



USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT RUSSIA

1. SAFETY AND SECURITY

Russia is generally a safe and friendly country to travellers. However, don't show around big amounts of money or walk alone at night along dark lonely streets. You can easily become a victim of pocket thefts; so take care of your wallet and do not keep big amounts with you.

Victims of crime

If you are the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest embassy or consulate of your country.

Emergency and useful numbers

Police: 02 or 112

Ambulance: 03 or 112

Fire brigades: 01 or 112

Telephone number assistance: 09

International calls: 8-10, code of country, code of city and number

The traffic

Road accidents are common in Russia, mainly due to poor roads, dangerous driving and non-enforcement of traffic laws. Be careful on the roads in Russia.

2. INSURANCE

Prior to your travels, make sure you have full insurance coverage during your stay in the country. Make sure your health insurance covers you for medical expenses abroad, including possible evacuation.

3. MONEY

The local currency is the Russian Ruble (RUB), divided into 100 kopeks.

Money exchange

Foreign currency is officially not allowed as payment means but can be converted at banks, foreign exchange bureaus and in some shops and hotels. Most hard currencies can be exchanged; US dollars and Euros are the easiest. It is hard to get rubles outside Russia and travellers are advised to take good condition US dollars or Euro notes to change once there.

ATMs

ATMs are common in the cities and probably the best option overall.

Credit/debit cards

Credit and debit cards are more and more common in Russia but far from all restaurants and shops accept cards, especially in small towns it can be difficult to pay by cards. American Express, Diners Club, Master Card and Visa are most accepted cards. In many places you will be charged a percentage of the sale, if using credit card.



International transfers

Western Union and MoneyGram, the international money-transfer specialists, operate in Russia.

Travellers' cheques

Travellers' cheques are difficult and expensive to cash, but if necessary it is advised to take them in US Dollars or Euro.

4. VISAS

Students travelling with AMBergh are assisted with the visa procedure.

Types of visas

Visitors from almost all countries will need a visa. All visitors travelling to Russia should check their requirements before departing. Russian visa requirements are highly complex and confusing. Generally, there are six types of Russian visas: 1) a tourist visa, 2) a business visa, 3) a student visa, 4) a private visa, 5) a transit visa, 6) work visa. Each visa type corresponds to the purpose of your visit.

The visa invitation

The invitation (also called visa support) is a special document issued by the party that invites you to Russia. The invitation is required by a Russian consulate to be able to process your visa. For every type of visa, there exists a different type of invitation. For example, to apply for a student visa, you'll need a student invitation.

After you receive the invitation, you can bring it along with the other documents needed to the consulate and apply for your Russian visa. It's always better to ask the Russian consulate first whether they accept copies of invitations or only originals and to specify it when applying for an invitation to facilitate processing.

Migration card

All foreigners are obliged to fill in a migration card before crossing the Russian border. The card should be handed over to immigration officials on the border also when leaving the country.

Visa registration

Your visa must be registered upon your arrival to Russia. The landlord of the apartment or the inviting organisation will register your visa.

As visa regulations may change, always check the visa rules with the Russian consulate/embassy in your country before travelling. Students travelling with AMBergh are assisted with the visa procedure.

5. GETTING THERE AND AWAY

By plane

Most of Russia's big cities have international airports.

Land

Russia is a vast country with a great number of access points. We list only a few here.

**Train**

Travellers can access Russia by train from Finland. There are also daily trains from Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Trains from Germany go via Warsaw and through Belarus to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Most people need a visa for crossing the border to Belarus.

Bus

There are buses from all the Baltic States, Finland, Germany, Poland to different destinations in Russia. If you are passing through Belarus you will need a visa for Belarus.

By car

To travel to Russia by car or motorcycle you need your passport with a valid Russian visa, your driving license and an international driving permit, the registration document on your car, third-party insurance valid in Russia.

6. TRANSPORTATION WITHIN RUSSIA

By Metro

It is the fastest way to travel around the big cities in Russia and it is easy to use it. When there're rush hours the metro is crowded. There are metro schemes in every car. The metro has no special zones and there's no time limit for using your ticket. The Metro is also a major sightseeing spot for tourists since metro stations have remarkable interiors that reflect modern decorative designs and historical periods of the country.

By buses, trolley-buses and trams

The city transport stops working after 24:00 and starts working after 6:00. If you're late, you can take a taxi.

By marshrutka (minibuses)

This kind of public transport is very popular and has even replaced some bus routes. If you see an approaching shuttle just wave it down like a taxi. When you are near your stop you tell the driver where to stop.

By taxi

Taxi is comparatively cheap. There are numerous taxi services; orders are taken via phone. A taxi can be stopped right on the street simply by putting out your hand. Price is to be agreed upon beforehand.

By car

You find car rental agencies at airports and most major hotels. Foreigners must have a passport, a driving license and an International driver's license to rent a car in Russia.

By bus or coach

Russia has an extensive long-distance bus network and you can get anywhere taking a local or an inter-city bus, the prices are reasonable. Tickets are sold in ticket booths.

**By train**

The state-owned Russian Railways (RZhD) runs all trains in Russia. Tickets are sold both at train stations or from ticket agents. You need to present your passport when buying a train ticket. Tickets for most destinations are usually readily available, however for some popular routes tickets should be bought in advance. You cannot book a train ticket in Russia - only purchase it. You cannot purchase it earlier than 45 days before the departure of your train.

By airplane

The domestic air network is extensive and covers most major towns in Russia.

7. FOOD AND DRINKS

Food

Most Russian meals start with a soup. Soups have always played an important role in the Russian meal. There is a great variety of soups such as shchi (cabbage soup), borsch (beetroot soup), ukha (fish soup), solyanka (soup based on meat broth), okroshka (cold soup based on kvass) and many others.

Popular meat dishes are Pelmeni and Vareniki, which are stuffed dumplings, Kotlety (meatballs), Shashlyk (a form of Shish kebab) are also very popular. Other popular meals are Pirozhki (pirogue, pie), which are filled with one of many different fillings, and Blini (pancakes).

Cabbage, potatoes, and cold tolerant greens are common in Russia. Pickling cabbage, cucumbers and other greens in brine is used to preserve vegetables for winter use. These are sources of vitamins during periods when fresh fruit and vegetables are traditionally not available.

Water and drinks

Tap water is not safe to drink throughout Russia.

8. BUSINESS HOURS

Throughout the year, apart from holidays, businesses are generally open at the following hours:

Offices: Mondays to Fridays: 09:00 - 18:00 (with a one hour break at noon)

Banks: Mondays to Fridays: 09:00 –18:00

Stores: Mondays to Saturdays: 10:00 - 19:00

In many cities, the stores are open also evenings and on Sundays.

Public holidays in Russia 2011

01- 05 January (New Year Holiday)

07 January (Russian Orthodox Xmas)

23 February (The Motherland Defender's Day)

08 March (International Women's Day)

01 May (Spring and Labour Holiday)

09 May (Victory Day)

12 June (Russia Day)

04 November (Day of People's Unity)



9. ELECTRICITY

Electricity in Russia is 220 Volts, 50 Hertz. Most of the sockets are standard European-size for double round-pin plugs.

10. TIME

Local time is GMT+2 - + 12.

11. INTERNET

Internet access is easy to find. Most cities, both large and smaller towns, have plenty of internet cafés. An increasing number of cafes, restaurants, and hotels provide wireless internet access.

12. TELEPHONE/MOBILE

The international dealing code for Russia is +7. It is possible to purchase mobile phone lines for the duration of your stay.

13. CLOTHING

There is no special dress code. Bring warm clothes, especially winter time.

14. WOMEN TRAVELLING ALONE

In Russia, a woman travelling alone is generally safe.

15. HEALTH

Medical facilities outside the cities can be basic and in case of emergency you are advised to seek treatment in a city. You should ensure that your medical insurance covers the cost of local hospitalisation and medical repatriation to your country of residence.

For information on vaccinations, make sure to check with the health authorities in your country prior to departure.