



RUSSIA INFORMATION SHEET

During the Cold War years, Russia was ensconced in mystery, but in the years since, we've learned that some elements are very European, and others, incredibly unique! There is something for everyone – culture, art, history, varied scenery and fantastic food!

The following is a general information sheet. It is as accurate as we can make it. However, things sometimes change unexpectedly. Please use this only as a guide.

Expectations

While group tours are one of the most enjoyable ways to travel, they do require a certain degree of flexibility and understanding on every individual's part. We have carefully planned your itinerary and have done our best to provide you with information about what to expect. However, much of what makes travel interesting, is the unexpected! Travel with an open mind and you will get the most and best out of your holiday. Please be assured that our mission is to create and provide you with the most enjoyable and memorable travel experience.

Currency

The unit of currency is the rouble. It is available in various denominations. Many shops and restaurants in the cities and tourist resorts accept major credit cards (MasterCard, Visa and, less frequently, American Express) and offer the best exchange rates. Credit cards are less easy to use in the countryside. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services like cash withdrawal, which may be available. U.S. travelers' checks have fallen out of favor with travelers, and despite the fact that they are the safest way to carry money, they are not always the most economical or handy, since **banks may charge commission for cashing them, and shops and restaurants give less favorable exchange rates.** If accepted, you may be required to show your passport to cash traveler checks. Travelers are recommended to take 2 different credit cards (debit/credit) as fraud alerts can be activated by your bank or credit card company. Having 2 cards will ensure you won't have to waste time on the phone rectifying the fraud alert.

Cash is often preferred but should not be carried in large quantities. Money can be changed at banks in all of the **main tourist areas** or exchange offices as well as most hotels and railroad stations. Russian banks are open 9:00 am – 6:00 pm Monday through Friday and 9:00 am – 3:00 pm on Saturdays, and are closed on Sundays and holidays. ATMs are widely available in major cities and will give you your cash in local currency. For many, this is the most convenient way to get money abroad. There are currency exchange kiosks in most major airports, if you are not able to get money converted prior to departure.

Be sure to have some local coins with you to use in the public bathrooms as this may be required for use.

PLEASE REFER TO YOUR ENCLOSED CURRENCY CONVERTER CHART FOR ACCURATE RATES.

Weather & Clothing

The weather in western Russia is generally temperate with warm summers, crisp, sunny autumns and cold winters. Even though we have noted the usual temperatures, you may experience unusual or varied weather conditions. For that reason, we always suggest that you pack clothes that can be layered. It is also wise to check the paper, the Weather Channel, or weather.com before you pack to verify the most current weather situation.

	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
St. Petersburg	25 – 61	54 – 75	28 – 59	18 – 28
Moscow	25 – 66	54 – 75	27 – 61	14 – 25

While in Europe, you will see temperatures forecast in Celsius. To convert Celsius to Fahrenheit, multiply the Celsius number by 9, then divide your answer by 5, and add 32. It is advisable to bring a mid-weight coat or jacket as the evening can get chilly. Conservative dress is preferred. Short shorts and bathing suits should not be worn in town. Casual wear is accepted in all but the grandest hotels and restaurants, but most Europeans will dress smartly when dining out. You may wish to pack one outfit that is a little dressier, but nothing formal, for a special evening: for men, a sport coat and a dress for women. Be sure to bring comfortable soft-soled shoes or sneakers for the days you are sightseeing. A small packable umbrella and sweaters are always a good idea to have with you. It is important to remember that you may visit churches. Bare shoulders, shorts and short skirts are not acceptable. Please remember to wear long pants or knee-length or longer skirts on those days as well as a shawl or sweater for your shoulders.

Packing Smart

Be sure to pack any prescriptions that you will need for your trip in your carry-on bag. Any liquids in your carry-on must be in quantities of three ounces or less, be in clear containers, and those containers must be in a clear, quart-sized Ziploc bag. You may wish to bring any special soaps or accessories from home. European hotels do not always have washcloths in the room. It's a good idea to pack your own if you require one. You may wish to pack a pocket calculator (useful in money conversion) and a small multi-language guide with basic phrases. Wake-up calls will be available from the front desk, but you also might want to bring your own battery-operated alarm clock. The availability and quality of hairdryers and irons at hotels vary greatly. For that reason, we recommend that you bring your own with you, if you need them. Don't forget your camera and extra film (film tends to be more expensive overseas). Due to heightened security at the airports, remember to pack questionable items in your checked luggage, not your carry-on. Such items include knives, scissors, any cutting implements, knitting needles, etc. If in doubt, pack it in your checked bag. It will save you time at security checkpoints.

Enjoying the trip

Please remember that you are booked on a group ticket. Durgan is unable to guarantee seating assignments, often not able to assign seats at all. We do forward all seating requests to the airlines but they are not always able to accommodate all requests. You will likely have with an intermediate stop while flying to your final destination, where you will change planes, but your luggage will be checked all the way to your final destination. Since the airplane is dry, and you will have a long international flight, it helps to drink a lot of non-alcoholic liquids while flying. Alcohol contributes to jetlag, as does eating heavy meals onboard. Feet swell at high altitudes, consider wearing a pair of compression socks for your flight. You will probably want to bring a small book or magazine in your carry-on luggage. A valid U.S. passport is required. It must be **valid for at least 6 months past the time your tour ends.** If you are not a U.S. citizen, you may need further identification. Contact National Passport Information at 1-877-487-2778 or the Russian Consulate for further information. A visa is necessary for this tour for U.S. citizens. Remember that you are responsible for having all valid documentation needed for this tour.

Accommodations: Hotel rooms in Europe are usually smaller than in the United States and rooms often differ. Hotel rooms in major cities tend to be smaller than hotel rooms throughout the rest of the country – but what you don't get in spacious accommodations is more than compensated by the wealth of attractions surrounding you. Please remember that a 3* hotel in the US is different than a 3* hotel in Europe. The European custom for a twin room is two single beds made up separately and placed side by side. A double room will usually have one double bed. A single room will have one twin-size bed. A triple is generally a twin room with a cot or small bed added. Also, please be aware that single rooms in Europe are almost always smaller than twin rooms.

**Unfortunately, we can only request room types and locations.
Room assignments are made at the discretion of the hotel at the time of check-in.**

Electrical Current

The standard current is 220 volts A.C. A transformer may also be necessary and can be purchased in many stores or online. Sockets generally have two or three round pins; type C or F. Adapters are needed for U.S. plugs (for hairdryers and travel irons). Please use only hairdryers with 1250-watt setting. The hairdryer may not work or fry when it is set on 1500 and may damage dryer even if you are using an adapter.

Food, Drink & Entertainment: Since water away from home can often be upsetting to the digestive tract, we recommend that you drink bottled water, which is not usually complimentary. This will usually be offered in restaurants for a fee. If in doubt, ask your tour escort. Water supplies marked “non potable” should not be used for drinking or brushing your teeth. If you have special dietary requests, let your tour escort and the dining room staff know and they will try to accommodate your needs. If you have a very limited diet, we suggest that you bring some snacks that you might need. Breakfast at most hotels is a continental buffet, though cereal is not always provided. Included hotel dinners are also typically a buffet but the menus change each night. Europeans generally dine later than is customary in the U.S.

Optional Side Trips: Optional side trips to nearby attractions *may* be available. Your tour escort can help you arrange these trips during your free time. Operators on these side trips often will not take credit cards, so you may want to carry more money, local currency only, if such trips interest you. The prices on the excursions vary greatly depending on the length of the tour and the places visited.

Safety and Health Services: We recommend that you leave a copy of your itinerary with friends or family, in case of emergencies. In order to have a trouble-free trip, you should avoid flaunting jewelry and wear your handbag securely strapped across your chest. Many stores sell security wallets that are worn inside your clothing. They are large enough to hold your passport, money, etc., and offer a secure option if you prefer to carry them with you. You should keep a record of your credit cards and Traveler's check numbers separate from your purse or wallet. It is also a good idea to carry a photocopy of the picture page of your passport and leave your passport and any valuables locked in the hotel safe, unless you have a security wallet. Losing your passport is expensive and inconvenient. Avoid going off on your own, unless you are familiar with the area. Be alert for suspicious people or circumstances.

There is no reciprocal health agreement with the U.S. and treatment is expensive. If you have health issues, be sure to check with your health care provider before leaving home to verify what procedures they want you to follow, should the need arise. Should an injury or accident occur, you will be responsible for any costs involved, medical and/or travel related. For this reason, we strongly urge you to take out traveler's insurance before your departure. Be sure to get receipts for anything you expect to be covered for.

Telephones

To call Russia from the U.S. dial 011 and the country code (7) followed by the area code and then the phone number. It is very expensive to call the United States from your hotel room. We suggest that you use a phone card or download a Wi-Fi based messaging app to your phone before you travel. Phone cards can be purchased at many newspaper stands and pharmacies. To call the U.S. from abroad, once you have a local line, dial the access code, then the area code and number. No need to dial “1” first.

Transportation & Shopping: Taxis are available from the hotel. Ask the front desk for help in summoning a taxi. Most shops open from 10:00 am – 6:00 pm Monday through Saturday. Shops are generally closed on Sunday. The best buys in Russia are vodka, Matryoshka dolls, furs, and Gzhel ceramics. For larger purchases, many countries impose a Value Added Tax (VAT). If the purchase is over a certain amount, you can get it partially refunded. Ask for a form where you purchase the item or at the airport. You must submit the form at the airport before you depart. Your refund will be mailed to you.

Time

Moscow and St. Petersburg are 8 hours ahead of Boston. Russia does not practice Daylight Savings Time.

Gratuities

Tipping is a way of life in Europe and generally expected; we hope the following information will be of assistance. Gratuities to your tour director, driver, local guides, dining room staff, and housekeepers are not included in the tour price. We recommend tipping your tour escort between 5-7 Euro per person per day and your driver about 3-5 Euro per person per day. Local guides, consider tipping 3-5 Euro per person for half day tours and 5-7 Euro per person for full day tours. For restaurants a service charge is typically already included in the check but it is customary to leave a small tip. Please remember, these are suggested rates and are ultimately up to you to show the guides, escort, and drivers your appreciation.

Custom Regulations

Luggage may be examined upon entering and leaving countries. U.S. citizens can bring home up to \$800 worth of foreign goods. Each member of the family is entitled to the same exemption and the exemption can be pooled. You cannot bring back fresh fruit, meat, cheeses or plants.

Language & Customs

The official language is Russian. English is spoken aboard river cruise vessels, and will be spoken at many hotels and shops and on most planes, trains, and tour buses. However, locals are pleased when a foreigner attempts to speak their language. Even if only a few words are exchanged, an instant feeling of friendship is created when two strangers can converse in the same language. For this reason, you might consider bringing a multi-language pocket phrase book.