

EUROPE · HISTORY · CULTURE · ARCHITECTURE · CITY BREAKS · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Russia

The world's largest country spans eleven time zones from the Baltic to the Pacific. Moscow's Kremlin and Red Square, St Petersburg's canals and the Hermitage, and the onion domes of the Golden Ring sit in the west; beyond the Urals, the Trans-Siberian crosses the taiga to Lake Baikal. Read the FCDO travel advice before considering a trip.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Russia.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 18 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Moscow	 CURRENCY Russian rouble (RUB) £1 ≈ RUB 110	 LANGUAGE Russian	 BEST TIME May-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£200 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 8h 30m via Istanbul, Dubai or Belgrade ~£400–£800 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2, UTC+3... standard time

Russia stretches about 9,000 km from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka, but the classic first trip stays in the west: four or five days in Moscow, a Sapsan train to St Petersburg, and perhaps a loop through Golden Ring towns such as Suzdal and Vladimir. The great adventure is the Trans-Siberian, about a week non-stop from Moscow to Vladivostok, or better broken with stops in Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk for Lake Baikal. Further-flung trips reach the Altai Mountains, Kamchatka's volcanoes and Karelia's lakes and wooden churches, though these need time and local help.

For British travellers, Russia has become far harder to visit since 2022: there are no direct flights, UK bank cards do not work, and the FCDO's advice must be read first. Those who do go find big, efficient cities with superb metros, world-class museums and ballet at modest prices, and a countryside where English is rare and Cyrillic signs are the norm. Long-distance trains are sociable, with hot water from the carriage samovar and neighbours sharing food. Winters are severe but often bright; summers in the west are warm, with white nights in St Petersburg around the June solstice.

Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Red Square and the Kremlin

The fortified heart of Russian power for centuries: tour the Kremlin's cathedrals and Armoury, then cross Red Square to the candy-striped domes of St Basil's Cathedral, completed in 1561 for Ivan the Terrible.

2

CULTURE

The Hermitage

Founded by Catherine the Great in 1764, the museum fills the Winter Palace and neighbouring buildings with some three million objects, from Rembrandts and Matisses to the opulent state rooms of the tsars.

3

ADVENTURE

Trans-Siberian Railway

Nearly 9,300 km of track from Moscow to Vladivostok across the Urals, the Siberian taiga and the shore of Lake Baikal; ride in a four-berth kupe compartment and break the journey in Yekaterinburg, Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude.

4

NATURE

Lake Baikal

The world's deepest and oldest lake holds about a fifth of the planet's unfrozen surface fresh water; base yourself in Listvyanka or on Olkhon Island, or come in February and March to walk on clear ice.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Suzdal

The best preserved of the Golden Ring towns, a few hours' drive north-east of Moscow: a riverside kremlin, white-stone churches, fortified monasteries and a museum of wooden architecture, all within a gentle walk.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Moscow

≈ 13.1 million people

Red Square, the Kremlin and St Basil's justify the trip, but leave time for the palatial metro stations, the Tretyakov Gallery, Gorky Park and evening walks along the Moskva embankments.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Saint Petersburg

≈ 5.6 million people

Peter the Great's planned capital of canals and Baroque palaces: the Hermitage, the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood, ballet at the Mariinsky and Peterhof's fountains by hydrofoil.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Novosibirsk

≈ 1.6 million people

Siberia's largest city and a major Trans-Siberian stop, with Russia's largest theatre building, the Opera and Ballet Theatre, and the Akademgorodok science town; a sensible break on the long ride east.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Russia

Best time: **May–Sep.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

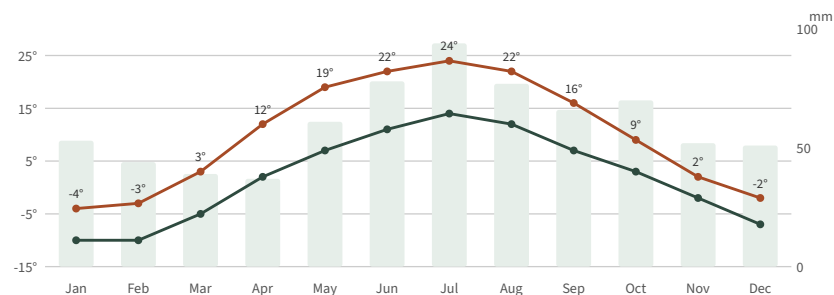
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Moscow

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec	New Year and Orthodox Christmas New Year is Russia's biggest holiday, with fireworks, Ded Moroz and illuminated squares; Orthodox Christmas follows on 7 January, and much of the country stops for the first week of January.
Feb–Mar	Maslenitsa Pancake week before Orthodox Lent, celebrated with blini, sleigh rides, folk music and the burning of a straw effigy of winter on the final Sunday.
Jun	Scarlet Sails St Petersburg's celebration for school-leavers in late June, during the white nights: a tall ship with scarlet sails glides along the Neva amid fireworks and crowds on the embankments.

How much does Russia cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ RUB 4,413 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £90 per person / day ≈ RUB 9,930 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £200 per person / day ≈ RUB 22,067 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Pelmeni Small meat-filled dumplings from Siberia, boiled and served with smetana (sour cream) or melted butter; once frozen by the sackful through winter, now eaten everywhere.	Shchi Cabbage soup, made with fresh cabbage or sauerkraut and beef or mushrooms — the peasant staple of the proverb 'shchi and kasha are our food'.	Blini Thin yeasted pancakes eaten with smetana, jam or caviar, especially during Maslenitsa, the festive pancake week before Orthodox Lent.
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Getting around

Rail is the backbone: Sapsan high-speed trains link Moscow and St Petersburg in about four hours, and overnight sleepers, in four-berth kupe or two-berth SV compartments, cover longer routes including the Trans-Siberian. Aeroflot and S7 fly between major cities. Moscow and St Petersburg have superb metros, and Yandex Go is the main ride-hailing app. Western bank cards have not worked since 2022, which complicates booking from abroad.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	DIALLING CODE +7
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EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 112 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”	TIME ZONES UTC+2, UTC+3, UTC+4, UTC+5, UTC+6, UTC+7, UTC+8, UTC+9, UTC+10, UTC+11, UTC+12 (standard time)
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TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% is usual in restaurants for good service, occasionally added to the bill; round up taxi fares and tip guides modestly in cash.

ETIQUETTE

Bring an odd number of flowers (even numbers are for funerals), remove shoes in homes, don't shake hands across a threshold, and in Orthodox churches women cover their heads and men remove hats.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Sheremetyevo International Airport (SVO), Moscow; Domodedovo International Airport (DME), Moscow; Pulkovo Airport (LED), Saint Petersburg

Visas & entry for Russia

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must get a visa before you travel.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Measles

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

Tuberculosis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Russia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 4 Nov 2026

Unity Day

Thu 31 Dec 2026

Day off (substituted from 01/04/2026)

Fri 1 Jan 2027

New Year Holidays

Sat 2 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Sun 3 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Mon 4 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Tue 5 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Wed 6 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Thu 7 Jan 2027	Christmas Day
Fri 8 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Mon 22 Feb 2027	Day off (substituted from 02/20/2027)
Tue 23 Feb 2027	Defender of the Fatherland Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Holiday of Spring and Labour
Mon 3 May 2027	Holiday of Spring and Labour (observed)
Sun 9 May 2027	Victory Day
Mon 10 May 2027	Victory Day (observed)
Sat 12 Jun 2027	Russia Day
Mon 14 Jun 2027	Russia Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Russian

ENGLISH	RUSSIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Здравствуйте	<i>ZDRAST-vooy-tyeh</i>
Thank you	Спасибо	<i>spa-SEE-bah</i>
Please	Пожалуйста	<i>pa-ZHAH-loo-stah</i>
Excuse me	Извините	<i>eez-vee-NEE-tyeh</i>
How much is this?	Сколько это стоит?	<i>SKOL-kah EH-tah STOH-eet</i>

Know before you go

Read the FCDO travel advice before planning anything; consular help is limited, and many UK travel insurance policies will not cover a trip against official advice.

UK-issued Visa and Mastercard cards have not worked in Russia since 2022, so travellers have had to carry enough cash, usually euros or dollars to exchange, for the whole trip.

Learn the Cyrillic alphabet before you go: it takes an evening or two and makes metro maps, station boards, menus and street signs far easier to decode.