in 1990.

Vasilevsky Island

Peter the Great intended for Vasilevsky Island to become the centre of his new city and the buildings at the eastern end of the island are some of the oldest in St Petersburg. However, despite being the academic centre of the city, the lack of a bridge until the mid-19th century meant that development naturally focused on the other side of the Neva. There's plenty to be seen here, though – the Strelka (Tongue of Land), beside the unusual red **Rostral Columns** (Map pp720-1; elaborate oil-fired navigation beacons, now only lit on special occasions), gives a magnificent view across the Neva and is a social hub during the summer months. The old Stock Exchange is now the grand **Central Naval Museum** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 328 2502; Birzhavaya pl 4; adult/student R320/110; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun; 📄 Sportivnaya/Vasileostrovskaya), a tribute to Russia's naval muscle.

On the University Embankment, the pale blue and white building with the steeple is the **Kunstkamera** (Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography; Map pp720-1; ☎ 328 1412; www.kunstkamera.ru; Universitetskaya nab 3; adult/student R200/100; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; 📄 Sportivnaya/Vasileostrovskaya); the entrance is around the corner on Tamozhnyonny per. Founded by Peter himself in 1714, it contains his personal collection of 'curiosities' that were originally displayed to educate the populace. You'll see a ghoulish collection of babies in jars with a variety of physical defects.

The single most interesting place to visit on Vasilevsky Island is the **Menshikov Palace** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 323 1112; Universitetskaya nab 15; adult/student R200/100; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun; 📄 Sportivnaya/Vasileostrovskaya). Now part of the Hermitage Museum, this 1712 palace was built for Peter the Great's close friend (and some say lover) Alexander Menshikov, the first governor of St Petersburg. The interiors are not much on the far later Yusupov Palace interiors, but are very revealing for anyone interested in the Petrine era. The very heavy, Dutch-influenced décor and furnishings were totally outmoded by the 19th century, but are very representative of the style of the times.

ACTIVITIES

There is plenty of opportunity to try out a Russian *banya* in St Petersburg. One of the most popular in town is **Krugliye Bani** (☎ 247 6409; ul Karbysheva 29A; ☎ 8am-9pm Fri-Tue; 📄 Pl Muzhestva), which also has a fantastic open-air heated pool that is great in the winter evenings. It's popu-

lar with expats on Wednesday. A more central option is **Kazachiy Bani** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 764 7812; Bolshoy Kazachy per 11; ☎ 9am-9pm; 📄 Pushkinskaya).

Swimming is also possible year-round, both inside and out. There are lots of pools in the city – try the **VMF** (☎ 322 4505; Sredny pr 87; ☎ 7am-9pm; 📄 Vasileostrovskaya) – a huge pool on Vasilevsky Island. However, for the quintessential Russian experience (or just to watch something quite spectacular during winter) head down to Zaychy Island (where the Peter & Paul Fortress is located) and watch the famous ice swimmers, or 'walruses', who start the day with a bracing dip in the water, through a hole carved into the ice.

TOURS

It is quite hard to imagine a better deal than **Peter's Walking Tours** (www.peterswalk.com), run by Peter Kozyrev and his fantastic team of English-speaking guides. The tours leave from the HI St Petersburg Hostel (opposite) or Quo Vadis (p719). Prices cost R400 to R600 per person for the various tours, which include a six-hour epic Siege of Leningrad Tour. Other walks include the Dostoyevsky and Communist Legacy Walks, as well as more standard city tours.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

St Petersburg celebrates **City Day** on 27 May, which marks the founding of the city with mass festivities. The **white nights** (around the summer solstice in late June) are truly unique. The city comes alive and parties all night as the sun only barely sinks below the horizon, leaving the sky a magical grey-white throughout the night.

SLEEPING

As St Petersburg has a very definite 'season', room prices are at a premium between May and September. Outside this period, room prices decrease by between 10% and 30% on those quoted here.

Budget

Hotel California (Map pp720-1; ☎ 901 301 6061; www.hotelcalifornia.ru; Apt 36, ul Marata 67/17; dm R600; 📄 📄 Vladimirskaia) The cheapest bed in the city, not to mention the place you're most likely to meet cool Russian musicians as well as foreign backpackers. Run by local rock legends Dva Samaliota, this hostel is great, although it can be quite lively at night. Dorm rooms sleep eight people.

St Petersburg Puppet Hostel (Map p724; ☎ 272 5401; www.hostelling-russia.ru; ul Nekrasova 12; dm/d R672/1664; 📄 📄 📄 Mayakovskaya) A popular and reliable place in central St Petersburg, next to the city's puppet theatre. The rooms are very simple but perfectly clean. Visa support is offered, and all visas are registered for free.

HI St Petersburg Hostel (Map p724; ☎ 329 8018; www.ryh.ru; 3-ya Sovetskaya ul 28; dm/d R690/1680; 📄 📄 📄 Pl Vosstaniya) A 300m walk from Moscow Station, this hostel is popular. Spotless dorms have three to six beds and there's one double; all are slightly cheaper in winter and for holders of ISIC and HI cards.

Sleep Cheap (Map pp720-1; ☎ 715 1304; www.sleepcheap.spb.ru; Mokhovaya ul 18/32; dm R700; 📄 📄 Chernyshevskaya) A rather crowded place, Sleep Cheap is still waiting to expand, and hopefully once it does the dorms won't be so full. Despite this, everything is modern and clean, with washing facilities and a good location. The hostel is unmarked from the street – go through into the courtyard of No 18 and the hostel is on the left.

Nord Hostel (Map p724; ☎ 517 0342; www.nordhostel.com; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 10; dm/d 825/2250; 📄 📄 📄 Nevsky Pr) Run by friendly Russian staff along the lines of a traditional travellers hostel, the Nord is a real winner, with by far the best location of any of the city's hostels, next to the Hermitage, and huge, beautiful dorm rooms (one has its own piano) and a few doubles as well. Book ahead – this is our hostel of choice.

Midrange

Hotel Neva (Map pp720-1; ☎ 578 0500; fax 273 2593; ul Chaikovskogo 17; s/d unmodernised R1700/2200, modernised R2500/3500; 📄 📄 📄 Chernyshevskaya) One of the city's oldest functioning hotels, the Neva opened its doors in 1913 and has a spectacular staircase to show for it. Unfortunately the rooms are not quite as grand, but they're still comfortable and clean. The location is good, a short walk from the Fontanka and the Neva Rivers.

Domik v Kolomne (Map pp720-1; ☎ 710 8351; www.colomna.nm.ru; nab Kanala Griboedova 74a; s/d R1800/2100; 📄 📄 Sadovaya) Pushkin's family once rented rooms in this house, and the atmosphere of a large flat remains. Rooms have a homey Russian feel, there are private bathrooms and guests will be well looked after. Some rooms have lovely views over the canal.

Herzen University Hotel (Map p724; ☎ 314 7472; fax 315 5716; Kazanskaya ul 6; s/d/t R1950/2600/2800; 📄 📄 Nevsky

Pr) A well-run Russian hostel with a brilliant location, this place is used to foreigners, although it's very much a university hall of residence, so don't expect your usual hostel vibe. It's mainly popular with groups, but its clean and simple rooms (nearly all with en suite facilities) are a great deal.

Nevsky Inn (Map p724; ☎ 924 9805; www.nevskynn.ru; Flat 19, Kirpichny per 2; s/d R2250/2750; 📄 📄 Nevsky Pr) Run by a joint British-Russian management, the Nevsky is one of the best places to stay in the city. Rooms are clean and comfortable, and there's a modern kitchen that guests can use, perfectly combining comfort and economy. Highly recommended.

Guesthouse (Map p724; ☎ 271 3089; www.ghs.spb.ru; Grechesky per 13; s/d R2720/3400; 📄 📄 Pl Vosstaniya) A great little place, despite its rather unimaginative name. Set behind the enormous Oktyabrsky Concert Hall, it's just a few minutes from Nevsky pr. Rooms are cosy and clean.

Hotel Oktyabrskaya (Map p724; ☎ 578 1515; www.oktober-hotel.spb.ru; Ligovsky pr 10; s/d R3000/4300; 📄 📄 📄 Pl Vosstaniya) This enormous hotel around Pl Vosstaniya has two buildings – the main one spans one side of the square and the smaller annexe, Oktyabrsky Filial, is to one side of Moscow Station. While it's enormous and impersonal, it's also well located and the rooms have all been renovated to a decent standard.

Rachmaninoff Art Hotel (Map p724; ☎ 327 7466; www.kazansky5.com; 3rd fl, Kazanskaya ul 5; s/d R4000/4850; 📄 📄 📄 📄 Nevsky Pr) Perfectly located and beautifully designed, the Rachmaninoff attracts in-the-know arty types staying in the city. Stuffed full of antiques, the understated rooms nonetheless enjoy a thoroughly modern, boutique feel. And there's free wi-fi – luxury hotels take note!

Five Corners Hotel (Map pp720-1; ☎ 380 8181; www.sugol.ru; Zagorodny pr 13; s/d/st R4900/5600/6650; 📄 📄 📄 📄 Dostoyevskaya) This place is very stylish indeed. Its suites are some of the coolest in the city and overlook a trendy hub of streets just a short walk from Nevsky pr. Staff are polite and efficient, and recent expansion to 35 rooms suggests it's deservedly popular. There's free wi-fi throughout.

Top End

Hotel Astoria (Map pp720-1; ☎ 313 5757; www.astoria.spb.ru; 39 Bolshaya Morskaya ul; s/d R13,500/15,500; 📄 📄 📄 📄 Sadovaya/Nevsky Pr) Given a new lease of life by the Rocco Forte group, which

purchased this classic St Petersburg hotel in 1997, the Astoria is the only real rival to the Grand Hotel Europe as the city's best hotel. Guests have included polar opposites, such as Lenin and George W Bush, and while rates are very steep, there's no doubting that this is a gorgeously designed five-star place.

Grand Hotel Europe (Map p724; ☎ 329 6000; www.grandhotелеurope.com; Mikhailovskaya ul 1/7; r from R16,000; P ☒ ☑; M Nevsky Pr) Pricey, but spectacular, the Grand Hotel Europe remains the best hotel in St Petersburg. The new management is renovating the hotel in a classical Russian style, bringing the tsarist opulence of the nearby Russian Museum into every room. Its faultless location, gorgeous rooms and superb service makes this the choice of everyone from royalty to rock stars, and its famous brunch (\$80) on Sunday is the best in the city.

EATING

Like Moscow, St Petersburg is an ever-increasingly exciting place to eat, although mainly in the upper price brackets. Those on a budget should look out for bliki kiosks throughout the city. Their delicious blini are superb value (R30 to R50) and a great place to snack. As in Moscow, street food is sold around metro stations.

Fasol (Map p724; ☎ 571 9695; Gorokhovaya ul 17; mains R150; M Sennaya pl) Delightful respite from the norms of the Russian eating experience, Fasol combines friendly, efficient service with good food at low prices. It's a cool place to come any time of day, although it's particularly busy in the evening. There's an English menu.

Oliva (Map p724; ☎ 314 6563; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 31; mains R160-300; ☎ 10am-midnight; M Nevsky Pr) An authentic Greek addition to the St Petersburg dining scene, though there is nothing taverna-like about this cavernous place, subtly painted and decorated in an array of Greek styles. The menu is traditional, and food is both excellent value and extremely good.

Sukawati (Map p724; ☎ 312 0504; Kazanskaya ul 8; mains R250-350; M Nevsky Pr) Sleek Indonesian/Japanese fusion place set back behind the Kazan Cathedral. The Nasi Goreng is delicious, and the whole menu far more imaginative than most Asian restaurants in town.

Vostochny Ugolok (Map pp720-1; ☎ 713 5747; Gorokhovaya ul 52; mains 250-500; ☎ 24hr; M Pushkinskaya/Sennaya pl) A taste of the Caucasus in St Petersburg, the 'Eastern Nook' serves brilliant trans-Caucasian dishes from Georgian *pkhali*

(mixed vegetables crushed up and served in crushed walnut and garlic) to Azeri *shashlyk* (kebab), all in a warm atmosphere of southern hospitality.

Dickens (Map pp720-1; ☎ 380 7888; nab reki Fontanki 108; breakfast R290; ☎ 8am-2am; M Sennaya pl) OK, we're not in the habit of recommending English or Irish pubs anywhere, but Dickens is exempt from that rule as it's the only place you can get a good English breakfast in the city without spending a fortune at a five-star hotel. It's a little out of the way, but has a friendly atmosphere and is popular with locals.

Salkhino (Map pp720-1; ☎ 232 7891; Kronverksy pr 25; mains R300-500; M Gorkovskaya) This place is our favourite Georgian in the city, serving unfussy, delicious Georgian fare and a great selection of wines. Try the Adjaran *khachapuri* and the aubergines in walnut paste.

Restoran (Map pp720-1; ☎ 327 8979; Tamozhenny per 2; mains R400-600; ☎ noon-1am; M Vasileostrovskaya) Beautifully designed and lit, Restoran harks back to the days of Romanov splendour, despite its modern-minimalist décor being the polar opposite of Romanov taste. The Russian cuisine is well realised and beautifully presented.

Cheap Eats

Teremok (Map p724; Nevsky 60; mains R60; M Nevsky Pr) Already firmly established as the city's premier fast-food blini kiosk, Teremok now has its own sit-down restaurant on Nevsky pr – great for a quick and filling lunch.

Chaynaya Lozhka (Map p724; Nevsky pr 44; mains R100; ☎ 9am-10pm; M PI Vosstaniya) This excellent chain serves delicious blini and offers a wide range of salads. The orange-clad staff members are extremely helpful and the meals are very cheap. There are also branches at Nevsky prospekt 136 and ul Vosstaniya 13. It can get busy at lunchtime.

Troitsky Most Kamennooostrovsky Pr (☎ 232 6693; Kamennooostrovsky Pr 9/2; mains R100-200; M Gorkovskaya; Zagorodny Pr (Map pp720-1; ☎ 115 1998; Zagorodny Pr 38; M Vladimirskaia) Superb vegetarian chain operating in multiple locations across the city. Its mushroom lasagne is legendary, and its salads freshly made and delicious.

Out of the city's food markets, **Kuznechny Market** (Map pp720-1; Kuznechny per 3; ☎ 9am-9pm; M Vladimirskaia) should not be missed. The most colourful and pricey of the city's food halls, you can taste delicious fruit, honey and cheese here, although you'll inevitably be charmed into making some purchases.

DRINKING

Novus (Map p724; ☎ 569 3818; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 8; ☎ 6pm-6am; M Nevsky pr) The current favourite for young expats and travellers, Novus is named after a highly eccentric Latvian hybrid of backgammon and pool. Packed nightly, this is a great place to meet a young and beautiful international crowd. Enter through the takeaway section downstairs.

Dacha (Map p724; Dumskaya ul 9; ☎ 6pm-6am; M Nevsky pr) The bar sensation of 2005, when everyone in the city suddenly flocked here, indie bar Dacha now looks like an old timer, but still features on many people's list for a good night out. The R100 admission charge includes two free beers.

Tsnyk (Map p724; ☎ 312 9526; per Antonenko 4; ☎ 1pm-3am Mon-Fri, 1pm-7am Sat & Sun; M Sennaya pl) Famous for its rowdy crowd and *grenki* (fried garlic black bread), this is the place to be seen misbehaving. Vodka is served in teapots and the toilets are scrawled with intellectual graffiti.

Fish Fabrik (Map p724; ☎ 164 4857; Ligovskiy pr 53; ☎ 3pm-6am; M PI Vosstaniya) An institution everyone should visit, Fish Fabrik is a dive bar for drunken artists and student slackers. Come here for beer, foosball (table football), cult movies and decent bar food.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Some of the best clubs include the following:

Griboedov (Map pp720-1; ☎ 764 4355; www.griboedovclub.ru, in Russian; Voronezhskaya ul 2A; admission R100-200; M Ligovskiy Pr) An alternative venue (see right).

Jet Set (Map pp720-1; ☎ 275 9288; Furshtadskaya ul 58B; M Chernyshevskaya) In-crowd heaven.

Metro (Map pp720-1; ☎ 766 0204; www.metroclub.ru; Ligovskiy pr 174; M Ligovskiy pr) Student super-club.

Cinemas

The main cinemas in town line Nevsky pr. With very few exceptions, foreign films (the majority of what is screened) are dubbed into Russian, and so aren't great for non Russian-speaking visitors. The *St Petersburg Times* usually lists films (if any) being shown in English.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

St Petersburg has four gay clubs and Russia's first lesbian club: check out **Excess** (www.xs.gay.ru) for the latest city-specific information. The two biggest and busiest clubs are next to each other:

Central Station (Map p724; ☎ 312 3600; www.centralstation.ru; ul Lomonosova 1; M Nevsky pr) Slick new venue.

Greshniki (Map p724; ☎ 318 4291; www.greshniki.ru; nab kanala Griboedova 28A; M Nevsky pr) An old timer.

Theatre

St Petersburg is arguably Russia's cultural capital and there's a huge range of theatre, ballet, opera and classical concerts. Check the Friday *St Petersburg Times* for listings.

Mariinsky Theatre (Map pp720-1; ☎ 326 4141; www.mariinsky.ru; Teatralnaya pl 1; M Sennaya Pl) A visit here should not be missed, especially as the Bolshoi in Moscow is being renovated and its main hall is closed until 2008.

Live Music

There's a lively rock scene in St Petersburg, home to classic Soviet rock groups, such as Aquarium and Kino, and more recently rock stars-cum-performance artists Leningrad. There's always plenty going on.

Griboedov (Map pp720-1; ☎ 764 4355; www.griboedovclub.ru, in Russian; Voronezhskaya ul 2A; admission R100-200; M Ligovskiy Pr) Run by local ska band Dva Samaritan and a favourite venue.

Platforma (Map p724; ☎ 314 1104; ul Nekrasova 40; ☎ 24hr; M PI Vosstaniya)

Red Club (Map p724; ☎ 717 0000; www.clubred.ru; Poltavskaya ul 7; ☎ 6pm-6am; M PI Vosstaniya)

There's also a lively jazz scene. Check out the *St Petersburg Times* for other jazz gigs.

JFC Jazz Club (Map pp720-1; ☎ 272 9850; www.jfc.sp.ru; 33 Shpalernaya ul; admission R50-200; M Chernyshevskaya)

Sport

The local soccer team Zenith provokes feverish passion in the hearts of young Petersburgers, and after a match there are always rowdy street scenes as mobs of blue-clad youth stream, drunk and excitable, from the stadium. You can usually buy tickets to see Zenith play all over the city (ask at any *teatralnaya kassa* in a metro station), and the season runs from October to April. Its home ground is the **Petrovsky Stadium** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 119 5700; Petrovskiy ostrov 2; admission R180; M Sportivnaya).

SHOPPING

Gostiny Dvor (Map p724; ☎ 710 5408; Nevsky pr 35; ☎ 10am-10pm; M Gostiny Dvor) The enormous Gostiny Dvor was one of the world's first shopping arcades, being built in the mid-18th

century. You'll find almost everything here, and despite the first floor being increasingly devoted to designer outlets, the ground floor retains much of its Soviet-era feel.

Souvenir Market (Map p724; Konyushennaya pl; **M** Gostiny Dvor) The best places for souvenir hunting include this market, next to the Church on Spilled Blood, where you can find an endless array of *matryoshki* (Russian nesting dolls) and Soviet memorabilia. You should most definitely haggle.

Folk Crafts Shop (Map p724; Stroganov Palace; **M** Nevsky pr) Another good place for traditional Russian gifts.

Other smart shopping malls include the designer-heavy **Grand Palace** (Map p724; ☎ 449 9344; Nevsky pr 44; ☎ 11am-9pm; **M** Gostiny Dvor) and the charming 19th-century **Passazh** (Map p724; ☎ 312 2210; Nevsky pr 48; ☎ 11am-9pm; **M** Gostiny Dvor).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

St Petersburg is served by Pulkovo airport (LED), to the south of the city. There are two terminals – Pulkovo-1 is for domestic flights and Pulkovo-2 is international. For international connections and the carriers that fly here, see p745.

Boat

From April to September St Petersburg has regular boats to/from Tallinn (R850, 14 hours) and a weekly service to Kaliningrad; see **Baltfinn** (www.baltfinn.ru) for details. For boat services from outside Eastern Europe, see p745. Boats leave from the **Morskoy Vokzal** (☎ 322 6052; pl Morskoy Slavy; **M** Primorskaya), but it's a long way from the metro, so it's easiest to take bus 7 or trolleybus 10 from outside the Hermitage.

Bus

Buses arrive and depart from **Avtovokzal No 2** (☎ 766 5777; nab Obvodnogo kanala; **M** Ligovsky Pr). They are the cheapest way to travel between Moscow and St Petersburg (R515, 10 to 12 hours, eight daily), as well as being the cheapest option to get to Tallinn (R580 to R670, 7½ hours, seven daily) and Riga (R540, 11 hours, two daily).

Train

St Petersburg is well connected to the Baltics, Eastern Europe and the rest of Russia by train. Trains to/from Moscow go from

Moskovsky Vokzal (Moscow Station; Map p724; ☎ 768 4597; pl Vosstaniya; **M** pl Vosstaniya), while services to/from the Baltics, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland run from **Vitebsky Vokzal** (Vitebsk Station; Map pp720-1; ☎ 768 5807; Zagorodny pr 52; **M** Pushkinskaya). See **Your Train – CIS Railway Table** (www.poezda.net) for timings and prices. For details of trains to Finland, see p930.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airports

St Petersburg's Pulkovo airport is 17km south of the city centre and has two terminals: Pulkovo-1 handles domestic flights and Pulkovo-2 is the international terminal. To Moskovskaya metro station, from where you can travel into the city centre, bus 13 runs from Pulkovo-2 and bus 39 runs from Pulkovo-1. A taxi into the city centre will cost around R600. All hotels can organise transfers, which can be a better option than haggling with unscrupulous taxi drivers. *Marshrutkas* (minibuses) K3 and K39 run between the two airport terminals and Sennaya Pl and Pl Vosstaniya metro stations respectively.

Marshrutkas

Around the city centre, *marshrutkas* (minibuses) are a quick alternative to the slow trolleybuses. Costs vary on each route, but the average fare is R18, and fares are displayed prominently inside each van. To stop a *marshrutka*, simply hold out your hand and it will stop. Jump in, sit down, pass the cash to the driver (a human chain operates if you are not seated nearby), and then call out '*ostanovityes pozhalsta!*' when you want to get out and the driver will pull over. *Marshrutkas* are a very good way of getting from one end of Nevsky pr to another.

Metro

The metro (R12 flat fare) is best for covering large distances across the city. The four lines cross over in the city centre and go out to the suburbs. The most confusing aspect of the system is that all labelling is in Cyrillic. Listen out for the announcements of the station names, or ask locals who will usually go out of their way to help. A further confusion is that two stations sharing an exit will have different names. For example, Nevsky pr and Gostiny Dvor are in the same place, but as they are on different lines, they have different names.

Taxi

Holding your arm out will cause unofficial taxis to stop very quickly. The standard rate for a short distance (1km to 2km) is R50, R100 for a journey roughly between 2km and 5km, and whatever you can negotiate for trips longer than about 5km. As a foreigner, expect to have the price raised – always agree on a price before getting into the taxi. To call an official taxi, dial ☎ 068. For more information about taxis in Russia, see p746.

AROUND ST PETERSBURG

Petrodvorets Петродворец

☎ 812

The most popular of the tsarist palaces that stud the countryside around St Petersburg, **Petrodvorets** (☎ 427 9527; www.peterhof.ru; admission to grounds adult/student R300/150, free after 5pm; ☎ 9am-9pm) has an imposing position 29km west of St Petersburg overlooking the Gulf of Finland. Despite its stunningly grand appearance, the **Grand Palace** (adult/student R430/220; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) was in fact almost totally destroyed by the German advance into Russia during WWII – the restored interiors are still as opulent as those befitting any despotic emperor. In fact, the only room in the palace that survived the Nazi occupation was Peter's simple study.

In summer the most impressive sight is the centrepiece of the grounds, the magnificent (if thoroughly over-the-top) **Grand Cascade & Water Avenue**, a symphony of more than 64 fountains and 37 bronze statues. This work of undoubted engineering genius extends from the palace all the way to the Gulf of Finland, and looks magnificent in an idiosyncratically look-how-rich-and-powerful-I-am imperialist manner.

Walking around the grounds is a treat, although during summer bring some anti-mosquito spray or you may well be eaten alive in the woods.

Elsewhere in the large grounds are several other buildings of interest. Most significant is **Monplaisir**, Peter's two-floor villa, and the lovely **Marly Guesthouse**, which takes its name from Louis XIV's hunting lodge at Versailles, and was a comfortable retreat for royals and their guests. It overlooks a small lake and has some wonderful interiors.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

In summer the pricey Meteor hydrofoils (R500, 30 minutes) leave from outside St Pe-

tersburg's Hermitage museum every 20 to 30 minutes from 9.30am to at least 7pm. The trip is great, although don't leave it too late when returning, as the crowds can be massive and you may have to wait for up to an hour to get on a boat.

Far cheaper is taking a suburban train (R22, 40 minutes, every 20 to 40 minutes); take any train terminating at Oranienbaum or Kalishe from the Baltic Station (**M** Baltiiskaya) and alight at Novy Petrodvorets station. The station is still quite a walk (about 2km) from the palace, but buses run frequently from here.

Tsarskoye Selo & Pavlovsk

Царское Село & Павловск

☎ 812

Literally the 'tsar's village', Tsarskoye Selo is the captivating palace 25km south of St Petersburg, just outside the town of Pushkin. Nearby is Pavlovsk, the smaller but equally impressive palace 4km beyond. Both are connected to specific rulers of Russia, although arguably Tsarskoye Selo's association with Catherine the Great draws far more interest than Pavlovsk's associate with her son, the mentally disturbed Paul I. It's perfectly possible to visit both in one day, although if time allows do them separately as they're both great trips in themselves.

Tsarskoye Selo was created by Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine the Great between 1744 and 1796. The big drawcard here is the Rastrelli-designed, baroque **Catherine Palace** (☎ 465 5308; www.tzar.ru; adult/student R520/250; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon, closed last Mon of the month), built between 1752 and 1756, but practically destroyed in WWII. The exterior and 20-odd rooms have been expertly restored; the gilt-adorned and mirrored Great Hall is particularly dazzling.

The most famous room in the Catherine Palace is the Amber Room – which was removed by the Nazis in 1941 and was believed to be the world's most valuable piece of missing art, valued at some \$140m. The room was created by Rastrelli under Empress Elizabeth from priceless amber panels given to Peter the Great by Frederick I of Prussia in 1716. The panels sat alongside magnificent diamond mosaics and mirrors, creating a dazzling ensemble. The Amber Room took more than a decade to restore and was reopened in 2003. The original was recently discovered to have been destroyed in Kaliningrad during the war (p737).

Just wandering around **Catherine Park** (adult/student R140/70; ☎ 9am-5.30pm), which surrounds the palace, is a pleasure. In the outer section of the park is the **Great Pond**, fringed by an intriguing array of structures, including a Chinese Pavilion, a purposely Ruined Tower and a Pyramid where Catherine the Great buried her dogs.

To escape the masses, head 4km further south to **Pavlovsk** (www.pavlovskart.spb.ru; admission to grounds adult/student R80/40; ☎ 9am-6pm), the park and palace designed by Charles Cameron between 1781 and 1786, and one of the most exquisite in Russia. Pavlovsk's **Great Palace** (☎ 470 2155; adult/student R370/185; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Thu), also partly restored after a trashing in WWII, has some delightful rooms, but it's the sprawling, peaceful park that's the real attraction.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The most convenient way of getting to both Tsarskoye Selo and Pavlovsk is to hop on one of the frequent *marshrutkas* (R26, 30 minutes) that leave from outside Moskovskaya metro station – not to be confused with the Moskovsky Vokzal (Moscow Station) – 8km

south of the city centre; the *marshrutkas* stop within walking distance of Tsarskoe Selo and outside Pavlovsk. You can also take a train from Vitebsky Vokzal's (Vitebsk Station) platform 1 to Detskoe Selo (Tsarskoe Selo's train station) and to Pavlovsk station for Pavlovsk (it's a 30-minute trip to either). Note that while there are several trains prior to 9am, there are far fewer later in the day.

KALININGRAD REGION КАЛИНИНГРАДСКАЯ ОБЛАСТЬ

pop 955,000

One part German, two parts Russian and wedged inextricably between a European-thirsty Lithuanian rock and a proud Polish hard place, Kaliningrad is a region with an identity problem. Should it be resurrecting its German past, flaunting its undeniable Russianness, or forging ahead on a brave new path?

Brashly, everybody's favourite Russian exclave does all three. The result is one of Eastern Europe's most exotic – and least travelled – locales. You'll definitely feel like you're in Russia, but it will seem a tad more liberal, a tad more open-minded and a tad more Western-oriented than the rest of the country.

If you, too, stay open-minded, you're in for a treat. In addition to a quirky capital – formerly the legendary German city of Königsberg – Kaliningrad has Prussian castle ruins, the world's largest amber-producing mine, long stretches of pristine beach and some of Europe's highest sand dunes.

Seeing all of this won't be easy. As an independent traveller here, you're about as common as a purple giraffe and people are likely to treat you accordingly. Tourism facilities are pretty much nonexistent. Do yourself a favour and bone up on the Cyrillic alphabet and some basic Russian phrases before you arrive.

HISTORY

From the 13th century until 1945 the area was German, part of the core territory of the Teutonic Knights and their successors, the dukes and kings of Prussia. Its centrepiece was Königsberg, capital of East Prussia. Once one of Europe's most beautiful cities, Königsberg was a liberal and academically advanced Prussian outpost on the Baltic. Albertina University, founded in 1544 (whose most famous graduate was Immanuel Kant), helped ensure the city's position as a major educational, spiritual and cultural centre.

Königsberg lost its dignity forever in a four-day series of intense British air raids in August 1944 that destroyed most of the city. 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. After the war insult was added to injury and East Prussia was handed over to Stalin. The Soviets proceeded to ship out all the Germans, and out of the rubble of Königsberg rose Kaliningrad, which was meant to be the finest example of a Soviet planned city. The result was what you see today: a blinding expanse of concrete that is extreme even by Soviet standards.

Russia's Baltic Fleet is headquartered at Baltiysk (about 50km due west of Kaliningrad), and therefore the entire region was closed to Westerners until 1991. Despite a massive military downsizing since the 1990s, the ex-

clave is still heavily militarised – a nod to its continued strategic importance to Russia as a buffer to the expanding EU.

Kaliningrad suffered through economically tragic times in the early 1990s. Things have much improved since then, and as the region becomes increasingly isolated from mainland Russia, many locals are pinning their hopes and futures more on Europe than Mother Russia.

Every year, into this strange brew waltz thousands of elderly German tourists returning to see the homeland of their ancestors or, in some cases, their own homeland.

PEOPLE

Kaliningrad's remaining German population of about 200,000 was deported to Germany or Siberia after WWII – one of the most effective ethnic-cleansing campaigns in European history. The population's now made up of almost 80% Russians, 10% Belarusians, 6% Ukrainians, and the rest Lithuanians and others.

ENVIRONMENT

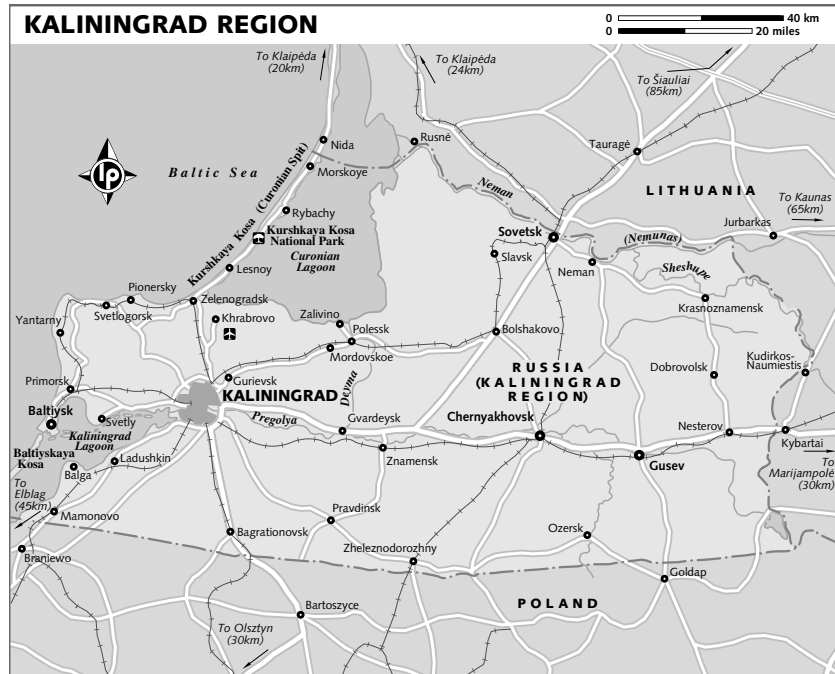
The Land

The Kaliningrad region is tiny – only 15,100 sq km, or less than a quarter the size of hardly immense Lithuania next door. Its coastline stretches 147km, 100km of which is sandy beaches and 50km of which is made up of the Kurshkaya Kosa (Curonian Spit), shared with Lithuania. The spit features Europe's second-highest sand dunes, measuring up to 60m in height. Much of the land is flat (some below sea level and protected by dykes), with elevations in the southeast rising to 231m.

Environmental Issues

Unesco placed the Kurshkaya Kosa on its list of World Heritage sites in 2000, securing the unique ecosystem's importance and its protection under international law. About the same time Russian oil giant Lukoil announced plans to build D6 – a large series of oil rigs and an underwater pipeline – just 22km from the spit's shores. Drilling commenced in 2004.

In the event of a spill Lukoil can breathe easy: it will only have responsibility to clean oil from the sea, not from the shore, where it would inevitably wash up. Kaliningrad-based environmental NGO **Ecodefense** (www.ecodefence.ru) cites several incidents of oil pollution near Kaliningrad since the early 1990s, which were downplayed by the authorities.



KALININGRAD КАЛИНИНГРАД

☎ within the region 2, from elsewhere 4012
pop 425,600

As with many provincial Russian cities, part of Kaliningrad's charm lies in its apparent lack of charm – its rows of Soviet-era apartment blocks, its neon-lit slot machine parlours, the stony faces of passers-by on the street. Yet hidden behind the brooding concrete facades lies a vibrant, fun-loving city with some more-traditional tourist appeal.

Much of that appeal lies in its Prussian past life. While allied bombing raids destroyed much of the city in WWII, some gems from old Prussia remain – a few attractive residential neighbourhoods with rows of old German houses, the remains of the old wall that once surrounded the city and its medieval castle, and a network of 19th-century red-brick gates that provided access through that wall.

While a hideous and heretofore unused Soviet monstrosity now occupies the plot where the castle once stood, the city has done a good job of rebuilding the main cathedral nearby, and contractors are hard at work installing a modern business and tourism Mecca – curiously named Fish Village – on the banks of the Pregolya River.

That's the future. In the present there is absolutely no tourist infrastructure. All maps, menus and street signs are in Russian only, there is no tourist information office to speak of and there's very little in the way of English-language guides – either written or breathing. The new tourism minister promises to make the city more user-friendly, but for now you're pretty much on your own.

Orientation

Leninsky pr, a broad north-south avenue, is Kaliningrad's main artery, running more

than 3km from the main train station, Yuzhny Vokzal (South Station), all the way to central ploshchad Pobedy (Victory Sq). Halfway it crosses the Pregolya River and passes Kaliningrad Cathedral, the city's major landmark.

Information**INTERNET ACCESS, POST & TELEPHONE**

Kaliningrad State Technical University information centre (Room 155, KGTU Bldg, Sovetsky pr 1; per hr R36; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat) Offers internet access.

Post office (ul Chernyakhovskogo 32; per hr R30; ☎ post office 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Sat, internet room 10am-2pm & 3-10pm Mon-Sat) Internet access and postal services.

Post office (ul Chernyakhovskogo 58; per hr R30; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Internet access and postal services.

Telekom (ul Teatralnaya 13; calls to US/UK per min R24/19.50, internet per hr R30; ☎ 8am-10pm) For long-distance calls, fax and internet access.

Telekom (Leninsky pr 2-4; calls to US/UK per min R24/19.50, internet per hr R30) For long-distance calls, fax and internet access.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Emergency Hospital (☎ 466 989; ul Nevskogo 90; ☎ 24hr)

Formula Zdorovya (☎ 777 003; Leninsky pr 63-67; ☎ 24hr) Well-stocked pharmacy.

MONEY

There are ATMs and/or 24-hour currency-exchange booths in most hotels, supermarkets, slot-machine parlours, and bus and train stations, as well as in various locations along Leninsky pr.

Stroivestbank (☎ 212 975; ul Gendelya 3a; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Gives credit-card cash advances.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? NOT MUCH

Königsberg city was renamed in 1946 after Mikhail Kalinin, one of Lenin's henchmen, had conveniently died just as a new name for the city was needed. A former president of the Supreme Soviet, Kalinin had never even visited the region.

Not surprisingly, few residents have any association with Kalinin, and those who do know of him would rather forget him. Among other rotten deeds, Kalinin turned his back on the famine in Ukraine in 1932, when millions starved, and authorised the massacre of thousands of Polish officers in Katyn forest, which was later blamed on the Nazis.

A modest movement to rename the city has all but petered out. It appears the name 'Kaliningrad' will remain, for better or for worse, a symbol of the city's ambivalence about its place in history.

KALININGRAD

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TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

Kaliningrad Historical and Cultural Monuments (Памятники Истории и Культуры Калининград) is an excellent guide to the city's architecture. It's in Russian, but there are scores of photos. At the time of writing it was only available for a hefty price at the Amber Museum (opposite).

Kaliningrad lacks a tourist information centre, so private travel agencies are the best source of advice.

Baltma Tours (☎ 916 416; www.baltma.ru; pr Mira 94)

This friendly, efficient, multilingual bunch is the best source of regional information in the city. Staff can arrange hotel accommodation, and provide tailored city tours and a surprising array of local excursions – including one to Yantamy, home of what was once the world's largest amber mine, and another to the military port city of Baltiysk (formerly Pillau), which requires a special permit to enter. Car hire with a driver is R620 per hour; guides cost R2800 per day.

Sights

KALININGRAD CATHEDRAL & AROUND

Tsentrally Ostrov (Central Island) with its striking Gothic **cathedral** (adult/student R70/30; ☎ 9am–5pm) was the geographical and spiritual heart of old Königsberg. Founded in 1333, the red-brick cathedral was almost destroyed during WWII, but since 1992 has been undergoing full restoration. The building's show-piece main hall, with fabulous vaulted ceilings, opened in late 2006 and serves as a concert hall. A painstakingly crafted replica of the

cathedral's 16th-century, 38,000-pipe organ will be completed by 2010. Upstairs, a museum has displays of old Königsberg, objects from archaeological digs and a shrine to Immanuel Kant – including the old philosopher's creepy death mask. Kant, whose rose-marble **tomb** lies outside on the north side, was born, studied and died 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.

WORLD OCEAN MUSEUM

Located along the Petra Velikogo embankment west of the cathedral, this **museum** (☎ 340 244; www.vitiaz.ru; nab Petra Velikogo 1; all 3 sections adult/student R80/40; ☎ 11am–6pm Wed–Sun Apr–Oct, 10am–5pm Wed–Sun Nov–Mar) is a Kaliningrad highlight. It's actually three museums in one: tour a B-413 submarine; learn about sea and space exploration aboard two giant Soviet research ships; or visit its fairly uninspiring aquarium and learn about oceanography. Visits to the two ships are by free guided tour only (every 45 minutes or so). The museum has a decent souvenir shop with old Soviet cameras, army-issue gadgets and other random knickknacks.

TSENTRALNAYA PLOSHCHAD & AROUND

Just north of the cathedral is Tsentralnaya ploshchad (Central Sq), on which sits one of

the ugliest of Soviet creations, the H-shaped **Dom Sovetov** (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. In its place this eyesore was built (over 10 long years), but it has never been used after builders discovered that the ground beneath it is hollow, with a (now flooded) four-level underground passage connecting to the cathedral. Duh.

Heading northwest along Leninsky pr from Tsentralnaya ploshchad, follow the signs leading to the unique **Bunker Museum** (Muzey Blindazh; ☎ 536 593; ul Universitetskaya 2; admission R30; ☎ 10am–6pm), the underground German command where General Otto Lasch capitulated to the Soviets in 1945. There are some excellent dioramas here depicting the WWII bombing of Königsberg. Free guided tours are available in Russian and German.

Head towards the **Kant statue** and keep heading east, crossing the pretty Prud Nizhny (Lower Pond), to get to the highly worthwhile **History & Art Museum** (☎ 466 888; ul Klinicheskaya 21; adult/student R40/20; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun). Housed in a reconstructed 1912 concert hall, the museum displays a fairly open history of the city and has heart-wrenching photos of the dynamiting of the city's castle. Exhibits are in Russian only.

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

PLOSHCHAD POBEDY TO PROSPEKT MIRA

At the northern terminus of Leninsky pr lies the concrete expanse known as ploshchad Pobedy (Victory Sq), once dominated by Lenin but now lorded over by the newly built **Church of Christ the Saviour**.

Extending west of the square is pr Mira, a pleasant artery leading to some of the city's prettiest areas and lined with shops and cafés. Past the Schiller statue is the **zoo** (pr Mira 24; adult/student R40/20; ☎ 9am–8pm). Further west is the splendid **Cosmonaut Monument**, a gem of Soviet iconography honouring several cosmonauts from the region.

Just where pr Pobedy branches out from pr Mira is the entrance to bustling **Central Park**, favourite strolling ground for local families in the warm months. There's a small amusement park, a few outdoor eating options and plenty of greenery.

Walks through the linden-scented, tree-lined old **German neighbourhoods** are the best way to experience old Königsberg: the entire area previously known as Amalienau between prs Pobedy and Mira is enchanting (ul Kutuzova especially), as is the slightly rundown area north of pr Mira centred around ul Komsomolskaya.

OTHER MUSEUMS

The fascinating **Amber Museum** (☎ 466 888; pl Vasilevskogo 1; admission R80; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) has some 6000 amber art works (including some wild Soviet symbols), plus copies of sections of the famous Amber Room, which the Nazis stole wholesale from St Petersburg in 1941 and brought to Königsberg's castle. It was then destroyed by fire while under Red Army occupation. The museum is located within **Dohna Tower**, which served as a fortress to protect adjacent **Rossgarten Gate** (pl Vasilevskogo 3).

Impressively renovated **Korolevskie Vorota** (King's Gate; ☎ 581 272; ul Frunze 112; student/adult R80/40; ☎ 11am–6pm Wed–Sun) houses a museum with cool models of old Königsberg and exhibits on the personalities who shaped the region's history. A little south of here is the twin-towered **Sackheim Gate** (cnr pr Moskovsky & Litovskiy Val).

Newly restored **Friedland Gate** (pr Kalinina 6; adult/child R20/10; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) contains a small museum with a great map plotting the locations of the 13 original city gates. There's an intriguing arms display, and the original cobblestone road that ran through the gate is visible inside.

Sleeping

Breakfast costs extra unless otherwise stated.

Chaika (☎ 210 729; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; ul Pugacheva 13; s/d from R1100/1300) This excellent-value hotel in an attractive residential area has an antique charm associated with being a converted townhouse as opposed to a converted Soviet monstrosity. The 24 rooms smell a bit musty, but have ample space and furniture.

Hotel Kaliningrad (☎ 536 021; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; Leninsky pr 81; budget s/d R1100/1600, business class s/d R2000/2800; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) In the middle of the city, this concrete monster, with a certain surly Soviet charm, couldn't be louder, but its clean, no-frills budget rooms get the job done for a decent price. Wheelchair access is available.

OLD GATES SPROUT NEW LIFE

There was a time when the only way into the heart of Königsberg was through a network of gates built into an earthen wall that surrounded the city. Originally constructed in the 14th century, the wall and 13 gates were rebuilt of red brick in the middle of the 19th century. Wars and overzealous city planners subsequently destroyed a few of these gates, but most of them survived, as did portions of the wall.

Today the surviving red-brick gates are a key element in the city's plan to resurrect the spirit of old Königsberg. A few of the gates have been restored to their former glory and now house museums. The **Brandenberg Gate** (ul Zheleznodorozhnaya) is open to traffic. The city plans to reconstruct an entire section of the old wall near **Prud Verkhny** (Upper Pond) – an area the city hopes to transform into a buzzing hive of tourist activity. The city recently installed a walking path around the pond.

If you're feeling energetic, you can walk most of the circumference of the old wall, the outline of which is clearly visible on any map of Kaliningrad. Start at the southern boundary of the wall along pr Kalinina and walk clockwise along ul Zheleznodorozhnaya, Gvardeysky pr, ul Chernyakhovskogo and finally ul Litovskiy Val. The walk takes most of the day, but you'll pass near many of Kaliningrad's best sights in the process. Remains of the old wall and the moat that surrounded the old city are visible throughout the walk. The impressive section of the old wall along ul Litovskiy Val is the part that the city plans to rebuild.

Deima Hotel (☎ 710 814; www.deima-tour.com; ul Tolstikova 15/2; business class s/d R1400/1800, economy d/tr with shared bathroom R600/990; (P)) There's a dizzying variety of rooms to match the dizzying pace of activity in the lobby, bar and billiard room. The cramped dorm-style economy rooms are the city's best budget option. The location is poor, though – it's a 10-minute taxi ride (R50) south from the train station.

Dona Hotel (☎ 351 650; http://dona.kaliningrad.ru; pl Vasilevskogo 2; s/d from R2100/2700; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Dona is an oasis of modernity, smiles and sleek design in a city where most hotels are still struggling to shake their Soviet shackles. It's Kaliningrad's best hotel, and its Dolce Vita eatery and jazz club is arguably the city's best restaurant.

Cherepakha (☎ 957 500; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; Zoologicheskyy tupik 10; s/d R2200/2900, ste R3900-4900; (P) (♿)) You can wake up to elephant calls in this intimate red-brick guesthouse tucked away in a residential neighbourhood behind the zoo. 'The Turtle' is known for its elegant furnishings, excellent a-la-carte breakfast and truly lavish deluxe rooms with huge flat-screen TVs.

Other recommendations:

Komnaty Otdykh (☎ 586 447; pl Kalinina; s/d/tr per person from R490/435/350) Surprisingly clean rooms above the train station, but watch your neighbour.

Hotel Moskva (☎ 352 333; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; pr Mira 19; s/d R2000/2800; (P) (♿)) Nicely renovated and perfectly located, if overpriced, 171-room behemoth.

Triumph Palace (Per Bolshevitsky 3) Newly opened top-end hotel.

Eating

A recent restaurant explosion is one sure sign of progress in Kaliningrad, but possibly the best place to eat remains the summertime *shashlyk* stands in Central Park. A pork kebab washed down by a bottle of Baltika won't set you back much more than R100.

Kaliningrad State Technical University cafeteriya (KGTU Stolovaya; Basement, Sovietyky pr 1; mains R40-75; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Every visitor to Russia should visit an authentic *stolovaya* (cafeteria) to fill up on cheap, hearty Russian food. This is a fine specimen in a great location.

Vatan (ul Chernyakhovskogo 12a-16a; mains R100-200; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎) If you're not familiar with the wonders of central Asian cuisine, become so at this fun, affordable basement eatery with rare nonsmoking section. Its easy-to-navigate English menu features Uzbek mainstays such

as *plov* and *manty* (spicy dumplings) as well as more exotic offerings, and you can guzzle pints of Czech Primator beer for just R40.

Zarya (pr Mira 43; meals R100-250; ☎ 10am-3am) This highly fashionable spot in the lobby of a cinema has an old Europe flavour, with good fish dishes and a vegetarian menu.

Yakitoriya Leninsky (Leninsky pr 18; ☎ 24hr); Leonova (Leonova 59; mains R150-300; ☎ 11am-6am) Twenty four-hour Japanese food in once restaurant-starved Kaliningrad? You betcha. Not quite authentic, but not bad for the price. It has an English-picture menu.

Solnechny Kamen (pl Vasilevskogo 3; mains R150-500) Although the food is good (if a bit expensive), the main attraction is the atrium dining area overlooking Prud Verkhny. It's located inside Rossgarten Gate.

12 Chairs Art Club (pr Mira 67; mains R200-400; ☎ noon-1am) A masterpiece of cosy interior design, this dimly lit basement maze emanates class from every antique-filled nook. From the service to the scrumptious house specialities to the mouth-watering dessert menu highlighted by chocolate fondue, they get it all right here.

Self-caterers should visit the following supermarkets:

Viktoriya (ul 9-go Aprela 9; ☎ 9am-midnight) Large Western-style supermarket.

Vester (Leninsky pr 16; ☎ 10am-9pm)

Drinking

Reduit (☎ 469 401; Litovskyy Val 27; mains R200; ☎ noon-midnight) Freshly brewed beer fills pint glasses and flavours many of the food recipes at this brewpub in one of the old city defence bastions near Korolevskie Vorota. Unfiltered (R70) is the way forward. A guided beer tasting/fortress tour costs R170 – call ahead to reserve.

Entertainment

Kaliningrad Oblast Drama Theatre (☎ 212 422; pr Mira 4; admission R100-180; ☎ box office 10am-7pm) Plays, classical concerts and other events are regularly staged here. Pick up the schedule at the box office.

Kaliningrad Cathedral (☎ 272 583; Tsentralnyy Ostrov) The Kaliningrad Chamber Choir holds concerts in a small room upstairs every Tuesday and Saturday at 4pm (admission R50). The newly restored main hall hosts concerts.

Philharmonic Hall (☎ 448 890; ul Bogdana Khmel'nitskogo 61a; admission from R30) Boasting excellent acoustics, this beautifully restored neo-

Gothic church hosts organ concerts, chamber music recitals and the occasional symphony orchestra.

NIGHTCLUBS

Kaliningrad's nightclubs often draw top DJs from Moscow and Western Europe. The big clubs loudly announce upcoming events on banners lining Leninsky pr and other major arteries. Most clubs besides Planeta tend to be either quiet or closed on weekdays.

Universal (☎ 952 996; www.dub-universal.com; pr Mira 43; admission from R300) You gotta love a place where the bartenders wear (unedited) mini-skirts with 'bar stuff' written across the bum. Nevertheless, it's Kaliningrad's classiest club and, unlike many places, won't leave you feeling way, way too old.

Vagonka (☎ 956 677; Stanochnaya ul 12; admission from R150) Located west of Kalinin Park, this one's not easy to find, but it's the best option for the under-21 crowd and drinks are cheap (R60 pints and R40 vodka shots).

Planeta (☎ 533 809; ul Chernyakhovskogo 26; admission Mon-Fri R150, Sat & Sun R400) Your one-stop shop for all things hedonistic goes off until the wee hours every night of the week. Upstairs is the glitzy nightclub proper, while downstairs an older crowd gets decidedly ugly dancing to Russian hits in the more intimate confines of the Diky Diuk restaurant.

Amsterdam (38/11 Litovskyy Val; ☎ 8am-2am Sun-Thu, 8am-6am Fri & Sat) Kaliningrad's only gay club is hidden 200m down an unnamed sidestreet off Litovskyy Val.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Kaliningrad's Khrabrovo **domestic** (☎ 355 083) and **international** (☎ 355 095) airports are 24km north of the city near Khrabovo village. For international connections, see p745. **Aeroflot** (☎ 916 455; pl Pobedy 4) has two to four daily flights to Moscow (from R2000 one way, 1¾ hours) and **Pulkovo Airlines** (☎ 716 663; pl Pobedy 4) has one to two daily flights to St Petersburg (from R2800 one way, 1½ hours). **Kaliningrad Airlines** (☎ 466 066; pl Kalinina 1) flies twice daily to Moscow and thrice weekly to St Petersburg.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 443 635, international tickets ☎ 446 261; pl Kalinina) is next to the Yuzhny Vokzal (South Station). International destinations served: Klaipėda (R183, three hours, four

daily), Kaunas/Vilnius (R300/450, six/eight hours, twice daily), Riga (R500, nine hours, twice daily), Tallinn (R800, 14 hours, daily), Olshtyn/Gdansk (R270/320, four/five hours, twice daily) and Warsaw (R450, nine hours, daily). **König Auto** (☎ 460 304) has several buses weekly to Berlin and other German cities.

The best way to Svetlogorsk and Zelenogradsk is via microbus or bus from the bus stop next to the Severny Vokzal (North Station) on Sovetsky pr. They run about every 15 minutes or so until about 8pm (microbus/bus to Zelenogradsk R25/30, 45/35 minutes; to Svetlogorsk R35/40, 60/45 minutes). All other domestic bus routes originate from the main bus station.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There are three border crossings from Poland and four from Lithuania; the lines at the Lithuanian borders are not as monstrous.

TRAIN

There are two stations in the city: **Severny Vokzal** (North Station; ☎ 601 838) and the larger **Yuzhny Vokzal** (South Station; ☎ 499 991). All long-distance and many local trains go from Yuzhny Vokzal, passing through but not always stopping at Severny Vokzal.

There are at least three daily trains to Vilnius (R550, six hours), at least one daily to Moscow (R950, 23 hours), one daily to Berlin (R2600, 15 hours), and one every second day to both Kyiv (R1200, 25 hours) and St Petersburg (R800, 26 hours).

Local trains include 12 daily to Svetlogorsk (R42, one hour), six daily to Zelenogradsk (R35, 45 minutes), and two daily to both Chernyakhovsk (R70, two hours) and Sovetsky (R100, three hours).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

To get to the domestic airport, take bus 128 from the bus station (R50, one hour, hourly). You have to take a taxi for the final 3km from the domestic airport to the international airport. Taxis ask at least R400 for the ride from the airport to the city centre, but it's cheaper going in the other direction (to the airport).

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Tickets for trams, trolleybuses, buses and minibuses are sold only by controllers on board (R6 to R7 within the city).

SVETLOGORSK СВЕТЛОГОРСК

☎ within the region 53, from elsewhere 40153
pop 13,000

This sleepy beach town with some impressive Prussian-era half-timbered mansions makes an easy day trip from Kaliningrad. You can bag rays on the long, narrow beach or stroll along the promenade that separates the beach from the steep, sandy slopes that lead up to the town. Other favourite pastimes include amber shopping along the main drag, ul Lenina, and enjoying a lazy lunch with a view at one of several beachside eateries. Pick up a town map at any kiosk.

The town's main attraction are the gallant wooden houses in the tranquil residential neighbourhood east of the town centre. After WWII the Soviets confiscated these houses from their original owners and many became dachas for elite apparatchiks. From the water tower on ul Oktyabrskaya, walk east and you'll soon come to the quaint, half-timbered **Makar Organ Hall** (☎ 21761; ul Kurortnaya 3) in a converted stable. You can hear concerts of Bach, Handel and others throughout the week. Most begin at 5pm.

About 200m east of the main beach promenade is an impressive, colourful **sundial**, believed to be the largest in Europe. You can hire **bicycles** (per hr R40) on ul Leninska 100m east of ul Oktyabrskaya.

Stary Doktor (☎ 21362; www.alter-doctor.ru; ul Gagarina 12; s/d R1550/1850; 📍), in a beautiful German mansion, has tastefully austere rooms and a good restaurant. Beachfront **Hotel Grand Palace** (☎ 21655; www.grandhotel.ru; s/d from R5200/6900; 📍 📺 📶) is the fanciest hotel in all of Kaliningrad, with lavish furnishings and a big plasma TV in every room; it also has wheelchair access.

If sitting outdoors at one of the many street-side eating spots on ul Leninska munching on *shashlyk* (chicken/pork R75/80), drinking *pivo* (R25) and listening to cheery Russian pop doesn't make you happy, you're in the wrong country. Down by the beach, **Taverna Dom Rybaka** (Beregovaya 16; mains R200-300; 🍷) has a great outdoor patio and serves tasty seafood.

Getting There & Away

The best way to get to Svetlogorsk is via microbus or bus from the bus stop next to Kaliningrad's Severny Vokzal (North Station) on Sovetsky pr. They run every 15 minutes or so until about 8pm (bus/microbus R35/40, 60/45

minutes). Trains run approximately hourly from 8am to 9pm (to North Station R35, one hour; to South Station R40, 1¼ hours).

KURSHKAYA KOSA NATIONAL PARK
КУРШКАЯ КОСА

☎ within the region 50, from elsewhere 40150

The 98km-long Kurshkaya Kosa (Curonian Spit) is a remote and dramatic landscape with high sand dunes, pine forests, an exposed western coast and a calm lagoon that is shared by Russia and Lithuania. A Unesco World Heritage site, it's a paradise for elk, birds, and intrepid travellers who like to get way off the beaten track.

The Russian half of the Kurshkaya Kosa has far fewer services than the Lithuanian side, which is part of its appeal. You're not allowed to walk on the dunes, so access to the coast is mainly from the spit's three main towns – Lesnoy, Rybacy and, furthest north, Morskoye.

The best way for adventurers to experience the spit is on bike. You can hire bikes at the National Park's **Ecotourism Information Centre** (☎ 45275; Tsentralnaya ul 26) in Lesnoy, which also organises ecologically friendly excursions.

The **Kurshkaya Kosa National Park** (☎ 41346; www.kurshkayakosa.ru; Lesnaya ul 7; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is headquartered in Rybacy, but its **bird-ringing centre**, 7km north of Lesnoy, is the spit's main highlight. Massive bird-trapping nets (one is 15m high, 30m wide and 70m long) trap an average of 1000 birds a day for tagging.

To get to Kurshkaya Kosa, take a bus from Kaliningrad to Zelenogradsk (see p739), then hop on a northbound bus (about seven daily) or hire a taxi (R300/500/600 to Lesnoy/Rybacy/Morskoye).

RUSSIA DIRECTORY**ACCOMMODATION**

Prices in this chapter are listed in budget order (from cheapest to most expensive). Budget accommodation is still hard to come by in Russia, and you are strongly recommended to book ahead during summer. During the white nights in St Petersburg in late June, booking early is essential. In this chapter, Budget is anything under R2000 per double per night, mid-range is R2000 to R12,000 per double per night, and Top End anything more than R12,000.

Both Moscow and St Petersburg have a number of well-established and reliable youth hostels, significantly more expensive than in most countries (budget beds cost €25 per night). Hotels start from about €35, although these are mainly fairly shabby Intourist relics. More independent and even boutique hotels are opening up and things are improving.

BUSINESS HOURS

Russians work from early in the morning until the midafternoon. Shops usually open between 9am and 11am and often stay open until 8pm or 9pm. Banks have more traditional opening hours – usually 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday. Bars and restaurants will often work later than their stated hours if the establishment is full. In fact, many simply say that they work *do poslednogo klienta* (until the last customer leaves).

CHILDREN

While Russia isn't an obvious place to take children, there's more than you might expect for them to get out of a visit. In Moscow, **Gorky Park** (Krymsky Val; 🕒 dawn-dusk; 📍 Park Kultury) is the obvious choice, where there's always plenty to do. You'll find fairground attractions, boats on the small lakes and plenty of other activities including a large ferris wheel.

The sprawling **Moscow Zoo** (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-255 6034; www.zoo.ru; Bolshaya Gruzinskaya ul 1; adult/under 18yr R80/free; 🕒 9am-8pm Tue-Sun summer, 9am-5pm winter; 📍 Barikadnaya) is also worth a visit. In St Petersburg the ghoulish freak show at the Kunstkamera (Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography; p726) is great fun for older kids, although younger ones may find its mutants rather upsetting. The **Alexandrovsky Park** (Map pp720-1; Kropinverksky Pr; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Petrogradskaya) behind the Peter & Paul Fortress has fairground rides, a small zoo and other activities that kids will enjoy.

CUSTOMS

Customs controls in Russia are relatively relaxed these days and bag searches beyond the perfunctory are quite rare. Apart from the usual limits, bringing in and out large amounts of cash is restricted, although the amount at which you have to go through the red channel changes frequently. At the time of writing it was US\$10,000.

On entering Russia you'll be given a *deklaratsiya* (customs declaration), which you should

fill out with a list of any currency you're carrying plus any items of worth. You should list mobile phones, cameras and laptops to avoid any potential problems upon leaving Russia.

It's best if you can get your declaration stamped on entry and then simply show the same declaration when you exit Russia. However, sometimes customs points are totally unmanned, so it's not always possible. The system seems to be in total flux, with officials usually very happy for you to fill out exit declarations on leaving the country if necessary.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Despite the media fascination with gangland killings and the 'Russian mafia', travellers have nothing to fear on this score – the increasingly respectable gangster classes are not interested in such small fry. Travellers need to be very careful of pickpockets, though – most foreigners stand out a mile in Russia and, while this is no problem in itself, there's inevitably an increased chance you'll be targeted. Also be aware that there are some local gangs that can surround and rob travellers quite brazenly in broad daylight, although these are rare.

Bear in mind that, while things have improved slowly, many police officers and other uniformed officials are on the make – some are not much better than the people they are employed to protect the public from. Never allow them to go through your wallet or pockets, as you may find something is missing later on. If you feel you are being unfairly treated or the police try to make you go somewhere with them, pull out your mobile phone and threaten to call your embassy (*ya pozvonuyu svoyu posolstvu*). This will usually be sufficient to make them leave you alone. However, if they still want you to go somewhere, it's best to call your embassy immediately.

There's a nasty skinhead tradition of attacking nonwhite people on Hitler's birthday (20 April). This should not cause undue concern to travellers, as targets are nearly always unfortunate people from the Caucasus, but nonwhite travellers should be aware of this disgusting behaviour, despite the very small chance of anything happening to them.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Disabled travellers aren't well catered for in Russia. There's a lack of access ramps and lifts for wheelchairs. However, attitudes are enlightened, and things are slowly changing. Major

museums, such as the Hermitage and the Russian Museum, offer very good disabled access.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Russian Embassies & Consulates

Check the **Russian Federation Embassy & Consulate Locator** (www.russianembassy.net) for more listings of Russian embassies abroad. The following addresses are of consular sections where visas can be obtained.

Australia (☎ 02-9326 1188; www.australia.mid.ru; 7 Fullerton St, Woollahra, NSW 2025)

Canada (☎ 613-236 7220; www.rusembcanada.mid.ru; 52 Range Rd, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8J5)

Finland (☎ 09-661 877; www.helsinki.rusembassy.org; Tehtaankatu 1B, FIN-00140 Helsinki)

Germany (☎ 030/22-65-11-84; www.russische-botenschaft.de; Behrenstr 66, 10117 Berlin)

UK (☎ 020-7229 8027, visa information message 0891-171 271; www.rusembblon.org; 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 40S)

USA (☎ 202-939 8907; www.russianembassy.org; 2641 Tunlaw Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Embassies in Moscow

Australia (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-956 6070; www.australianembassy.ru; Kropotkinsky per 2; (M) Kropotkinskaya)

Belarus (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-924 7031; fax 095-928 6633; Maroseyka ul 17/6, 101000 Moscow; (M) Krasnye Vorota)

Canada (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-105 6000; fax 105 6025; Starokonnyushenny per 23; (M) Kropotkinskaya)

France (☎ 495-937 1500; www.ambafrance.ru; ul Bolshaya Yakimanka 45; (M) Oktyabrskaya)

Germany (☎ 495-937 9500; www.moskau.diplo.de; ul Mosfilmovskaya 56; (M) Park Pobedy)

Netherlands (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-797 2900; www.netherlands-embassy.ru; Kalashny per 6; (M) Arbatskaya)

New Zealand (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-956 3579; www.nzembassy.msk.ru; ul Povarskaya 44; (M) Barrikadnaya)

UK (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-956 7200; fax 956 7201; Smolenskaya nab 10; (M) Smolenskaya)

Ukraine (☎ 495-229 1079; emb_ru@mfa.gov.ua; Leonovskiy pereulok 18; (M) Pushkinskaya)

USA (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-728 5000; www.moscow.usembassy.com; Bolshoy Devyatinsky per 8; (M) Barrikadnaya)

Consulates in St Petersburg

Australia (Map p724; ☎ 812-325 7333; www.australianembassy.ru; Italiyanskaya ul 1; (M) Nevsky Pr)

Canada (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-325 8448; fax 325 8393; Malodetskoyevskiy pr 32B; (M) Tekhnologicheskoy Institut)

France (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-332 2270; www.consulfrance-saint-petersbourg.org; nab reki Moyki 15; (M) Nevsky Pr)

Germany (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-320 2400; www.sankt-petersburg.diplo.de; Furshadtskaya ul 39; (M) Chernyshevskaya)

UK (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-320 3200; www.britain.spb.ru; pl Proletarskoy Diktatury 5; (M) Chernyshevskaya)

USA (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-331 2600; www.stpetersburg-usconsulate.ru; ul Furshadtskaya 15; (M) Chernyshevskaya)

Consulates in Kaliningrad

Denmark (☎ 401-2-716 868; 4th fl, pl Pobedy 4)

Lithuania (☎ 401-2-957 688; ul Proletarskaya 133)

Poland (☎ 401-2-950 419; Kashtanovaya alleya 51)

Sweden (☎ 401-2-959 400; ul Kutuzova 29)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality was legalised in Russia in the early 1990s but remains a divisive issue throughout the country. Young people have a fairly relaxed attitude towards both gay and lesbian relationships, especially in Moscow and St Petersburg – by far the most cosmopolitan cities in the country. But attempts in the Duma as recently as 2002 to ban homosexuality altogether reflect the strong conservative traditionalism of many older Russians who see homosexuality as some kind of Western import. In 2006 ultra-right-wing groups backed by extremists from the Russian Orthodox Church attacked clubbers attempting to go to a gay night in Moscow, although luckily only a few people were hurt. In the same year Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov illegally refused to even consider an application by gay groups to stage Russia's first ever gay pride march. There's still a long way to go, although on a practical level most same-sex couples will have no trouble booking a double room in a hotel.

HOLIDAYS

Following are Russia's main public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Russian Orthodox Christmas Day 7 January

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day/Spring Festival 1 & 2 May

Victory (1945) Day 9 May

Russian Independence Day 12 Jun

Day of Reconciliation and Accord (the rebranded Revolution Day) 7 Nov

Other days that are widely celebrated are Defenders of the Motherland Day (23 February), Easter Monday and Constitution Day (12 December).

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a huge amount of travel information about Russia on the internet. The most up-to-date and accessible news sites are **Moscow Times** (www.themoscowtimes.com) and the **St Petersburg Times** (www.sptimesrussia.com), while **The Exile** (www.exile.ru) offers far more trenchant analysis of what's going on in the country's corrupt political landscape.

For specific and current tourist guides for St Petersburg and Kaliningrad (but oddly, not Moscow) see **In Your Pocket** (www.inyourpocket.com), which is updated monthly and includes the latest information on hotels, restaurants and nightlife. One of the best general sites for visitors is the excellent **Way To Russia.Net** (www.waytorussia.net), an online information portal with up-to-the-minute visa and travel information, listings for bars and clubs, travel tips, and background on Russia and its culture.

For those planning railway trips in Russia and the former Soviet Union, **Your Train** (www.poezda.net) is an invaluable resource, with a fully updated rail timetable uploaded to assist with planning any trip, as well as an online booking system to help you avoid the queues at train stations.

LANGUAGE

Russian is spoken – not to mention written – everywhere. Young people usually speak some broken English, but generally knowledge of foreign languages is very low. After English, German is the most commonly understood language. It's pretty easy to pick up some basic Russian phrases, although what will really improve your enjoyment of Russia is making an effort to learn the (surprisingly easy) Cyrillic alphabet (see p960). Without it, you'll find everything extremely hard work.

MEDIA

The Russian media has been the subject of an intense power struggle since the beginning of Putin's era in power. Seeking to claw back the control of the media lost since the end of communism, the Kremlin has been accused of illegally taking control of certain media groups that were critical of the government.

The most spectacular example of this was the takeover of national channel NTV by the Kremlin in 2001. Most Russian media outlets today are controlled by either the government or oligarchs with their own agenda.

Magazines

There is a huge range of magazines on sale in Russia – many Western titles such as *Vogue* and *Elle* have their own Russian editions, and there is also plenty of homegrown talent. *Itogi* is the Russian equivalent to the *Economist* and has some very interesting news analysis pieces.

Newspapers

The tabloid is king in the new Russia, as pioneered by the weekly *Argumenty I Fakti* and also *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, the trashy, huge-selling daily that has defined post-communist Russia's fascination with the grubby celebrity classes of the Russian showbiz world. Far better for news and analysis are *Izvestia*, *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti* (affiliated with the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal*). The *Moscow Times*, a free English-language daily, has built its reputation on healthy scepticism of the Kremlin and pioneering investigative writing. It's twice-weekly sister paper, the *St Petersburg Times*, is the best source of local news from Russia's second city.

Radio

The Moscow station *Ekho Moskvy* (Echo of Moscow) is the only independent station in the country and has a huge following. Other Russian stations have a huge amount of advertising and are of negligible quality.

TV

The state-run ORT is the government mouthpiece and has been slowly raising broadcasting standards over the past decade to match NTV and RTR, its two main commercial rivals. A huge number of channels broadcast regionally as well. Other national channels include Kultura (the culture channel, showing high-brow documentaries, films and concerts) and the ultraglossy MTV Russia, which has been broadcasting in Russia since 1998, showing a mix of Russian and Western pop music.

MONEY

The currency in Russia is the rouble, which is made up of 100 kopeks. Notes come in denominations of 5000, 1000, 500, 100, 50 and 10 roubles; coins come in five-, two- and one-rouble, and 50- and 10-kopek denominations. You can use all major credit and debit cards (including Cirrus and Maestro) in ATMs, and in good restaurants and hotels. It's possible to exchange travellers cheques, although at

a price. Euro or US dollar cash is the best to bring, and in general should be in pristine condition – crumpled or old notes are often refused. Most major currencies can be exchanged at change booths all over any town in Russia. Look for the sign *obmen valyut*. You may be asked for your passport.

POST

The Russian postal service gets an unfair rap. Postcards, letters and parcels sent abroad usually arrive within a couple of weeks, but there are occasional lapses. A postcard to anywhere in the world costs R17 and a letter R20.

TELEPHONE

The international code for Russia is ☎ 7. The international access code from normal phones in Russia is ☎ 8, followed by 10 after the second tone, followed by the country code. From mobile phones, however, just dial +[country code] to place an international call.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Independent travellers may need to use travel agents to secure visa invitations (see right) and to book internal travel, as without Russian-language skills this can sometimes be tricky to organise yourself if you want to arrange more than a simple train or plane ticket. The following services are recommended:

IntelService Center USA (☎ 1-800 339 2118; www.intelservice.ru; 1227 Monterey St, Pittsburgh, PA 15212) With offices in both the US and Moscow, the IntelService Center has plenty of experience in organising travel in Russia. As well as visa invitations, it can arrange discounted hotel rates and tours.

Travel Document Systems (☎ 1-800 874 5100; www.traveldocs.com; 925 15th St NW, Ste 300, Washington, DC 20005) The Washington-based TDS deals exclusively in visa documentation and can fax visa invitations anywhere in the world.

Way to Russia (www.waytorussia.net) An entirely online travel agency, this Russian-based website is probably the ultimate resource for travellers. Some of the best visa support and most up-to-date information can be found here. Highly recommended.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Fire ☎ 01
- Police ☎ 02
- Ambulance ☎ 03

VISAS

Everyone needs a visa to visit Russia, and it will probably be your biggest single headache, so allow yourself at least a month before you travel to secure one. There are several types of visa, but most travellers will apply for a tourist visa, valid for 30 days from the date of entry. Your visa process has three stages – invitation, application and registration.

First of all you need an invitation. For a small fee (usually around €30) most hotels and hostels will issue an invitation (or ‘visa support’) to anyone staying with them. The invitation then allows you to apply for a visa at any Russian embassy. Costs can vary enormously, from \$20 to \$200 for same-day service, so try to plan as far ahead as possible. If you’re not staying in a hotel or hostel, you’ll need to buy an invitation. This can be done through almost any travel agent dealing with Russia.

On arrival you will need to fill out a *migratsionnaya karta* (migration card) – a long white form issued at passport control throughout the country. You surrender one half of the form immediately to the passport control and keep the other for the duration of your stay, giving it up only when you exit Russia. It is essential that you don’t lose this, as leaving Russia without it will be an expensive nightmare. Some hotels will not accept travellers without one either.

Finally, once you arrive in Russia you are – officially at least – obliged to register your visa within three working days. This can nearly always be done by your hotel or hostel, but if you are not staying in one, you will need to pay a travel agency (usually \$30) to register it for you. Not registering your visa is a gamble – some travellers report leaving Russia unhindered without registration, but officially you are liable to large fines. It’s best not to take chances.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The most common problem faced by foreign women in Russia is sexual harassment. It can be quite common to be propositioned in public, especially if you are walking alone at night. Unpleasant as it may be, this is rarely dangerous and a simple ‘*kak vam ne stydno*’ (‘you should be ashamed of yourself’) delivered in a suitably stern manner should send anyone on their way.

That said, Russian men are generally extremely polite, and will open doors, give up

their seats and wherever possible help any female out to a far greater degree than their Western counterparts. Women are also very independent, and you won’t attract attention by travelling alone as a female.

TRANSPORT IN RUSSIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Moscow’s three international airports are modern **Domodedovo Airport** (DME; ☎ 933 6666; www.domodedovo.ru), crappy Soviet-era relic **Sheremetyevo Airport** (SVO; ☎ 232 6565; www.sheremetyevo-airport.ru) and recently done up **Vnukovo Airport** (VKO; ☎ 436 2813; www.vnukovo.ru). Between them Moscow is connected to nearly all European capitals, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Beijing, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and Delhi.

St Petersburg’s recently renovated **Pulkovo-2 Airport** (LED; ☎ 704 3444; www.pulkovo.ru) is the city’s international gateway. It’s not as well connected as Moscow, but has regular connections throughout Europe, including Prague.

Kaliningrad’s **Khrabrovo International Airport** (KGD; ☎ 4012-355 083) has daily flights to Warsaw on **LOT Airlines** (Leninsky pr 5).

The following list of carriers fly to/from Russia. Telephone numbers are included as applicable for Moscow (prefixed 495), St Petersburg (812) and Kaliningrad (401).

Aeroflot (code SU; ☎ 495-223 5555; 812-327 3872, 401-2-916 455; www.aeroflot.com)

Air France (code AF; ☎ 495-937 3839, 812-336 2900; www.airfrance.com)

American Airlines (code AA; ☎ 495-234 4074/5/6; www.aa.com)

Austrian Airlines (code OS; ☎ 495-995 0995, 812-331 2005; www.aua.com)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 495-363 2525, 812-380 0626; www.ba.com)

ČSA (code OK; ☎ 495-737 6637, 812-315 5259; www.czechairlines.com)

Delta Airlines (code DL; ☎ 495-937 9090, 812-117 5820; www.delta.com)

Finnair (code AY; ☎ 495-933 0056, 812-303 9898; www.finnair.com)

Germania Express (code ST; www.gexx.de) Web-based sales only.

Japan Airlines (code JL; ☎ 495-730 3070; www.jal.com)

Kaliningrad Airlines (code K8; ☎ 401-2-355 095)

KLM (code KL; ☎ 495-258 3600, 812-346 6868; www.klm.com)

LOT (code LO; ☎ 495-775 7737, 812-273 5721, 401-2-342 707; www.lot.com)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 495-737 6400, 812-320 1000; www.lufthansa.com)

Pulkovo Airlines (code FV; ☎ 495-299 1940, 812-303 9268, 401-2-716 663; www.pulkovo.ru)

SAS Scandinavian Airlines (code SK; ☎ 495-775 4747, 812-326 2600; www.scandinavian.net)

Siberia Airlines (code S7; ☎ 495-777 9999, 812-718 8676; www.s7.ru)

Transaero Airlines (code UN; ☎ 495-788 8080; www.transaero.ru)

Land

BORDER CROSSINGS

The Russian Federation has a huge number of border crossings, adjoining as it does some 13 countries. From Eastern Europe you are most likely to enter from Finland at Vyborg, Estonia at Narva, Latvia at Rēzekne, Belarus at Krasnoye or Ezjaryshcha, and Ukraine at Chernihiv. You can enter Kaliningrad from Lithuania and Poland at any of six border posts. If you’re going west to Europe through Belarus, note that you do need a transit visa and you must obtain it in advance; see p95 for details.

Sea

St Petersburg has regular ferries from Helsinki, Tallinn and Rostok (in Germany). They are a slow and not particularly cheap method of transport. Tickets can be bought at the sea port (Morskoy Vokzal) and through the **Paromny Tsentr** (Map p724; ☎ 812-327 3377; www.paromy.ru, in Russian; ul Vosstaniya 19; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya), which sells tickets on all ferries. Prices for St Petersburg–Tallinn begin at R1500 for an armchair and at R2300 for a bed in a four-berth cabin.

GETTING AROUND

Air

In a country of Russia’s size, travelling by air is often the only reasonable way to get around. Flights link nearly every city in Russia to Moscow, and most to St Petersburg.

When flying, reckon on paying two to three times the train fare for the same journey. Flights between Moscow and St Petersburg go every hour, and a seat costs from R1300/2400 (one way/return).

You can buy tickets at any *aviakassa* (air ticket office), at travel agents or directly from the airlines (see left).

Bus

The cheapest way to get around Russia is by bus. The enormous size of the country makes it rather unappealing, but for short trips from major cities it can be faster than the train and there are more regular connections. Some sample costs are R515 (Moscow–St Petersburg) and R170 (St Petersburg–Novgorod).

RESERVATIONS

There's almost no need to reserve a seat, and in most places it's impossible anyway. Just arrive a good 30 minutes to one hour before the departure is scheduled and buy a ticket.

The long-distance bus stations are at the following addresses:

Avtovokzal No 2 (Map pp720-1; ☎ 812-166 5777; nab Obvodnogo Kanala 36, St Petersburg; 🚏 Ligovsky Pr)

Bus station (☎ 4012-443 635, international tickets 446 261; pl Kalinina, Kaliningrad)

Shcholkovskaya Avtovokzal (Shcholkovskaya Bus Station; ☎ 495-468 0400; Shcholkovskoye shosse 2, Moscow; 🚏 Shcholkovskaya)

Car & Motorcycle

It's perfectly possible to bring your own vehicle into Russia, but expect delays, bureaucracy and the attention of the roundly hated GAI (traffic police), who take particular delight in stopping foreign cars for document checks.

To enter Russia with a vehicle you will need a valid International Driving Permit, your passport, and the insurance and ownership documents for your car. *Benzin* (petrol) is no problem to find, although unleaded is still rare outside Moscow and St Petersburg. Avoid 76 petrol, and pay more for 95 or 98.

Driving in Russia is on the right-hand side, and traffic coming from the right has the right of way. Any amount of alcohol in your blood is likely to lead to complications if you are breathalysed. However, you have the right to demand a hospital blood test.

HIRE

Hiring a car is far preferable to bringing your own vehicle into Russia. As you don't really need a car to get around big cities, they are mainly of use when making trips out of town where public transport may not be so good. All the major agencies have offices in Moscow and St Petersburg. Check out **Hertz** (www.hertz.com) and **Avis** (www.avis.com).

Hitching & Unofficial Taxis

Hitching for free is something of an alien concept in Russia, but paying a small amount to be given a lift is a daily reality for millions. The system's honour code is so ingrained that drivers will often go to extraordinary lengths to get you to your destination. In cities you'll see people flagging down cars all the time; long-distance hitching is less common, but it's still acceptable if the price is right. Simply state your destination and ask '*skolko?*' (how much?). Obviously, use common sense: don't get into a car with more than one passenger and be careful if travelling alone at night.

Train

Russia is crisscrossed with an extensive train network. Suburban or short-distance trains are called *elektrichkas* and do not require advance booking – you can buy your ticket at the *prigodny poezd kassa* (suburban train ticket offices) at train stations. Long-distance services need to be booked in advance to guarantee a seat. See p938 for details of classes on Russian trains. Train travel is pricier than bus travel, but it's still perfectly affordable and far more comfortable. Prices between Moscow and St Petersburg in 2nd class begin at R500, going up to R1500 for the fast day trains.

RESERVATIONS

You're advised to reserve at least 24 hours in advance for any long-distance journey. It's quite a bureaucratic process, so bring your passport (or a photocopy), as without it you'll be unable to buy tickets. You can buy tickets for others if you bring their passports or photocopies. Queues can be very long and move with interminable slowness. If you're in a hurry, go to the service centres that exist in most big train stations. Here you pay a R100 surcharge; thus, there are no queues. Alternatively most travel agents will organise the reservation and delivery of train tickets for a generous mark-up.

You can buy train tickets in all mainline train stations, and at the central reservation offices in both Moscow and St Petersburg.

Moscow Central Train Booking Office (Map pp702-3; ☎ 495-266 8333; Komsomolskaya pl 5; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun; 🚏 Komsomolskaya)

St Petersburg Central Train Booking Office (Map p724; ☎ 812-162 3344; nab Kanala Griboedova 24; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun; 🚏 Nevsky Pr)

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