

Yekaterinburg to Krasnoyarsk

Crossing Siberia along the old post road, Anton Chekhov wrote 'You'll be bored from the Urals to the Yenisey'. It's true that the scenery for most of this stretch isn't going to blow you away, but the lack of window gawping is by no means a bad thing. In fact, the clever way to cover this sector is in a series of overnight hops. Siberia's most interesting larger cities seem to have been deliberately placed to make this easy, and good timetabling means that handy night trains cover the very sections you're most likely to need. Happily these tickets rarely need to be booked more than a day or two ahead.

With fascinating historical context, Yekaterinburg offers one of the most popular stops along the Trans-Siberian route, though some travellers find it visually disappointing. An overnight train from Yekaterinburg takes you on to Tobolsk with its fine kremlin and lovable unkempt old-town area. The next sensible hop is to Omsk, whose modestly appealing old core is worth a day between overnight connections. Many Trans-Sibbers head next for gigantic Novosibirsk with its train museums and a plethora of international bars and restaurants. However, much more interesting is to get off instead in appealing Tomsk, which has a delightful blend of Siberian wooden architecture and a lively student atmosphere. From either Tomsk or Novosibirsk, branch line trains can whisk you south towards the glorious mountains of the Altai for rafting, hiking or simply relaxing on the picturesque banks of Teletskoye Ozera, a lesser-known alternative to Baikal.

Vibrant Krasnoyarsk has an attractive setting and offers some intriguing alternatives to the Trans-Siberian mainline if you're continuing east.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stroll through the intriguing, kremlin-crowned old city of **Tobolsk** (p160)
- Enjoy the youthful energy and wooden architecture of **Tomsk** (p178)
- Follow the pilgrims to the Romanovs' execution site in **Yekaterinburg** (p152)
- Hike, raft or just relax in the beautiful, fascinating **Altai Mountains** (p178)
- Discover Trans-Siberian history at Novosibirsk's **railway museums** (p167 and p177)



■ ROUTE DISTANCE: 2287KM

■ DURATION: ONE DAY, EIGHT HOURS

THE ROUTE

Yekaterinburg to Omsk

Major trains halt at **Yekaterinburg** for 15 to 30 minutes. The cultural and economic capital of the Urals, it's famous as the birthplace of Boris Yeltsin and the death-place of Tsar Nicholas II. Wander across the street for a look at the old train station, which now houses a Railway Museum (see p152).

Siberia officially begins at 2102km. Trains stop for 15 minutes in **Tyumen** (2138km), Siberia's oldest Russian settlement, now a dynamic oil-rich city.

From Tyumen our route detours 221km northeast off the official Trans-Siberian line

to the old Siberian capital of **Tobolsk**. Near the 212km marker, east-facing windows have fine if distant views of Tobolsk's kremlin.

Back on the main Trans-Siberian route east, the next major stop is for 15 minutes at **Ishim** (2428km), which was famous for its 19th-century Nikolskaya trade fairs (revived since 1991). It retains a striking, white-washed 1793 cathedral. At 2497km, local time becomes Moscow time plus three hours. Swampy land provides opportunities for bird-spectators.

There's another 15-minute halt at agro-processing town **Nazyvaevskaya** (2562km); if you're riding straight from Moscow you'll now be into day three of your journey. After the six-span Irtysh River bridge, trains pause

for 25 minutes in **Omsk** (2716km) where Fyodor Dostoevsky was exiled in 1849.

Omsk to Krasnoyarsk

If you notice an increase in passing trains after Omsk, blame it on coal from the Kuzbas Basin east of Novosibirsk going to the smelting works of the Urals. In freight terms this is the world's busiest section of railway.

Barabinsk (3035km), a 17-minute stop, was once a place of exile for Polish Jews. The surrounding Barabinsk Steppe is a boggy expanse of grassland and lakes that was formerly the homeland of the Kirghiz people.

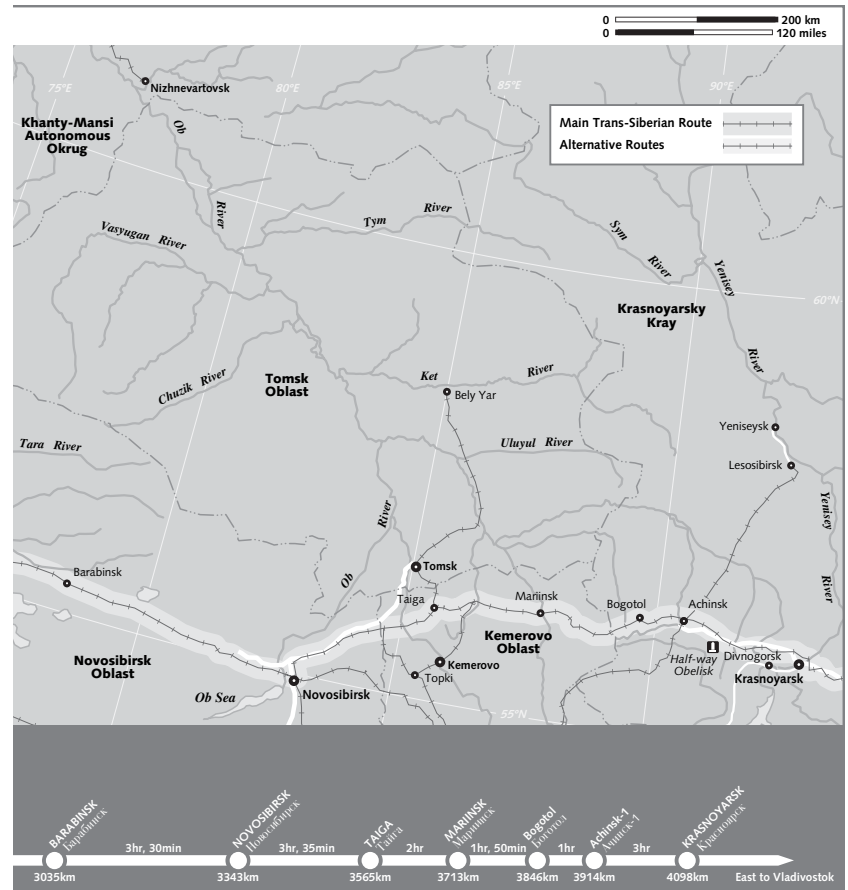
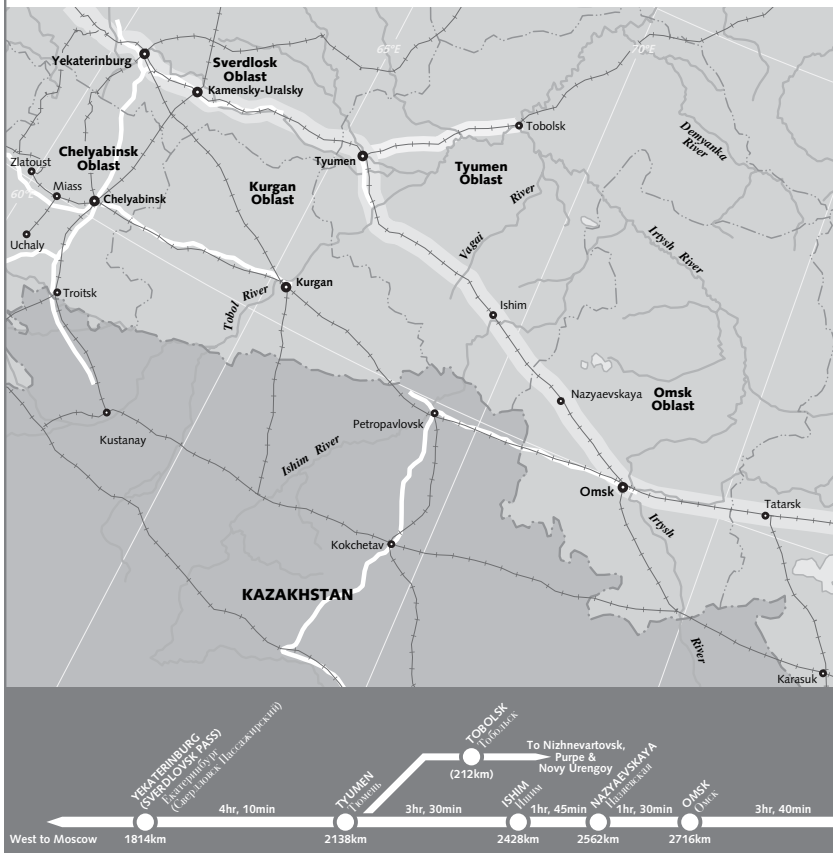
At around 3330km get ready for the seven-span, 870m-long bridge across the Ob, one of the world's longest rivers. During

the 20-minute stop at **Novosibirsk** (3343km), inspect the grand station interior, a real temple of the Trans-Siberian.

At 3479km, time shifts to make it Moscow time plus four hours. The 25-minute halt at **Taiga** (3565km) provides plenty of time to wish you were heading 79km north up the branch line to **Tomsk**. This is not a Womble (as Brits of a certain age may expect, from the kids' TV program) but a charming old Siberian city.

Spot an engine repair yard to the south as you approach **Mariinsk** station (3713km), a 20-minute stop. Originally named Kiysk, the town grew wealthy as the focus of a Siberian gold rush. It was renamed in 1857 to honour Tsar Alexander II's wife Maria.

YEKATERINBURG TO KRASNOYARSK



At 3820km the line enters Krasnoyarsky Kray, a vast territory of enormous mineral and forest wealth. It covers 2.5 million sq km stretching all the way to the Arctic coast.

After brief stops at **Bogotol** (3846km) and **Achinsk-1** (3914km) the railway starts twisting through woodlands and over hills with cinematic landscapes to enjoy.

A small, easily missed white obelisk south of the train line at 3932km marks the half-way point between Moscow and Beijing (via Ulaanbaatar).

Major services stop for 20 minutes at **Krasnoyarsk** (4098km, p185). That's just long enough to nip out and see a fine communist-era mural in red mosaics decorating a wall on the station square outside.

YEKATERINBURG ЕКАТЕРИНБУРГ

☎ 343 / pop 1.29 million / 📶 Moscow + 2hr
From the execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his family in 1918 to the high-profile Mafia killings in the 1990s, Yekaterinburg is notorious for its bloody history. Contemporary Yekaterinburg remembers these events, attracting pilgrims and tourists alike to the sites associated with the Romanov deaths.

As the economic and cultural capital of the Urals region, the city offers visitors more than a dramatic history. The Urals' mineral wealth is on display in the city's many museums, while the ongoing economic boom is evident in the crowded cafés and clubs around the centre. Yekaterinburg also has the accommodation options and facilities to serve as a convenient base for adventure activities and winter sports in the Urals.

History

Yekaterinburg was founded as a factory-fort in 1723 as part of Peter the Great's push to exploit the Ural region's mineral riches. The city was named after two Yekaterinas: Peter's wife (later Empress Catherine I), and the Russian patron saint of mining.

Yekaterinburg is most famous as the place where the Bolsheviks murdered Tsar Nicholas II and his family in July 1918. Six years later, the town was renamed Sverdlovsk, after Yakov Sverdlov, a leading Bolshevik who was Vladimir Ilych Lenin's right-hand man until he died in the flu epidemic of 1919.

WWII turned Sverdlovsk into a major industrial centre, as hundreds of factories were transferred here from vulnerable areas west

of the Urals. The city was closed to foreigners until 1990 because of its many defence plants. Remnants of this era still litter the city, with fighter planes proudly displayed in schoolyards and missiles arranged outside the city's Military History Museum.

It was one such missile that in 1960 brought down the US pilot Gary Powers and his U2 spy plane in this area. Powers was exchanged for a Soviet spy in 1962.

During the late 1970s a civil engineering graduate of the local university, Boris Yeltsin, began to make his political mark, rising to become regional Communist Party boss before being promoted to Moscow in 1985.

In 1991 the town reassumed its original name. After suffering economic depression and Mafia lawlessness in the early 1990s, business has been on the upswing for the past decade.

Orientation

The train station is 2km north of the city centre, which is roughly bordered by pr Lenina in the north, ul Malysheva in the south, pl 1905 Goda in the west and ul Lunacharskogo in the east. Ul Sverdlova runs south from the station, changing its name to ul Karla Libknekhta closer to the centre. Pr Lenina crosses the dammed Iset River three blocks west of ul Karla Libknekhta.

MAPS

Karta (☎ 375 6290; Pervomayskaya ul 74; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) offers an extensive selection of maps of Yekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk, as well as other cities and regions.

Information

Alfa-Bank (☎ 371 4226; ul Malysheva 33A) Has a 24-hour ATM that dispenses roubles or US dollars.

Coffee.IN (☎ 277 6873; ul 8 Marta 8; per hr R50; 🕒 24hr) Internet café located in the shopping centre Mytny Dvor. Enter from the back.

Dom Knigi (☎ 358 1898; ul Antona Valeka 12; 🕒 9am-7pm) Best for foreign-language and local-interest books.

Ekatereburg Guide Center (☎ 268 1604; www.ekaterinburg-guide.com; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 1, Bolshoy Ural Hotel, side entrance) An enthusiastic group that organises English-language tours of the city and trips into the countryside. Popular excursions include rafting, hiking and biking trips in the Urals (€40 to €52 per person), as well as Ganina Yama (p156) and the Europe-Asia border (see p156). Also arranges discounted accommodation and homestays.

YEKATERINBURG

0 600 m
0 0.4 miles

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Gutabank (☎ 359 2621; pr Lenina 27; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) One of the few places in the city that accepts travellers cheques.

Main post office (pr Lenina 39; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Fri) Offers Internet and international telephone connections.

Ural Expeditions & Tours (☎ 376 2800; http://welcome-ural.ru; 23 Posadsakaya ul) This group of geologists from the Sverdlovsk Mining Institute has found a unique way to market its skills and knowledge – leading trekking, rafting and horse-riding trips to all parts of the Urals. English-speaking guides.

Sights

ROMANOV DEATH SITE

On the night of 16 July 1918, Tsar Nicholas II, his wife and children were murdered in the basement of a local merchant's house, known as Dom Ipateva (named for its owner Nikolai Ipatev). During the Soviet period the building housed a local museum of atheism, but it was demolished in 1977 by then-governor Boris Yeltsin, who feared it would attract monarchist sympathisers.

Today, the site, on ul Karla Libknekhta, is marked by an iron cross dating from 1991, and a second marble cross from 1998 when the Romanovs' remains were sent to St Petersburg for burial in the family vault.

The Byzantine-style **Church of the Blood** (☎ 371 6168; ul Tolmachyova 34) now dominates this site. While many believe the funds could have been better spent, this church was built to honour the Romanov family, now elevated to the status of saints. Rumour has it that the controversial church contains the most expensive icon in all of Russia.

Nearby, the pretty wooden **Chapel of the Revered Martyr Grand Princess Yelisaveta Fyodorovna** (🕒 9am-5.30pm) honours the royal family's great-aunt and faithful friend. After her relatives' murders, this pious nun met an even worse end, when she was thrown down a mineshaft, poisoned with gas and buried. You can visit this spot, where a monastery has recently been built, on a trip to Nizhnaya Sinyachikha (p156).

Across the street from the Church of the Blood are the ostentatious **Rastorguev-Kharitonov mansion** and the restored **Ascension Church** (ul Karla Tsetkin 11). Behind them, a pretty park climbs up the hill known locally as the Yekaterinburg Acropolis.

Just east of here, pl Sovetskoy Armii is dominated by the powerful **Afghanistan War Monument**, known as the Black Rose. The

giant soldier with downcast head primarily commemorates losses in Russia's Afghanistan War (1979–89), but plaques around the statue also note those lost in other conflicts during the Cold War years.

ISTORICHESKY SKVER

This area, better known as the *plotinka* (little dam), was where Yekaterinburg began back in 1723. Water from the dam (reconstructed twice since that date) powered an iron forge, a mint and a stone-cutting works. Now you'll find a clutch of tiny museums housed in the historic buildings where the city grew up. Peek into the **water tower**, one of the city's oldest structures. Then head over to the old mining-equipment factory and mint buildings. These contain the **Museum of Architecture & Industry** (☎ 371 4045; ul Gorkogo 4 & 5; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue-Sat), which displays the machinery used in the mining industry from the 18th and 19th centuries up through WWII.

East on pr Lenina, the founders of Yekaterinburg – Tatishchev and de Gennin – proudly hold the tsar's decree. This **statue** to the founders of the city was unveiled on the city's 275th anniversary in 1998. The nearby **Chapel of St Catherine** was erected in the same year on the site of a former cathedral honouring the patron saint of mining.

The bridge on ul Lenina holds the red sculpted **Order of Lenin** given to the city for honourable service during WWII. On the west side of the *plotinka* is **Geological Alley**, a small park dotted with rocks from the Ural region. The star exhibit of the **Museum of Fine Arts** (☎ 371 0626; ul Voevodina 5; admission R50; 🕒 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) is the Kasli Iron Pavilion that won prizes in the 1900 Paris Expo.

RAILWAY MUSEUM

The newest addition to Yekaterinburg's many museums is the long-awaited **railway museum** (☎ 358 4222; ul Chelyuskintsev; 🕒 noon-6pm Tue-Sat). Housed in the old train station, dating from 1881, its exhibits highlight the history of the railroad in the Urals area, and include a re-creation of the office of the Stalin-era railway director.

OTHER MUSEUMS

For a stunning introduction to Urals semi-precious stones, visit Vladimir Pelpenko's private collection, also known as the **Urals**

Mineralogical Museum (☎ 350 6019; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 1A; admission R50; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), in Bolshoy Ural Hotel. This impressive collection contains thousands of examples of minerals, stones and crystals from the region, many crafted into mosaics, jewellery and other artistic pieces.

More-serious geologists will appreciate the **Ural Geology Museum** (☎ 251 4938; ul Kuybysheva 39; admission R50; 🕒 11am-5pm Mon-Sat), which has over 500 carefully catalogued Ural region minerals and a collection of meteorites.

Activities

Winter in the Urals lasts a long time, making this a terrific place for winter sports. The rolling hills that surround Yekaterinburg are breathtaking when covered with a fresh layer of snow.

Ural Expeditions & Tours (p150) can arrange dog-sledding excursions (per person €65), as well as winter hikes and snowmobile trips.

If there's no time to leave the city, head to **Mayakovsky Park**, 5km south of town, for cross-country skiing. Take tram 3 from the train station or 29 from ul Lenina. Equipment is available to rent.

Tours

The Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150) offers a wide variety of guided tours, the most basic being the two-hour 'brief look' (€48). Prices include transportation, museum entry and the services of an excellent, English-speaking guide. Another option is the 'Romanov Execution' tour (€77), which takes three to four hours and includes a trip to Ganina Yama (p156).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Ekaterinburg Guide Center (☎ 268 1604; www.ekaterinburg-guide.com; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 1, Bolshoy Ural Hotel, side entrance; 1-/2-/3-person homestays €22/36/52) Experience real Russian living by staying with a local family. Prices include breakfast. The agency also rents apartments for €40 to €50 per night – a bargain if you are travelling in a group.

Bolshoy Ural Hotel (☎ 350 6695; fax 355 0583; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 1; s with/without bathroom R1450/500) This place lives up to its name: if nothing else, it is indeed *bolshoy* (large), occupying an entire city block. The somewhat seedy

atmosphere is buffered by the prime location – steps from the Opera Theatre and the all-important Gordon's Scottish pub.

Academy of Geology Hotel (☎ 350 0508, 350 0510; pr Lenina 54, Bldg 6; r with breakfast R1200) This decent budget option offers attentive service and four smart, spacious rooms. Located in a quiet complex off the main road, it is difficult to find. Enter the courtyard from ul Bazhova and look for the marble entryway with the unmarked metal door. Unfortunately, this place does not register visas, so it is not a good option for visitors staying more than a day or two.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Iset (☎ 350 0128; hotel_resr@etel.ru; pr Lenina 69; s/d with breakfast from R2900/3600) If the Iset looks funky from the street, that's because it is shaped like a hammer and sickle when seen from the sky. All the rooms at this retro Soviet-style hotel have been upgraded, featuring hardwood floors, new bathrooms and odd furniture ensembles. It's all part of the charm.

Hotel Sverdlovsk (☎ 353 6574; fax 353 6248; ul Chelyuskintsev 106; s/d from R1200/1500) Gives a choice between cheap and dilapidated rooms or upgraded and overpriced. In its favour is its location, opposite the station.

Country Inn (ul Malysheva) Under construction at the time of research, this hotel is expected to be a Western-managed three-star tourist hotel, filling a void of midrange accommodation options. It is supposed to open in 2006; contact the Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150) for information.

TOP END

Hotel Premier (☎ 355 3882; www.premier-hotel.ru; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 23; s/d with breakfast R4000/5300; 📺 📺) A small and personable European-style hotel offering comfortable rooms. Rooms can be a bit stuffy in winter when air-con is not working, but otherwise they are spacious and stylish. The location offers the best of both worlds: a quiet residential street just a few steps from the main drag.

Hotel Magister (☎ 229 7044, 257 4206; magister1@etel.ru; ul 8 Marta 50; s/d with breakfast R4100/4600; 📺 📺) Quaint, comfortable rooms and accommodating staff make the Magister a long-standing favourite with visitors to Yekaterinburg. Brand-new windows block out the noise from the busy street below.

This small, private hotel is 'home' for many long-term business travellers, so book well in advance.

Atrium Palace Hotel (☎ 359 6000; www.atriumhotel.ru; ul Kuybysheva 44; s/d €210/260; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☎) Atrium Palace once claimed to be the only five-star hotel east of Moscow. This snazzy place has several pricey restaurants, a popular bar and nightclub, plus a fitness centre and sauna. Rack rates are quoted, but discounts are usually available, especially if you make your reservation through the Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150).

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Dacha (☎ 379 3569; pr Lenina 20A; meals R200-300; ☎ noon-midnight) Each room in this restaurant is decorated as a room in a Russian country house, from the casual garden to the more formal dining room. It's a great place to enjoy unbeatable Russian cuisine and hospitality.

Port Stanley (☎ 355 1955; ul Gorkogo 10; meals R600-1000; ☎ noon-midnight) The sunny terrace on the banks of the Iset makes this a top spot for dining in summer, while the modern interior is also pleasant. The menu is seafood – not from the Iset, we hope. Sample Russian favourites like grilled sturgeon or herring salad, or more-exotic fare like sea bass or lobster.

Nigora (☎ 376 3941; ul Malysheva 19; meals R200-300; ☎ noon-midnight) This restaurant offers spicy, filling Uzbek food – soup and *plov* (meat and rice) to fill the belly and warm the soul. Heavy wooden tables and a low, painted ceiling add to the cosy, welcoming atmosphere.

Georgian Kitchen (☎ 350 0541; ul Belinskogo 20; meals with wine R300-500; ☎ 24hr) This is a classic Georgian place, complete with kitschy artwork and Christmas lights. But the shashlyk, *kharcho* (rice with beef or lamb and soup) and *khachapuri* (Georgian cheese bread) are spicy and delicious. And the keyboardist-crooner belting out the ballads never fails to inspire some dancing (or perhaps that's the Georgian wine).

Grand Buffet (☎ 359 8366; ul Malysheva 36; meals R250-350; ☎ noon-midnight) All-you-can-eat buffet featuring Russian fare. You'll find nearly anything you are craving, as the basement saloon serves Tex-Mex and there's also an Italian place next door.

Em Sam (☎ 376 6066; ul Malysheva 27; meals R150-300; ☎ 11am-midnight) Sushi is all the rage across Russia, and Yekaterinburg is no exception. Lunch specials and a convenient location make this place popular. There is another outlet in Bolshoy Ural Hotel.

QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

Uspensky food court (☎ 371 6744; ul Vaynera 10; meals R30-100; ☎ 10am-8pm) On the top floor of the Uspensky shopping centre, this food court offers burgers, pizza, sandwiches, sushi and more. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide a sweeping view of the city centre and a new perspective on the activity below.

Mak Pik (☎ 371 6898; pr Lenina 24/8; meals R100; ☎ 9am-10pm) Now located in several spots around the city, Yekaterinburg's original fast-food restaurant specialises in burgers like the 'Big Mak Pik'; it also serves pizza, *pelmeni* (Russian-style ravioli stuffed with meat) and, of all things, sushi.

Kupets (ul 8 Marta 48; ☎ 24hr) If you're looking for a large, Western-style supermarket with a wide selection of Russian and imported food items, head here.

Drinking

Coffee Shop No 7 (☎ 378 9370; ul Voevodina 4; breakfast R100-200; ☎ 8am-midnight) A pleasant location on the *plotinka*, smooth jazz and frothy cappuccinos. What more can you ask from your local coffee shop?

Old Dublin (☎ 376 5173; ul Khokhryakova 23; meals R400-600, 500mL Guinness R140; ☎ noon-2am) A favourite with expats in Yekaterinburg, this pub is actually owned – partially – by an Irish bloke.

Gordon's (☎ 355 4535; Krasnoarmeyskaya ul 1; business lunches R180, meals R400-600; ☎ noon-2am) The aforementioned Irish bloke opened this Scottish pub in 2005, and it promises to be a popular spot, thanks to the excellent food and 12 beers on tap. Bartenders in kilts don't hurt, either.

Rosy Jane (☎ 371 0607; ul Lenina 34; ☎ 24hr) An English pub – not to be confused with the Scottish pub down the street and the Irish pub around the corner. The dark wood bar features seven draught beers and more than 150 kinds of whisky.

Tinkoff (☎ 378 4008; Krasnoarmeyskaya 64; 500mL beers R120; ☎ noon-2am) This microbrewery features seven home-grown brews as well as some seasonal specialties, plus a menu

of sausages, sandwiches and other tasty snacks. You will recognise the restaurant's open layout and industrial décor if you have been to Tinkoff outlets in other cities.

Entertainment

Vodoley (☎ 377 7277; ul Shevchenko 9; ☎ 1pm-6am) There is something for everyone at this entertainment complex – from bowling to billiards to dining to dancing. There is strict face control at the door, so be sure to dress the part.

Zebra (☎ 377 6891; ul Malysheva 44; ☎ 10pm-10am) If you are serious about dancing, this is the place to strut your stuff. Progressive, house and techno music plays all night long.

Philharmonic (☎ 371 4682; www.filarmonia.e-burg.ru; ul Karla Libknekhta 38) Yekaterinburg's top venue for the classical performing arts often hosts visiting directors and soloists, as well as the regular performances of the acclaimed Urals academic orchestra.

Opera & Ballet Theatre (☎ 350 8057; pr Lenina 45A; tickets from R100) The level of professionalism is not quite on par with the Philharmonic, but the ornate baroque theatre is still a lovely place to see the Russian classics.

Shopping

Dominated by the Stalinesque town hall and the looming statue of Lenin, the main city square, pl 1905 Goda, is about 200m west of Istorichesky Skver (square). It is flanked by two department stores and the new Uspensky shopping centre (opposite). Further west, artists sell their wares along the tree-lined strip in the centre of pr Lenina.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The main airport is **Koltsovo** (☎ 226 8909, 264 4202), 15km southeast of the city centre. Flights go three times a day to/from Moscow (R6000, 2½ hours).

Flights depart almost daily to Irkutsk (R7500, four hours), Novosibirsk (R5200, two hours), Samara (R4000, two hours), St Petersburg (R6000, 2½ hours) and Vladivostok (R13,000, 11 hours).

Some of these flights are operated by Urals Airlines, which has a poor record for safety violations (including seven emergency landings in 2004!). A US consulate advisory warns against flying on any Urals Airlines flights until this record improves.

Several airlines operate flights directly to Europe, two or three times a week: **Lufthansa** (☎ 264 7771) operates flights to Frankfurt (€400 return); **British Airways** (☎ 264 4216) flies to London (€500 return); and **Czech Airlines** (☎ 264 4214) flies directly to Prague (€550). **Transaero City Centre** (☎ 365 9165; pr Lenina 50) handles bookings for all airlines.

TRAIN

Yekaterinburg – often still 'Sverdlovsk' on timetables – is a major rail junction with connections to all stops on the Trans-Siberian route. Trains to/from Moscow go frequently, but the most comfortable one is the *Ural* (R2050, 26 hours, daily). Depending on the route, the next major destination heading west is either Perm (R650, seven hours) or Kazan (R1275, 15 hours). Trains also run to Tyumen (seat R230, 4½ hours) and Tobolsk (R630, nine hours). Heading east, the next major stops are Omsk (R1200, 12 hours) and Novosibirsk (R1280, 21 hours).

You can buy tickets at the main train station (level three in the west wing) or at outlets throughout the city, including the convenient **Railway and Air Kassa** (☎ 371 0400; ul Malysheva 31; ☎ 7am-9pm). Buying a ticket from Yekaterinburg to Moscow is rarely a problem; however, securing one eastward to Irkutsk and beyond can be tricky. If you're on a tight schedule, it's advisable to make an advance booking through a travel agency, such as Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150).

Getting Around

Bus 1 will take you from the train station to Koltsovo airport (45 minutes) from 5.30am to 11pm.

Many trolleybuses (pay on board) run up and down ul Sverdlova/ul Karla Libknekhta between the train station and pr Lenina. Trams 4, 13, 15 and 18 and bus 28 cover long stretches of pr Lenina, with bus 4 continuing to the southern bus station. The smaller northern bus station, primarily serving regional destinations, is near the train station.

A single metro line runs between the northeastern suburbs and the city centre, with stops at the train station (Uralskaya), pl 1905 Goda and ul Kuybysheva near Hotel Magister (Geologicheskaya).

STRADDLING THE CONTINENTS

If you wish to have one foot in Europe and one in Asia, you can head 40km west of Yekaterinburg on the Moskovsky Trakt to the **Europe-Asia border**. Erected in 1837 at a 413m high point in the local Ural Mountains, the marker here is a popular spot for wedding parties to visit on their postnuptial video and photo jaunts. Hire a taxi from Yekaterinburg for R150 per hour or make arrangements for this excursion through Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150) for €20 to €27 per person.

In an attempt to make this geographic landmark more accessible to intracontinental travellers, city officials are in the process of erecting a new, more prominent marker at another spot along the border, conveniently just 17km from Yekaterinburg. The city has grand plans for monuments, museums, parks and gift shops, as well as European and Asian restaurants on their respective sides of the border.

Sceptics should be assured that this is more than a symbolic meeting of east and west. The site – on the watershed of the Iset and Chusovaya Rivers – was confirmed by scientists who examined geological records and studied the patterns of water flow. This clash of continents is the real deal.

AROUND YEKATERINBURG

Ganina Yama Ганина Яма

After the Romanov family was shot in the cellar of Dom Ipateva, their bodies were discarded in the depths of the forests of Ganina Yama, 16km northeast of Yekaterinburg. In their honour, the Orthodox Church has built the exquisite **Monastery of the Holy Martyrs** (☎ 343-217 9146; admission free) at this pilgrimage site. Set deep in the peaceful birch forest, the wooden buildings were constructed using ancient methods, which preclude the use of nails. An observation platform overlooks the mine shaft where the remains were deposited and burned. According to the Orthodox Church, this is the final resting place of the Romanov family and therefore sacred ground.

To reach Ganina Yama by public transport, take the *elektrichka* (suburban train) to Shuvakish. Be sure to check the return train schedule in advance. If you hire a taxi from Yekaterinburg, take the road to Nizhny Tagil and look for the wooden signpost in the median 16km out of the city. Follow the signs to the monastery.

Alternatively, Ekaterinburg Guide Center (p150) offers a three-hour tour for €20 to €27 per person that goes to Ganina Yama.

Nizhnyaya Sinyachikha & Around

Нижняя Синячиха

☎ 243 / ☎ Moscow + 2hr

The pretty village of Nizhnyaya Sinyachikha, about 150km northeast of Yekaterinburg and 12km north of the town of Alapaevsk,

is home to an open-air **Architecture Museum** (☎ 246-75118; admission R20, guided tour R50; ☎ 10am-4pm). Here there are 15 traditional Siberian log buildings featuring displays of period furniture, tools and domestic articles. The stone cathedral houses a collection of Ural region folk art. This impressive collection of art and architecture was gathered from around the Urals and recompiled by the single-handed efforts of Ivan Samoylov, an enthusiastic local historian.

About 2km west of Nizhnyaya Sinyachikha is a monastery dedicated to Grand Princess Yelisaaveta, on the spot where she died (see p152). Three buses a day go to Alapaevsk (R110, 3½ hours).

TYUMEN ТЮМЕНЬ

☎ 3452 / pop 507,000 / ☎ Moscow + 2hr

Founded in 1586, Tyumen was the first Russian fort in Siberia. Today the city exudes a sense of growing prosperity as the booming capital of a vast, oil-rich *oblast* (region) that stretches to the Arctic Circle. The city has a businesslike drive and youthful bustle best experienced on weekend evenings by strolling in the fairground of City Park. Pleasant and liveable, Tyumen has tree-lined streets and a fair few older buildings amid all the new construction, but if you have limited time you're better stopping in Tobolsk.

Orientation

The train station lies at the end of ul Pervomayskaya, 1.5km south of the main commercial artery, ul Respubliki, which runs

some 5km from the fine Trinity Monastery to well beyond the bus station.

City maps are sold at **Magazin Knizhny** (ul Privokzalnaya 28A, Polyklinka Bldg; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun), hidden away near the train station.

Information

Internet Salon (ul Respubliki 12; per hr R28.80;

☎ 11am-8pm)

Main post office (ul Respubliki 56; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun)

Telephone office (ul Respubliki 51; ☎ 24hr) Has prepay Internet.

Trikita (Megafon Shop, ul Melnikayte 100; Internet per hr R30; ☎ 24hr) Slow but handy for Hotel Vostok.

Web Khauz (ul Respubliki 61; Internet per hr R28; ☎ 11am-8pm) Entry from ul Profsoyuznaya, up two flights of stairs then along a balcony.

Sights

Behind a kremlinesque wall on the Tura riverside, the picturesque 1727 **Trinity Monastery** (Cuyato Troitsky; ul Kommunisticheskaya 10) is Tyumen's finest sight. But there are plenty more fine churches, notably the voluptuously curved baroque **Znamensky Cathedral** (ul Semakova 13) dating from 1786 and the similar **Saviour's Church** (ul Lenina).

The **Fine Arts Museum** (Muzey Izobrazitelnykh Iskusstv; ☎ 469 115; ul Ordzhonikidze 47; admission R40; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has an impressive and eclectic collection including an original by Vasily Kandinsky. Close to the large **Lenin Statue** (Tsentralnaya pl) several remnant older buildings have been turned into museums, notably the wooden **Marsharov House Museum** (☎ 461 310; ul Lenina 24; admission US\$2; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Wed-Sun) and sweet little **First House Museum** (Istoriya Adnovo Dma; ☎ 464 963; ul Respubliki 18; admission US\$1; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sun).

Further east, the **Geological Museum** (☎ 751 138; ul Respubliki 142) is one of the best of its type, and there's a modern **war memorial** nearby shaped like a gigantic metal candle.

Towards the train station, notice the **FD Class steam locomotive** (ul Pervomayskaya) hidden in the trees.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hotel GUBD (☎ 247 434; ul Sovetskaya 124; s/tw R250/400) A great-value central cheapie. Some better rooms (single or twin R500) have private bathrooms.

Hotel Vostok (☎ 205 350; fax 206 124; ul Respubliki 159; s/tw from R580/740) East of the city centre but very accessible on bus 25 from the train station, this vast Soviet monster of fers repainted but tired rooms with private bathrooms. A few well-renovated singles are available for R1158.

Resting rooms (komnaty otdykha; Tyumen train station; dm/tw R170/800) The clean 8th-floor dormitories share somewhat unexciting seatless toilets but have panoramic views of the endless railway activity below. Exit the station via the main doorway and re-enter by a separate door on your left.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Neftyanik (☎ 461 687; www.neftyanik.ru; ul Chelyuskintsev 12; s/tw/d R1200/1400/2040) This hotel is handy for the older parts of town, thoroughly renovated and reasonable value for money, though some staff members are less than helpful.

Hotel Prometey (☎ 250 021; fax 251 423; ul Sovetskaya 61, 5th fl; s/tw/d R1250/1700/1700) Rebuilt rooms with pleasant new furniture, although bathrooms don't quite reach the same standards. In twin rooms the beds are barely wide enough for stick insects.

Hotel Tura (☎ /fax 282 209; ul Melnikayte 103A; s/d R1370/2160) Small well-kept hotel near the Vostok with pleasantly subdued décor and new shower-booth bathrooms.

TOP END

Hotel Tyumen (Kvoliti Otel; ☎ 494 040; www.hotel tyumen.ru/en; ul Ordzhonikidze 46; s/d R3500/4400, ste R6000-7700) This is a typical international-standard business hotel complete with muzak and ping-pong elevators. The ground-floor Vienna Café has a wide-ranging English-language menu.

TO KAZAKHSTAN BY ACCIDENT

Constructed from 1892 to 1895, the original West Siberian Railway linked Chelyabinsk (252km south of Yekaterinburg) with proto-Novosibirsk via Petropavlovsk and Omsk. Between Yekaterinburg and Omsk, some trains still use this line. However, as Petropavlovsk is now in northern Kazakhstan, the route is a visa nightmare. It simply isn't worth the hassle – take a train routed via Tyumen instead.

TYUMEN

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Магазин Книжный.....(see 27)	Изобразительных Искусств.....7 D3	Trinity Monastery	Свято-Троицкий Монастырь.....13 A2
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Web Khauz WebХауз.....5 D3	Пам'ятник В И Ленину.....10 C3		

Eating & Drinking

Korolevskaya Trapeza (☎ 451 248; ul Lenina 4; business lunches R200, meals R250-650, cover after 8pm R60; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) Here you'll find imaginative and subtle Russo-European cuisine dished up in a pseudo-medieval atmosphere of high-vaulted ceilings with crusader murals. Enter from behind Osminog Casino and Italika Pizzeria.

Kofeynya (☎ 466 083; ul Semakova 19; espresso R40; ☎ 8am-11pm) Tyumen's top coffee house with an astonishing range of special grinds and *mate* (South American) teas served in authentic wooden bulbs that look like opium pipes.

Pinta Taverna (☎ 250 220; ul Dzerzhinskogo 38; meals R200-400, beers R60-100; ☎ 11am-2am) Cosy

farmyard-styled cellar with waitresses in peasant costumes watched by a stunted model cow.

Pivnoy Klub (☎ 283 669; ul Melnikayte 103; meals R65-140, beers from R40; ☎ 10am-11pm) This low-key beerkeller pub has heavy wooden seats and serves perfectly cooked chicken *ragu* using wonderfully crunchy fresh vegetables. Next door is the popular Fridays fast-food joint.

Stolovaya (ul Privokzalnaya 28A, Polyclinic Bldg; meals R30-50; ☎ 7.45am-3pm & 4-10pm) Fill up for less than the cost of a coffee elsewhere in this unrepentantly Soviet-era cafeteria beside the station.

Trian Supermarket (ul Volodarskogo 23; ☎ 24hr) All-hours supermarket with hot, spit-roast chicken.

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Getting Around

From the train station bus 25 serves Hotel Vostok and passes near the bus station (hop off at the 'Neptun/Stroitel' stop then walk a block east, crossing the big clover-leaf junction of uls Permyakova and Respubliki). Bus 13 from the train station loops around to the Hotel Neftyanik; switch to frequent bus 30 or 14 in front of the World Trade Center building to reach the Trinity Monastery. The route follows ul Respubliki westbound, but returns through the centre on ul Lenina. From outside Transagenstvo, *marshrutka* (fixed-route minibus) 35 (R18 plus R8 per bag, 40 minutes) runs to the airport regularly until 8.40pm.

TOBOLSK ТОБОЛЬСК

☎ 34511 / pop 98,000 / ☎ Moscow + 2hr
Star attractions of Tobolsk, Siberia's former capital, are its handsome kremlin and a charmingly decrepit old town, full of collapsing old wooden houses and churches. The city is 247km northeast of Tyumen and makes an easy alternative stopping point on your journey. Although it's off the Trans-Siberian mainline, direct overnight trains arrive from Yekaterinburg and Omsk.

An early visitor to the city was Yermak Timofeevich, whose band of Cossack mercenaries sacked the nearby Tatar stronghold of Sibir in 1582. Tobolsk's original fort was built five years later.

Although the locals were Muslim Tatars, Tobolsk became the seat of Siberia's first bishopric in 1620 as Christianity tried to stamp out incest, wife-renting and spouse-stealing by sexually frustrated Cossacks.

From 1708 the city became the region's politico-military hub but its strategic importance started to wane in the 1760s when it was bypassed by the new Great Siberian Trakt. Involuntary guests included many Decembrists (see p194) in the 1830s, Dostoevsky (en route to exile in Omsk) and Tsar Nicholas II who spent several doomed months here with his family in 1917.

The city's remarkably hospitable population remains 30% Tatar.

Orientation

The train station is 10km northeast of the modern city centre. That's an area of ugly Soviet-era concrete blocks around Hotel Slayanskaya. Don't lose hope! Some 3km

Getting There & Away

Trains depart to all Trans-Siberian destinations. Useful overnight connections include Omsk (R700, 8 hours, departs 8.47pm) and Kazan (R1100, 22 hours, departs 4pm). At least three trains daily run to Tobolsk for R180 *platskart* (*platskartny*; open carriage), taking 4½ hours, or take the bus (R260, five hours, seven daily). While the ugly train station undergoes its long-term reconstruction, rail tickets are sold across the square at ul Pervomayskaya 62. Alternatively buy them at **Transagenstvo** (ul Respubliki 156; ☎ 8am-8pm) near Hotel Vostok. It also sells air tickets. **UtAir** (☎ 453 131; ul Pervomayskaya 58A; ☎ 8am-8pm) flies to Moscow (from R5000) and various regional and Central Asian cities.

further south the delightful kremlin overlooks the intriguing old town that lies on the Irtysh flood plain below.

Information

Gazprombank (ul Oktyabrskaya; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-3pm Fri) Changes money.

Post office (Komsomolsky pr, M/R 42; ☎ 8am-6pm) Has an attached telephone office.

Servis Tsentr (per hr R28.80; ☎ 8am-10pm) An Internet service behind the post and telephone offices.

Sights

KREMLIN

Within the tower-studded 18th-century walls of the **kremlin** (☎ grounds 8am-8pm) are the intriguing but disused **Trading Arches** (Gostiny Dvor) and the glorious 1686 **St Sofia Cathedral** whose central dome has recently been gilded. Less eye-catching from outside, but containing splendid arched ceiling-murals, is the 1746 **Intercession Cathedral** (Pokrovsky Sobor). Between the two, the 1799 **bell tower** was built for the Uglich bell (below), a copy of which is in the **Museum of the Spiritual Cultures of Western Siberia** (☎ 23 715; admission R20; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun). This museum is housed within the elegant **Arkhereisky mansion**. The upper storey has a stylishly re-created 19th-century drawing room as well as plenty of stuffed animals. The middle floor has a *chum* (teepee-style cone of poles covered with skins or strips of bark) amid some interesting ethnographic items. The museum shop sells detailed but hard-to-read city maps. The eerie 1855 **Tyuremny Zamok** (Krasnaya pl 5; admission R20; ☎ 10am-4pm

THE FIRST SIBERIAN EXILE

Russian history is surreal. The first famous exile to Siberia was not human but a 300kg bell. In 1581 this **Uglich bell** had been used to call an insurrection on the murder of Tsar Boris Godunov's heir Tsarevich Dmitry. Astonishingly, Godunov's wrath turned upon the inanimate bell: he ordered it to be publicly flogged, had its tongue ripped out and then ordered it to be dragged to Tobolsk by banished citizens. Did the flogger smirk? Sadly, there's no record. The bell later regained its metallic voice in a specially built tower in Tobolsk's kremlin but it has long since sneaked home to Uglich.

Wed-Sun) was once a holding-prison where tsarist exiles were temporarily incarcerated awaiting their final rural banishment.

OUTSIDE THE KREMLIN

Built in 1887 for Tobolsk's 300th anniversary, the delightful little **Fine Art Museum** (ul Oktyabrskaya; admission R35, video cameras R100; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) contains a collection of WWI-era Russian avant-garde canvases. Arguably more interesting are the fine local bone-carvings. Some are by Minsalim Timergazeev, a spiritual Tatar eccentric with wild-flowing grey hair who has his own workshop in the art shop next door, **Minsalim Folk Trade** (☎ 22 650; dimini@zmail.ru; ul Oktyabrskaya 2; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm). For many travellers, meeting Minsalim is one of the highlights of a trip to Siberia. He'll happily demonstrate how to turn antler fragments into shaman-shapes using Heath Robinson-esque elastic-band technology. His son speaks English.

OLD TOWN

Wooden stairs lead down beneath the kremlin's **Pryamskoi Vozv** (gateway) to the wonderful old town, full of weather-beaten, partly ruined churches and angled wooden homes sinking into the soggy marshland.

Near the 1918 **Victory Chapel**, uls Mira and Kirova converge at a small square. Here the **Tobolsk Rayon Administration Building** (ul Mira 10) was the exile home of the last tsar before his journey to execution in Yekaterinburg. The **Tsar Nicolas II Office-Museum** (Kabinet-Muzey Imperatora Nikolaya II; ☎ 22 776; admission R15), upstairs beyond a security check, is one small room restored close to its 1917 appearance.

The **Archangel Mikhail Church** (ul Lenina 24) two blocks east has a colourfully restored interior. The character of Tatianna Larina in Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Oeginin* is said to have been modelled on Natalia Fonvizina, a Decembrist wife who prayed here when not cultivating pineapples in her hothouse. More photogenic is the semiderelict 1759 **Zachary and Elisabeth Church** (ul Bazarnaya ploschad) with soaring black-tipped spires. Beyond the main red-brick **mosque** (☎ 22 748; ul Pushkina 27), weave through the muddy lanes of Tatar cottages to reach the splendid baroque shell of the **Krestovozdvizhenskaya Church**.

The modest **Siberian-Tatar Cultural Centre** (Tsentr Sibirsko-Tatarskoi Kultur; ☎ 22 713; ul Yershova 30)

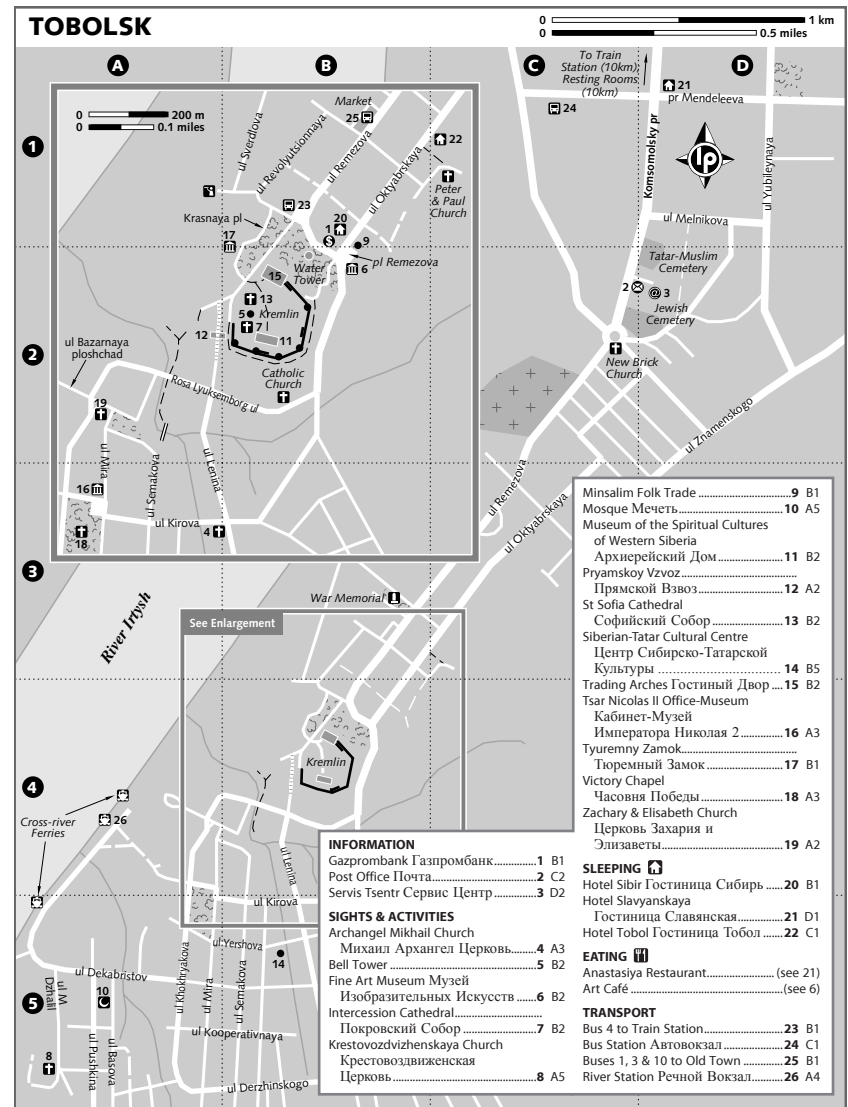
has a minor museum (admission R10; ☎ 9am to noon and 1pm to 5pm Monday to Friday), exhibitions and occasional Tatar musical shows.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Sibir (☎ 22 390; pl Remezova 1; with breakfast s R490-650, tw/ste R1300/1330) Perfectly situated

for the kremlin, this good-value hotel has flashes of style, most notably in some of its full-facility suites. Unremarkable standard single rooms have share-pair bathrooms for R490 and private ones for R650. Breakfast is served in its inviting restaurant.

Hotel Slayvanskaya (☎ 99 101; www.hotel.tob.ru in Russian; 9th Mikrorayon, ul Mendeleeva; s/tw R2000/3500;



YURI GAGARIN LIVES! *M Guppy, Worthing, UK*

The train ride's alcoholic theme had been set that morning when a kindly couple with two be-mused toddlers treated me to breakfast. Thoughtful. But challenging. Vodka and *sala* (salted pork fat) aren't really my thing. Especially not before 10am. Then that evening I met Yuri Gagarin. No, not THE Yuri Gagarin, of course. The great cosmonaut has long since mutated from living human to heroic icon. This fresh-faced young Yuri, nonetheless, had some pretty astonishing talents of his own when it came to 'rocket fuel'. In a single evening, while wowing many impressionable young ladies with his ID card, he managed to consume almost 10L of beer. Predictably the toilet stayed busy all night.

(P) This unusually luxurious Western-standard hotel suffers somewhat from its unexciting new-town position. Some discounts are available.

Resting rooms (komnaty otdykha; ☎ 95 222; train station; dm R178) Clean and friendly, the position's utterly impractical for visiting the city but ideal if you're arriving blurry-eyed off the Omsk train or awaiting the 5.23am service to Tyumen. Showers cost R35 extra.

Hotel Tobol (☎ 46 614; ul Oktyabrskaya 20; s/d/tw R420/780/960) Dingy last resort.

Art Café (☎ 24 347; ul Oktyabrskaya; coffee R40, meals R350) Anglo-Iranian owner Jacob can cook up British, Russian or international meals to order, bakes fat-free cakes and tells improbable but true yarns of his former hair-pulling antics. It's in the Fine Art Museum (see p160) basement.

Anastasiya Restaurant (☎ 40 138; meals R200-450; ☎ 7am-11pm) Seek out the great downstairs pub at Hotel Slavianskaya, and eat at its unexpectedly good-value restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Tobolsk is a stop on the line to Nizhnevartovsk, Purpe and Novy Urengoy. Connections to Trans-Siberian stations include overnights from Yekaterinburg (R850, 12 hours) and Omsk (R890, 12 hours), though the latter arrives at 5am northbound. For Tyumen, trains (R167 *platskart*, 4¾ hours) are supplemented by seven daily buses (R260, five hours). Buses run several times daily to Tyumen (R260, five hours).

From the **river station** (☎ 96 617) extremely slow river ferries travel south to Omsk (third/first class R612/1674, three per month in summer), taking over two days. Heading north allow almost five days to reach the Arctic-Circle city of Salekhard (R740/2411).

Getting Around

Bus 4 and *marshrutka* 20 link the train station, new town and kremlin. Buses 1, 3 and 10 travel past the kremlin and loop around the old town. Bus 1 passes the mosque.

OMSK OMCK

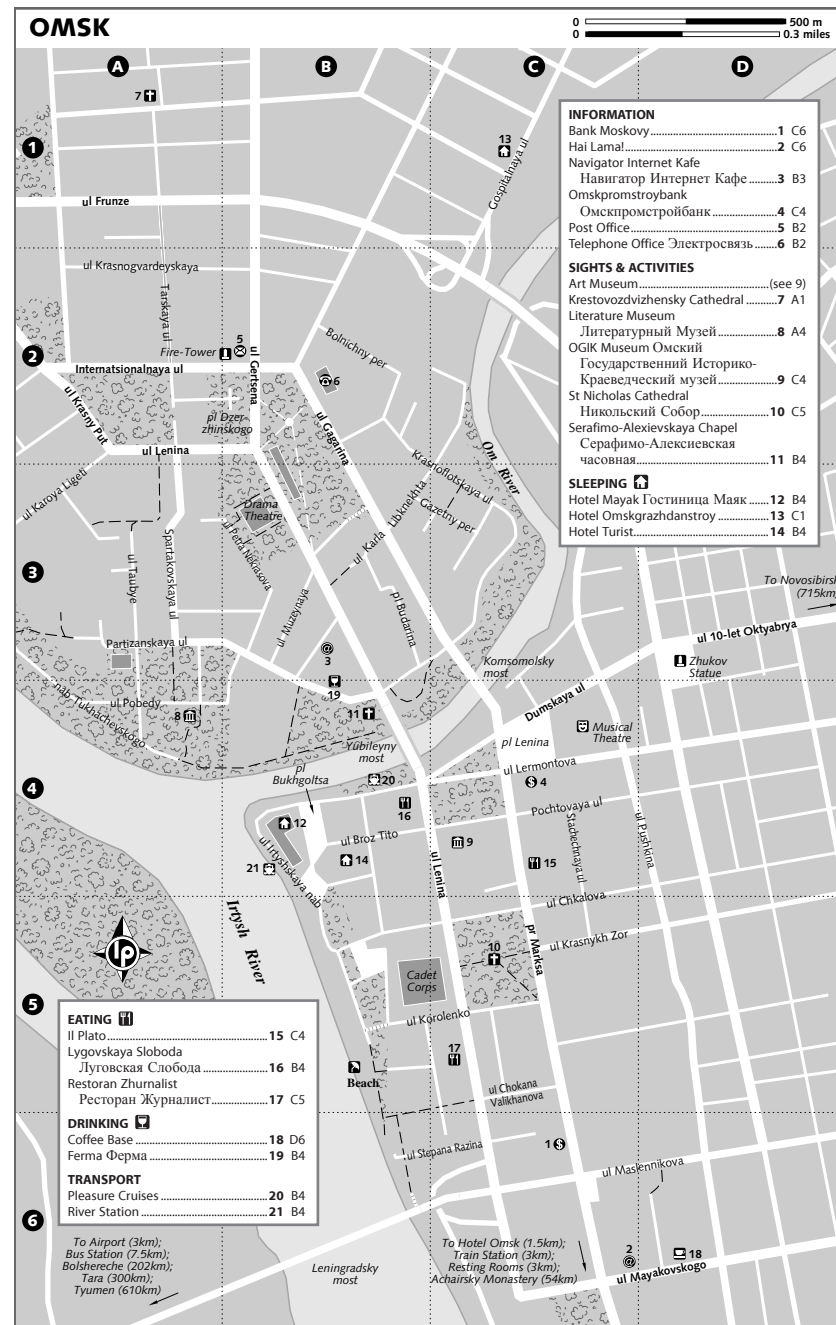
☎ 3812 / pop 1.3 million / ☎ Moscow + 3hr Don't be put off by your first impressions of Omsk, 568km east of Tyumen. Crossing the Irtysh River you'll see a line of giant cranes like skeletal giraffes and the usual rows of drab apartment blocks. But the old city centre, where the Om River joins the Irtysh, has parks, quirky public sculptures and a stretch of stately 19th-century buildings along ul Lenina, the main shopping drag. There's also decent-value budget accommodation and great dining, but the main incentive to stop in Omsk is that it neatly breaks the journey from Tobolsk (or Yekaterinburg) to Tomsk (or Novosibirsk) into two painless overnight rides.

History

Starting as a 1716 Cossack outpost, by 1824 Omsk had replaced Tobolsk as the seat of the governor general of Siberia. It became a major dumping ground for exiles. These included Dostoevsky, whose *Buried Alive in Siberia* describes the writer's wretched Omsk imprisonment (1849-53) during which he nearly died from a flogging. During the Civil War, Admiral Alexander Kolchak briefly made Omsk the seat of his anti-Bolshevik government until fleeing to Irkutsk where he was executed in 1919. Today Omsk is another city doing quite nicely on the proceeds of Russia's oil boom.

Orientation

From the train station, 4km south of the city centre, jump straight onto trolleybus



4 up pr Marksa, a major commercial thoroughfare with stolidly Soviet architecture. Get off at central pl Lenina, dominated by a hideous musical theatre with a roof like a giant ski jump. From near here the city's attractive old core stretches north along ul Lenina across the little Om River.

Information

Bank Moskvy (pr Marksa 10; ☎ 10am-1pm & 1.45-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Good euro rates and 24-hour ATM.

Hai Lama! (☎ 287 866; ul Mayakovskogo 15; per hr R25 plus per MB R3; ☎ 24hr) Fast Internet.

Navigator Internet Kafe (ul Lenina 14/1; per hr R25-35 plus per MB R3, beers R30-60; ☎ 9am-10pm) Nightshift R90 to R120 plus R2 per MB.

Omskpromstroybank (ul Lermontova 20; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Good dollar rates.

Post office (ul Gertsena 1; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Telephone office (ul Gagarina 34; ☎ 24hr)

Sights

Pseudo-Napoleonic flourishes make the **Drama Theatre** Omsk's most ornate historical building, though other fine century-old buildings can be found down ul Lenina to the pointy little 1908 **Serafimo-Alexievskaya Chapel**. Across Yubileyny most (Yubileyny bridge) the **OGIK Museum** (Omsky Gosudarstvenny Istoriko-Krayevadchesky muzey; ☎ 314 747; ul Lenina 23A; admission R25; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) has a strong historical and ethnographic collection and an historic framed map of the original Trans-Sib line running from Chelyabinsk to Vladivostok. The next-door **Art Museum** (Omsky Muзей Iskusstv; ☎ 313 677; admission R100; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has a lot of fussy pottery but the rectilinear 1862 building is a curiosity in itself. It was built as the Siberian governor's mansion, hosted passing tsars (an original throne survives) and housed the government of the counter-revolutionary Whites during Kolchak's brief reign (1918-19).

Further south, the stately 19th-century **St Nicholas Cathedral** (Svyato-Nikolsky Sobor; ul Lenina 27A) was used as a cinema during Soviet times.

The limited attractions of the **Literature Museum** (☎ 242 965; ul Dostoevskogo 1; admission R40; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) include interesting old city photos and some Dostoevsky doodles from his unhappy Omsk years.

Activities

Fancy a **river trip**? Various pleasure boats depart regularly from just west of Yubileyny most. Scenery is nothing special but for a relaxing afternoon you could float 55km to **Achairsky Monastery** (R160, 4½ hours return). The complex has been totally rebuilt since 1992, having been used as an infamous Gulag in earlier decades. Highlights are the impressive five-storey bell tower and a holy spring that flows out beneath a cute wooden chapel in the birch woods nearby.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hotel Omskgrazhdanstroy (☎ 251 247; ul Gospital'naya 19; dm/s/tw R210/350/660) Rooms are not sexy but they are clean, large and remarkably good value. All have private bathrooms. The area isn't attractive but it's within walking distance of the historic centre.

Resting rooms (komnaty otdykha; ☎ 442 347; dm/tw R250/700) Rebuilt, clean and unusually appealing, they're in a separate building: exit the main station, turn left and find the door before the baggage *kassa* (ticket office).

Hotel Omsk (☎ 310 721; fax 315 222; ul Irtyshskaya Naberezhnaya 30; dm R350, s R650-1200, tw R1200-1600) This tall, drab concrete block is very rarely full. Somewhat shabby, typically Soviet rooms are survivable and some have views. It's halfway between the train station and the centre: take any bus along pr Marksa to Pobedy Park to the riverside.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Mayak (☎ /fax 315 431; www.hotel-mayak.ru; ul Lermontova 2; s/tw R1920/2640) Within the rounded end of the vaguely ship-shaped Art Deco river station, the small, stylish rooms have artistic lines. Reception is friendly and rates are half if you stay under 12 hours.

Hotel Turist (☎ 316 419; www.tourist-omsk.ru; ul Broz Tito 2; s R1330-2100, tw R1640-2350) The best rooms are splendidly rebuilt and well worth the price. However, economy versions are looking pretty worn. Some English is spoken at the smart new reception.

Eating & Drinking

Restoran Zhurnalist (☎ 511 313; ul Lenina 34; lunches R90-160, dinners R270-600; ☎ noon-1am) This reliable restaurant has tasty, good-value Russian

food and an atmospheric interior of framed cameras, ticking old clocks and newspaper ceilings.

Ferma (☎ 247 827; ul Partizanskaya 2; beers R45-60, snacks R80-200; ☎ noon-midnight) Communist iconography is delightfully mocked in this amusing cellar bar-café beneath a splendid old-Omsk building. Original 1960s posters need no commentary as they hilariously explain how to deal with bacteriological attack (ie cockroaches) and how to slice the ideologically perfect cheese-and-salami sandwich.

Lygovskaya Sloboda (☎ 311 540; ul Lenina 20; meals R350-1000; ☎ noon-1am) This appealingly traditional, upmarket Russian restaurant has a handy bakers' window (☎ 10am to 8pm) in the side selling tempting pastries and croissants.

Il Plato (☎ 310 315; ul Marksa 5; salad-bar lunches R150-215, dinners to R600; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Handily situated and much nicer than you'd guess from the ugly exterior, this chain pizzeria does R90 omelette-and-toast breakfasts with bottomless coffee. In the same building are a roast chicken joint and a Czech-retro pub-restaurant.

Coffee Base (ul Mayakovskogo 17; coffee R29-100; ☎ 10am-11pm) Caffeine heaven.

Getting There & Away

Westbound trains on the main Trans-Siberian line travel regularly to Moscow (42 hours). Train 67 is best for Yekaterinburg (R1200, 13 hours) via Tyumen (R700, 7½ hours). For Tobolsk (R410 *platskart*, 13¼ hours, departs 4pm), train 395 gets in bright and early. Eastbound, train 88 is best for Novosibirsk (R420 *platskart*, 9½ hours) but there's also a direct train to much more interesting Tomsk (trains 38 or 272; R620 *platskart*, 14 hours). Although train tickets are sold conveniently from the **rechnoy vokzal** (river station; ☎ 398 563; pl Bukhgołtsa; ☎ 9am-7pm), commission can be a whopping R150. Here you can also buy air tickets or catch very leisurely Rechflot ferries to Tobolsk (R612/1674 third/first class, 62 hours) three times monthly in summer.

Omsk's **airport** (☎ 517 570; ul Inzhener'naya 1) is on the western bank of the Irtysh River. Useful domestic destinations include Moscow (R5500, several daily), St Petersburg (R5510, twice weekly) and Irkutsk (R6050, three times weekly).

Getting Around

From the train station, trolleybus 4 and *marshrutka* 335 run along pr Marksa to pl Lenina, past the main post office and on for miles up Krasny Put. No 60 serves the airport.

NOVOSIBIRSK НОВОСИБИРСК

☎ 383 / pop 1.5 million / ☎ Moscow + 3hr

This city wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the Trans-Siberian Railway. Train enthusiasts may wish to see Siberia's biggest station, a new railway museum and a locomotive collection at nearby Seyatel. And those seeking Irish bars will be delighted by the choice. However, for atmosphere and sightseeing consider stopping in Tomsk instead. Either Novosibirsk or Tomsk make possible starting points for visiting the beautiful Altai Mountains (see p178).

History

Founded in 1893, the city grew around the Ob River bridge that was then being built for the Trans-Siberian Railway. Named Novonikolayevsk until 1925 for the last tsar, it grew rapidly into Siberia's biggest metropolis, a key industrial and transport centre exploiting coalfields to the east and mineral deposits in the Urals. In the 1930s the construction of the Turkestan-Siberian (Turk-Sib) railway south from Novosibirsk to Almaty in Kazakhstan made the city a crucial transport link between Russia and Central Asia.

Orientation

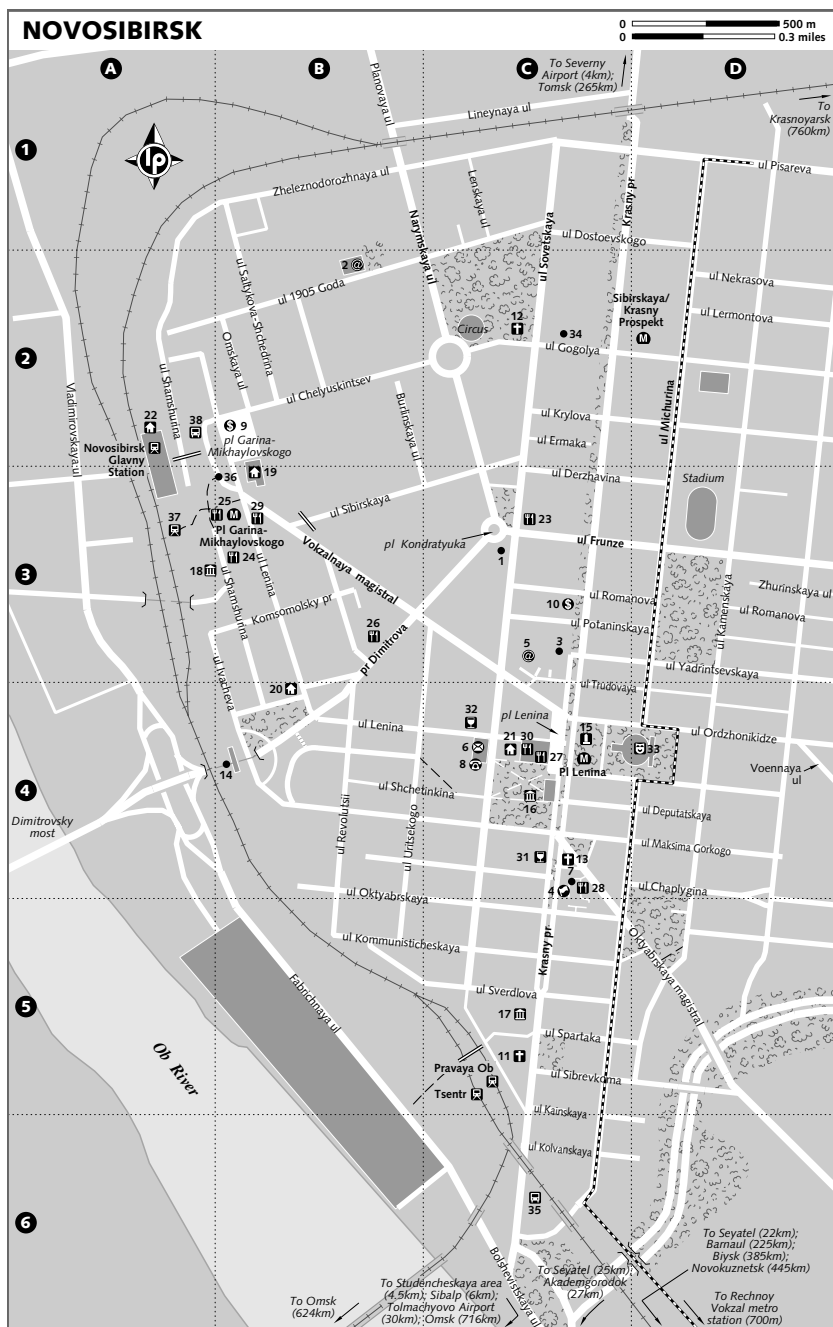
Despite its daunting scale, Siberia's biggest city has a relaxed and manageable centre. Volkzal'naya magistral runs 1.5km from the train station, meeting the main commercial axis, Krasny pr, at central pl Lenina. Some 30km south of the centre near the great Ob Sea (reservoir), Akademgorodok is Siberia's biggest and best known 'science suburb'.

MAPS

Dom Knigi (Krasny pr 51; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) bookshop has a good range of maps including detailed Altai topographics, if you're heading for the hills.

Information

Paying for a night at Hotel Sibir is the only 100% certain way to get tourist visas registered. Hotel Novosibirsk might also oblige.

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INTERNET ACCESS

Computer Klub Arena (☎ 220 3939; ul 1905 Goda 41; per hr R15 plus per MB R3; ☎ 8am-9pm) Fun, submarine décor interior accessed downstairs through the courtyard of a school. Nightshift R110 from 10pm, booking required.

Internet Tsentr (☎ 291 8841; ul Trudovaya 1; per 30min R30; ☎ 9am-10pm) Beneath an apartment block down the first alley off Vokzalnaya magistral walking from pl Lenina. Nightshift R110.

MONEY

TransKreditBank (ul Lenina 86; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Handy for the train station. The ATM works 24 hours.

Vneshtorgbank (Krasny pr 35; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Decent euro rates.

POST

Main post office (ul Lenina 5; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun)

TELEPHONE

Telephone office (ul Sovetskaya 33; ☎ 24hr)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Altair (☎ 212 5115; www.altairtour.ru; ul Sovetskaya 65, office 15) Helpful, with English spoken.

Sibalp (☎ 346 3191; http://sibalp.unpo.ru) Specialists for tailor-made small-group Altai exploration trips. English-speaking homestays and city tours arranged. Will meet travellers at their hotel.

STA-Novosibirsk (☎ 223 9534; www.sibtravel.com/eng; ul Oktyabrskaya 45A; ☎ 7am-1pm & 2-6pm) Can book you into 'closed' hotels for just R100 over normal costs.

Sights

Novosibirsk's pl Lenina is dominated by the huge, silver-domed **Opera & Ballet Theatre** (Krasny pr 36; ☎ season Oct-Jun). Bigger than Moscow's Bolshoi, its grand interior alone makes performances one of the city's highlights (see p177). In front, wearing a flapping coat, the dashing **Lenin statue** is flanked by waving partisans vainly trying to direct the chaotic traffic.

Close to the train station, the brand-new **West Siberian Railway Museum** (☎ 345 7359; ul Shamshurina; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) should be open by the time you read this. There's also a somewhat tatty **FD21 Steam Locomotive** where pr Dimitrova tunnels under the tracks.

In an elegant mansion, the **Local Studies Museum** (Краеведческий музей; ☎ 218 1773; Krasny pr 23; admission R150; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) has Altai shaman coats, cutaway pioneer houses and some splendid religious artefacts. The **State Art Museum** (Khudozhestvennyy muzey; ☎ 223 3516; http://gallery.nsc.ru; Krasny pr 5; adult/student R150/80; ☎ 10am-5.20pm Tue-Fri, 11am-5.20pm Sat & Sun) has an extensive collection including icons and distinctive mountainscapes by celebrated Russian painter Nikolai Rerikh.

The pretty little **Chapel of St Nicholas** (Chasovnya Svyatitelya Nikolaya; pr Krasny) was said to mark the geographical centre of Russia when built in 1915. Demolished in the 1930s, it was rebuilt in 1993 for Novosibirsk's centenary. The gold-domed 1914 **Cathedral of the**

Ascension (Voznesensky sobor; ul Sovetskaya 91) has a wonderful, colourful interior with a soaring central space that's unexpected from its fairly squat exterior appearance. The 1898 **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (sobor Alexandra Nevskogo; Krasny pr 1A) is a red-brick Byzantine-style building with gilded domes and bright new murals.

Sleeping

Novosibirsk hotels are poor value by Siberian standards. Currently only those that we list here accept foreigners, though some others will if booked through a travel agency (p167).

Hotel Sibir (☎ 223 1215; centre@gk-sibir.sibnet.ru; ul Lenina 21; s/d with breakfast from R2100/2600; 🏠) Proudly considering itself 'international', the Sibir has English-speaking receptionists, money exchange, tour and ticketing booths and a lounge bar in its unrepentantly 1970s lobby. King bedded 'studios' (double R5400 with air-con) are splendid. However, in the styleless standard rooms the parquet floors are worn and some of the furniture is ageing.

Station Hotel (☎ 229 2376; Novosibirsk Glavny train station, 2nd fl; dm/tw/tr R500/1200/1500, s/tw with bathroom R2800/3500) Only for those with onward rail tickets. Half-price for 12-hour stays. It's frequently full.

Hotel Tsentralnaya (☎ 222 3638; fax 227 660; Lenina 3; s/tw R700/1000, with bathroom R1500/2200) Perfectly central. The no-frills basic rooms here have shared, survivable bathrooms and doggy lifts. While it's hardly exciting, this is Novosibirsk's best available budget option. However, sometimes foreigners are randomly refused.

Hotel Novosibirsk (☎ 220 1120; fax 216 517; Volkzalnaya magistral 1; s/tw with breakfast from R1100/1700) Opposite Novosibirsk Glavny train station, this glum 23-storey Soviet-era tower has mediocre, overpriced Soviet-era rooms. The cheapest share a toilet and washbasin between pairs of rooms and lack showers altogether. You'll pay over R1800 for a private bathroom. Breakfast is lacklustre.

Homestays (s R700-1000, tw R1100-1500) are organised through **Uyut Kvartirnoe Byuro** (☎ 202 009; www.risp.ru/~hotel in Russian; Novosibirsk Glavny train station). Rates are half-price for 12 hours. For similar rates, tour agency **Sibalp** (☎ 346 3191; http://sibalp.unpo.ru) can arrange English-speaking hosts.

Eating

The choice is endless within a block or two of pl Lenina – just stroll down ul Lenina, Krasny pr or Volkzalnaya magistral where the Irish pubs and Wild West bars also do good, if pricey, food. Marginally cheaper eateries huddle near metro Studencheskaya.

Zhili Byli (ul Lenina 1; meals R130-450; 🕒 11am-11pm) Prices are reasonable in this central, Disney-esque 'Siberian village'. There's an English menu, and stuffed bliny for R45 to R90. It's above GrillMaster (burgers R39 to R54) and Pizza-Pasta (slices R36 to R42).

Lanch Kafe (☎ 270 581; meals R200-350) At the rear of the Zhili Byli building, entered from the park, is this popular place, above which are a great Italian restaurant and a chilled-out, cushion-floored DJ-bar serving sushi.

Mexico Kafe (☎ 210 3420; Oktyabrskaya magistral 49; meals R350-800; 🕒 noon-1am) Great Mexican food served within an atmospheric basement decorated with Aztec icons.

Ne Goryuy (☎ 217 5636; meals R300-900; 🕒 noon-1am) Down the next stairway from Mexico Kafe is this ultramodern, mood-lit basement for classy Georgian cuisine.

Balkan Grill (☎ 217 2288; ul Frunze 3; meals R500-1300, beers R190; 🕒 11am-11pm) Whitewashed brickwork and vines give a Mediterranean feel. The menu is in English and the portions are enormous. Credit cards accepted.

Blues Kafe (☎ 346 1931; ul Geodezicheskaya 1; beers R50-70, lunch R95-125 before 5pm) This cosy place is near Studencheskaya metro, one block west through the market. *Chiziki* (cheese balls; R60) are better than the BB King salad.

QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

Kuzhina (☎ 229 4119; pr Dimitrova 1A; meals R140-250; 🕒 11am-10pm) This is a relatively upmarket point-and-pick cafeteria chain. Amid giant vegetables, the décor has an olde-Russia feel despite the angular new glass architecture.

Blinnaya (ul Volkzalnaya 2; snacks R20-45; 🕒 9am-10pm; 🍷) A neat, unpretentious little place handy for a pancake, or an R9 Nescafé or R38 beer while awaiting a train.

Kaskad (ul Volkzalnaya 2; 🕒 7.30am-10pm) Multi-roomed grocery store with a takeaway, pay-by-weight salad bar and a basic sit-down *pelmenaya* (place serving dumplings).

Supermarket Khoroshy (Vokzalnaya magistral 4; 🕒 24hr) Sells groceries at any time.

(Continued on page 177)

(Continued from page 168)

Drinking

People's Bar & Grill (☎ 275 5000; Krasny pr; beers from R48, espressos R39; 🕒 noon-2am) This top people-watching spot has a hip modern vibe and an Anglo-American retro theme. Enter down stairs opposite St Nicholas chapel.

Saint Patrick's (☎ 222 2296; ul Lenina 8; 🕒 noon-2am) Downstairs through this could-be-anywhere Irish bar, the Tserp I Molot (Hammer & Sickle) karaoke bar is amusingly decked with tongue-in-cheek Soviet iconography.

Entertainment

Novosibirsk is a lively place with dozens of nightclubs, bowling alleys, concert halls and theatres fully listed in Russian on www.novosibout.ru.

Opera & Ballet Theatre (☎ 227 1537; www.opera-novosibirsk.ru; Krasny pr 36; admission R35-200; 🕒 Sep-Jun) Don't miss a night at this gigantic venue.

Rock City (☎ 227 0108; www.rockcity.ru in Russian; Krasny pr 37, 3rd fl; typical admission R200; 🕒 variable) For more-contemporary music from Latin dancing to heavy rock concerts, head to Rock City, above the Old Irish pub.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are two airports but most major airlines use big **Tolmachyovo airport** (☎ 216 9230; http://tolmachevoeng.faktura.ru), 30km west of Novosibirsk off the Omsk road. The website gives approximate timetables. **Siberia Airlines** (☎ toll-free 8-800 200 0007; www.s7.ru), the biggest regional carrier, has flights to Germany and several east-Asian cities plus a comprehensive domestic network. Regular connections include Moscow (R6300, R8600 return), St Petersburg (R7080 booked six days ahead) and Irkutsk (R5490 to R6100, 2½ hours). The central **Aviakassa** (ul Gogolya 3; 🕒 8.30am-8pm) is one of dozens of places at which you can purchase air tickets.

BUS

From the **bus station** (Krasny pr 4) around 20 daily buses serve Tomsk (R170, five hours). Shared taxis shave an hour or more off the journey for roughly double the price.

TRAIN

The main train station, **Novosibirsk Glavny** (ul Shamshurina 43), has daily long-distance trains.

For Moscow (48 to 55 hours via Omsk, Tyumen and Yekaterinburg), comfortable train 25 (even days) is easy to book. However, the cheaper 339 (1.30am, odd days) takes one night longer, saving on hotel accommodation as well as the fare. Of a dozen possible trains to Omsk the handiest overnighter is train 87 (R420 *platskart*, nine hours, daily). For Krasnoyarsk (R541 *platskart*, 12 to 14 hours), train 84 (13¼ hours overnight, even days) is well timed and rarely full.

For Altai, the 601 runs overnight to Biysk (R280 *platskart*, 10¼ hours, daily) via Barnaul (5½ hours). For Khakassia and Tuva you can go to Abakan direct (train 68, 23 hours, daily) or in two overnight hops via Novokuznetsk (train 605, R690, 9½ hours). Trains to Almaty, Kazakhstan (R1500, 32 to 37 hours) run daily at 5pm.

If queues are horrendous at the station's main ticket desks, you can buy them relatively swiftly from the upstairs **service centre** (🕒 4.30am-2am; commission R100) – no English spoken – or in Hotel Sibir.

Getting Around

Garina-Mikhaylovskogo, the metro stop for the main train station, is on a three-stop cross line. At Sibirskaya/Krasny pr this intersects with the main north-south line running across the river to Studencheskaya and pl Karla Marksa. For the city centre, *marshrutky* are generally handier. From outside Novosibirsk Glavny train station take trolleybus 2 to Severny airport, *marshrutka* 1122 to Tolmachyovo airport, Akademgorodok-bound 1015 for Seyatel and Studencheskaya-bound 1212 for the city centre (pl Lenina) and bus station.

AROUND NOVOSIBIRSK

Seyatel СЕЯТЕЛЬ

☎ 383

Beside the Akademgorodok highway, 24km south of central Novosibirsk, the **Locomotive Collection** (☎ 292 033; admission R50; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat-Thu) is a star attraction for train enthusiasts. It features 69 brightly painted and lovingly maintained trains and carriages dating from 1891 including one supposedly used by the last tsar. Directly across the tracks is Seyatel suburban train station from which it's 10 minutes' walk to the **Sun Museum** (Музей Солнца; ☎ 339 9126, mobile 📞 913-943 9835; sun-museum@yandex.ru; ul Ivanova 11A, 2nd fl;

adult/child R30/20; ☎ call ahead). Keep asking for directions! Small but spiritually uplifting, this place examines sun-symbolism across cultures. Artist-sculptor curator Valery Lipenkov speaks basic English and plays resonant *bila* (flat bells) for interested guests.

To reach Seyatel take the roughly hourly suburban trains (R18) that use a small open platform somewhat south of the main Novosibirsk Glavny station (R28) or use *marshrutka* 1015 from outside. Returning it's often easier to use bus 622 (1015 fills up in Akademgorodok) but you'll have to change onto tram or metro at Rechnoy vokzal south of Novosibirsk's central area.

Akademgorodok Академгородок

☎ 383

Akademgorodok suburbs were elite Soviet academic townships full of research institutes. Attached to most Siberian cities, they attracted scientists by offering special perks and relatively spacious apartments in peaceful surroundings. Nearly 3km south

of Seyatel, Novosibirsk's Akademgorodok is Siberia's biggest, nestled in taiga close to the beaches of the Ob Sea. The Akademgorodok idea is interesting, but the reality is frustrating for tourists. Although most institutes have 'museums', these mostly open only for invited academics. Package tourists get channelled to the spectacular **Geological Museum** (☎ 332 837; ul Koptuyuga; admission R150; ☎ by arrangement) where spotting purple Yakutian charoite is less memorable than witnessing the unreconstructed Sovietness of the guides delivering their mesmerising monotone monologues. Is it self-parody?

Bus 7 from Akademgorodok runs towards Seyatel station and the Sun Museum.

TOMSK ТОМСК

☎ 3822 / pop 473,000 / ☎ Moscow + 4hr

Siberia's most likable city, Tomsk is an underappreciated gem, 270km northeast of Novosibirsk. Home to some of Siberia's best traditional wooden architecture, it's also a lively university city where there's even a

hope of finding English-speakers in pubs and restaurants. Although 80km off the Trans-Sib mainline, it's not really a diversion as there are handy overnight through trains from both Omsk and Krasnoyarsk.

Founded in 1604, Tomsk was an important administrative and commercial town on the Great Siberian Trakt at its Tom River crossing. When the city was bypassed by the Trans-Siberian Railway its commercial importance declined, but its renowned academic institutions and the surrounding *oblast's* oil wealth are today bringing Tomsk a renewed economic dynamism. Its much-celebrated 400th anniversary brought a further face-lift in 2004.

Orientation

The train station and next-door bus station are about 2.5km southeast of pr Lenina, Tomsk's appealing main commercial street.

Accurate bus-route maps are sold at news kiosks in the stations.

Information

Left-luggage at the train station is easy to miss; it's downstairs from within the *prigorodny kassa* (suburban train ticket office; entered by a separate door at the northern end of the main station building).

Internet Salon Plazma (☎ 529 446; ul Kuznetsova 15; per hr R16-28; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Main post office (pr Lenina 95; Internet per hr R20;

☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun)

Netcafé (☎ 281 441; pr Lenina 32; per 30min R16 plus per MB R2.5; ☎ 9am-11pm)

SberBank (pl Lenina 12; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9-5pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques.

SibakademBank (☎ 527 489; ul Belinskogo 15A;

☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Great rates for US dollars.

Tomskturist (☎ 528 179; pr Lenina 59; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) City tours.

Sights

Tomsk is famous for 'wooden lace' architecture – carved windows and tracery on old log and timber houses. Great examples include the restored **Shishkov House** (ul Shishkova 10), the spired **Russian-German House** (1906; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 71), the **Dragon House** (ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 68) and the fan-gabled **Peacock House** (ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 67A). Many more line **ul Tatarskaya**, which is several blocks west of ul Krasnoarmeyskaya.

Tomsk's original fortress site on **Resurrection Hill** features the recently rebuilt 'Golden Gate' **wooden tower** and the **Tomsk History Museum** (admission R15; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which is mainly interesting for the view from its lookout turret (R10). From the top you can see seven historic churches, but not the Dracula-gothic **Voznesenskaya Church** for which you'll need to stroll on up cobbled ul Bakunin.

Cafés, theatres and century-old architecture make for delightful strolling along pr Lenina. Start on formless pl Lenina, which mixes ugly Soviet monstrosities with the splendid 1784 **Epiphany Cathedral**, the former **trading arches** and the small but revered **Iverskaya Chapel** (Iverskaya Chasoviya; ☎ 10am-6pm). The wonderful **1000 Melochey Shop** (pl Lenina; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) features griffins and 1906 Art Nouveau ironwork flourishes.

Tomsk's appealing commercial district is most bustling south of pr Nakhnovicha where you'll find the well-stocked if somewhat stuffy **Tomsk Art Gallery** (☎ 514 106; pr Nakhnovicha 5; adult R50; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Other small museums include two rooms within the **Atashev Palace & Regional Museum** (<http://museum.trecom.tomsk.ru> in Russian; pr Lenina 75; admission R20 & R11; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), which was once a church. Across the road, the eerie prison-dungeon of the cruel NKVD (later the KGB) is now a memorable **Oppression Museum** (☎ 516 133; pr Lenina 44, rear entrance; admission R18; ☎ 2-6pm Mon-Fri). Tours are recommended, but are only available in Russian.

Further south in resplendently leafy grounds, the classically colonnaded **university buildings** explain Tomsk's popular title of 'the Oxford of Siberia'. Pr Lenina finally ends 600m beyond at the powerful mother-and-son **WWII Memorial** in the Lagerny Gardens, behind which are views of the meandering River Tom and the taiga beyond.

Sleeping BUDGET

TGU Hotel (☎ 528 386; pr Lenina 49, 5th fl; dm R250, s R500-600, d R700) Brilliant-value newly renovated rooms with private bathrooms (except in the dorms). Reservations are usually essential, with a R100 booking fee. Enter from the rear; no lift.

ADVENTURES IN THE ALTAI

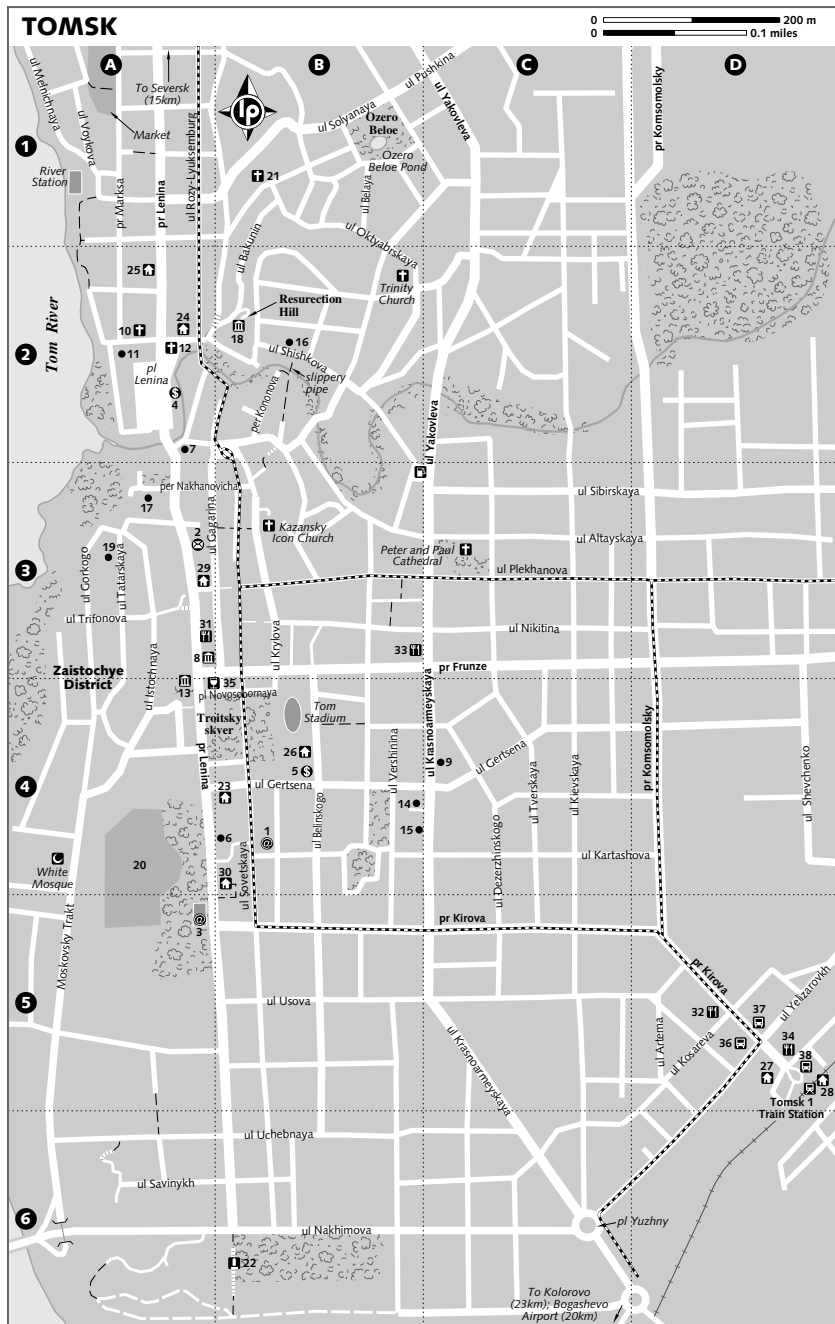
Declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1998, the glorious lake-dotted mountains of the Respublika Altai (Altai Republic) are an adventure playground for Russia's outdoor types, while its riverside lodges and camps are a very popular summer getaway for city dwellers.

Siberia's highest peak, 4506m Mt Belukha, stands on the Kazakhstan border and can be climbed from the tiny village of Tyungur where **Lenalp** (www.russia-climbing.com) has a well set-up hiking and rafting base. For something much more relaxing, **Teletskoye Oзера** is Altai's equivalent of Lake Baikal and arguably even more picturesque. Do-nothing lakeside hotels and camps in **Artybash** make it a most congenial place to unwind. There are more lodges along the banks of the Katun River, notably in **Chemal** and **Souzga** south of Gorno-Altai, the Altai Republic's capital. Nearby, **rafting** is a common pursuit for local tourists, ranging from quick fun-splashes to multiday sporting adventures. Five-day adventures can cost from a mere US\$150 per person but you'll generally get what you pay for; better but much pricier tours include tastier food, wetsuits and more safety boats. Dozens of local agencies in Barnaul, Novosibirsk (p167) and beyond can help, but unless you use a specialist agency don't expect anyone to speak English.

Access starts with overnight train rides from Tomsk or Novosibirsk to Biysk via Barnaul. From across Biysk's station square, buses continue (two hours, eight daily) to Gorno-Altai (450km southeast of Novosibirsk). Stop here to get a special Altai visa registration (you'll need a letter from your visa's sponsor stating your destinations). Once registered, buses or shared taxis then whisk you to Chemal, Artybash, Tyungur or down the beautiful Chuysky Trakt. That's the main road to Olgii in Mongolia, passing ancient standing stones, burial mounds, petroglyphs, canyons and passes before emerging in a mountain-ringed steppe-land sprinkled with nomad yurts. For great maps try Dom Knigi (p165) in Novosibirsk.

Be aware that advance preparation is wise. Very few foreigners come this way, and even local tourists rarely venture much beyond Chemal. Much of the region's better accommodation and hiking guides (essential for trekking) are booked solid in July and August while from May to early July, you'll need to be very careful of ticks (which carry potentially fatal encephalitis).

For much more-detailed information, see Lonely Planet's *Russia & Belarus*.



Hotel Sputnik (☎ 526 660; www.sputnik.tomsk.turist.ru; ul Belinskogo 15; s/d/tw/tr R550/750/900/960) Smartened-up Soviet rooms share refitted new bathrooms.

Resting rooms (komnaty otdykha; Tomsk 1 train station; dm/tw R200/700) Perfectly clean, new rooms with sparkling shared toilets and shower. No rail ticket required. Curfew 1am to 5am.

Hotel Severnaya (☎ 512 324; pr Lenina 86; dm/tw/d R300/900/1300) Despite the smart new façade, rooms are sad and share communal squat toilets.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Magistrat (☎ 511 111; www.magistrathotel.com; pr Lenina 15; d/tw/ste R2800/3850/4500; 🚗 🚗) Luxurious brand-new rooms behind a palatial 1802 façade. English is spoken and the restaurant is lavish. Only the suites are air-conditioned.

BonApart (☎ 534 650; bon_apart@mail.ru; ul Gertsena 1A; s/tw/d/ste R1550/1850/1850/2400) New, full-comfort midrange hotel, lacking only a lift.

Sibir Forum (☎ 530 280; pr Lenina 91; s/tw/d/ste 1700/1900/2100/2800) Appealingly bright, fully renovated rooms on two floors of the otherwise unreconstructed Hotel Siberia.

Hotel Tomsk (☎ 524 115; pr Kirova 65; s/tw R1800/1900) This well-upgraded Soviet tower is handy for the stations but rather overpriced given the very small bathrooms. Tatty older rooms cost only R1500.

Eating & Drinking

Wonderful cafés, restaurants and cheap 'bistro' cafeterias abound on pr Lenina.

FoodMaster (pr Lenina 83; meals R100-450; 🕒 11am-1am) This place is great value, has splendid

EXPERIENCING THE REAL THING IN SIBERIA

It's a regret of many Trans-Siberian travelers that, despite crossing a whole continent, they never actually visit a real Siberian village. An easy solution is to hop on a Yarskoye-bound bus, replete with its gnarled-faced peasant farmers, from Tomsk bus station. Get off at **Kolorovo** (R9, 35 minutes, seven daily). Founded in 1620 as Spasskoye, Kolorovo was once one of the Tomsk region's richest settlements and it retains a very picturesque 1799 **church** right beside the river bank. As in any village there's really nothing much to do, but the almost deserted road south is lovely for idle walks. Opposite the church, the village shop can serve instant coffee (R5) while you await a bus or *marshrutka* (fixed-route minibus) back to Tomsk.

olde-worlde décor and a menu in English that ranges from Chinese to Mexican to Italian.

Sibirsky Pub (☎ 530 047; www.siberian-pub.ru in Russian; ul Novosobornaya 2; mains R10 0-200, Guinness per pint R140; 🕒 noon-3am) This is Tomsk's British pub with English spoken, a filling R144 lunch deal and live bands at weekends.

Pizza Rio (ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 31; slices R41; 🕒 24hr) Both better, and better value, than Trattoria.

People's Bar & Grill (☎ 443 315; ul Krasnoarmeyskaya 31; beers from R60, meals R250-600; 🕒 noon-2am) Below Pizza Rio, and very hip.

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TRANSPORT

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Gastronom (pr Kirova 59; ☎ 24hr) Close to the station, this is a handy grocery.

Trattoria (per Nakhimova 2) An inviting and modern pizzeria-cafeteria, although prices are relatively high.

Getting There & Away

From Tomsk I (main) station there are daily services to Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal (Yaroslavl Station; 56½ hours). Train 37 leaves around 10am and is handy for Tyumen (22½ hours). For Omsk summer-only train 437 (R850 *platskart*, 15 hours, even days) is more convenient. *Platskart* carriages run to Irkutsk (34 hours) via Krasnoyarsk (R420, 14½ hours) daily in summer, even days in winter. For Altai take trains to Barnaul (R442, 14¾ hours, even days) then switch to bus for Biysk or Gorno-Altai.

From the bus station next door, shared taxis (R500, 3½ hours) are a much option faster than buses (R260, 5½ hours, 20 daily) for Novosibirsk.

Tomsk has some flight connections available to Moscow and the northern oil cities but there is always much more choice from Novosibirsk.

Getting Around

From just near the train station, bus 4 travels west and then runs north along the length of pr Lenina from pr Kirova, approximately paralleled by tram 2. Handy *marshrutka* 7 starts at pl Yuzhny (where *marshrutky* back from Kolorovo might leave you – see p181), passes the train station, heads west along pr Frunze, then travels up pr Lenina.