

# Russian Caucasus

## Кавказ

This beautiful and many-faceted part of Russia receives few travellers, despite being only a plane or train journey from Moscow, and that's a pity. The colossal Caucasus mountains, 1100km of soaring peaks and deep valleys, stride from the Caspian to the Black Sea. Between the mountain range and the Black Sea is a coastal strip that endows Russia with its most southerly seaside resorts. The pearl is Sochi, with glorious summer sun, warm sea, plenty of classy bars and restaurants, and performances by Russia's top entertainers. In the mountains near Sochi lies Krasnaya Polyana, on the way to being another big European ski resort. Here, in this 'Switzerland by the sea', you can easily ski and swim in the sea on the same day.

This region, one of the last to be added to the tsarist Russian Empire, was won and controlled with the help of Cossack warriors. Their homeland lies in the Kuban Steppe, around Rostov-on-Don, where Cossack culture remains undiminished; their old capital, Starocherkassk, is where to find it. Wander east and the central Caucasus mountains rise from the vast steppe in a land of dead volcanoes and gushing mineral springs. Their curative powers attracted mid-19th-century society, which transformed Pyatigorsk and Kislovodsk into elegant spa towns. Visitors to the sanatoriums can roam the parks and take day trips to Dombay and Mt Elbrus. Threaded into this landscape is the drama of writer Lermontov's death echoing the plot of his novel *A Hero of Our Time*, also set here.

Even if you're no skier, hiker or climber, do venture into the mountains by visiting Dombay or Mt Elbrus and ride cable cars and chairlifts part of the way up to view the savage beauty of this lofty range. At the eastern end lies unsafe-to-visit Chechnya and Dagestan, a complicated and fractious ethnic jigsaw with an Asiatic atmosphere, extending from the mountains to the Caspian Sea.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Sleep in Stalin's bedroom in his Black Sea hideaway, the **Green Grove dacha** (p469)
- Catch cable cars and text your friends that you're up **Mt Elbrus** (p487), Europe's highest mountain
- Lounge about in sunny **Sochi** (p463) and have your photo taken with Lenin
- Sample superb Russian champagne at **Abrau-Dyurso** (p462)
- Ride Dombay's **chairlifts** (p482) to survey waterfalls, glaciers and sharks-teeth mountain summits



## History

The Caucasus has stood at the crossroads of Mediterranean, Central Asian, West Asian and Eastern European cultures since the Bronze Age. The result is an extraordinary mix of races with three main linguistic groups: Caucasian, Indo-European and Turkic. Most people are either Orthodox Christians or Muslims. The Caucasus has suffered many invasions and occupations, having been squeezed between rival Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arab, Ottoman and Russian empires.

### LIFE BEFORE THE RUSSIANS

Little is known of the area's prehistory. Earliest human traces date from Neolithic times when farming was replacing hunting and gathering. The first communities evolved in Dagestan's valleys around the same time as agriculture developed in West Asia and China, establishing this region as an early cradle of civilisation.

Significant post-Neolithic remains are the 3000-plus dolmens scattered across the coastal foothills from Novorossiysk to

Sochi. These funeral memorials of huge flat stones date from the 4th to the 2nd century BC.

Mass migrations brought in many different peoples, including Scythians in the 8th century BC followed by Sarmatians five centuries later. In the 1st millennium AD, groups including Kipchaks (ancestors of the present-day Balkar), Huns, Pechenegs and Khazars all left their mark, some settling and mixing with existing inhabitants.

The first dominant state created by the Alans, ancestors of modern Ossetians, blossomed during the 10th century AD and at its peak ruled most of the northern Caucasus. The state was conquered by the Mongol Tatar invasions of the early 13th century and any remnants destroyed by Timur's (Tamerlane) army in 1395.

### THE RUSSIANS ARRIVE

Escaping Russian serfs and adventurers had already settled in the lower Terek River region when Russian military power arrived here in the late 1550s. Russian imperial influence grew at the expense of the Ottoman

Turks who were gradually edged out. Russian imperial conquests met with fierce resistance from local tribes from the Caspian to the Black Sea. The predominantly Muslim populace resented being ruled by European and Christian Russians and bitter guerrilla-type warfare lasted several decades.

At times of threat the Caucasian tribes have united. In the 19th century, Imam Shamil brought together Dagestani and Chechen tribes and the Cherkess for a 30-year fight against the Russians that ended with Shamil's surrender in 1859 (see p124). This was the last major threat to Russian hegemony until the current Chechen wars. Many with strong Muslim beliefs, who felt they had no future under Russian suzerainty, fled to Turkey and its empire in West Asia. An exception was the Ossetians, who as Christians had never fought the Russians and wanted no part in the Islamic state that was Shamil's intention.

During the October Revolution, many tribes united to form the Mountain Republic. Independence lasted until 1921 when Soviet forces, having consolidated power, conquered the remainder of the Tsarist Empire. The Mountain Republic was given autonomous status while various Dagestani nationalities were combined into a new Dagestan Autonomous Republic. The autonomous Mountain Republic ceased in 1924 after it divided into four new autonomous regions: Adygeya, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. Soviet policy was to divide and rule by creating small autonomous regions, often combining two totally different nationalities.

In 1944 Stalin ordered the mass deportation of Balkar, Chechen, Ingush and Karachay peoples to Central Asia and Siberia, on the pretext of potential collaboration with German forces. Those left behind took over the property and land of the deported. Khrushchev allowed the exiled groups to return in 1957 but without compensation or repossession of their property. The oppressive and dictatorial nature of the Soviet regime smothered any potential conflict but this changed very quickly after the failed 1991 coup in Moscow.

### POST-SOVIET ERA

The political restructuring of Russia transformed the region into the semiautono-

mous republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Adygeya and Checheno-Ingushetia, later separated into Chechnya and Ingushetia.

The slipping of the Soviet leash let loose a host of ethnic-based rivalries, paramount of which has been the Chechnya conflict; see p492. The battleground spilt over into North Ossetia in September 2004 when militants slaughtered hundreds of children, teachers and parents at a school in Beslan. There was also a major conflict between the North Ossetians and the Ingush that preceded the Chechen conflict and remains unresolved, since most Ingush who fled North Ossetia in 1992 still have not returned home. Political unrest has also surfaced in Karachay-Cherkessia. In November 2004 thousands forced the president to flee after the unexplained murder of several prominent citizens. The president's son-in-law had been implicated.

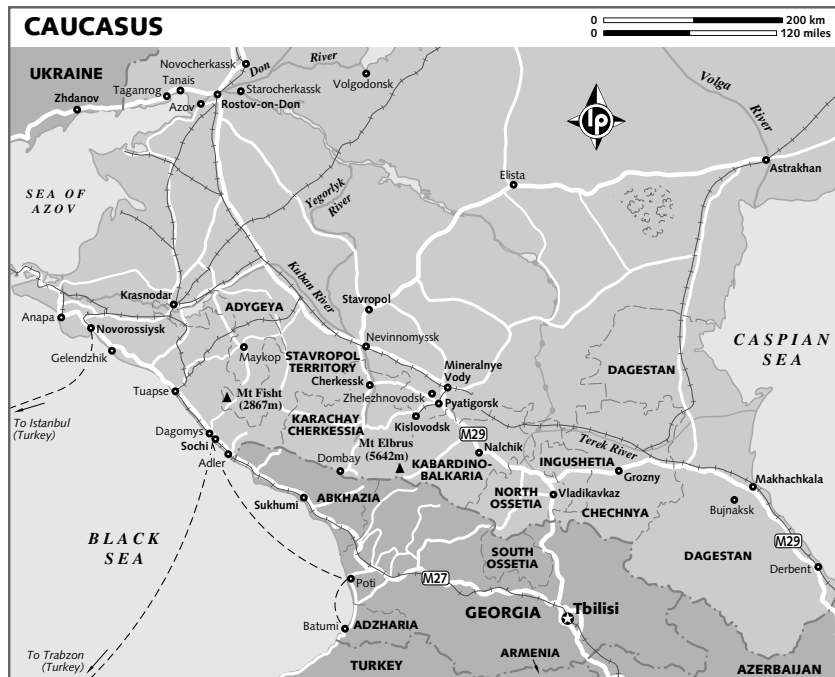
In Kabardino-Balkaria the growth in Islam is being met by heavy-handed police action with people persecuted on ethnic and religious grounds. The fact that Chechen warlord, Shamil Basayev, chose to launch an attack on the state's capital, Nalchik, suggests this policy has backfired. In October 2005, separatist Chechen guerrillas launched multiple attacks on Nalchik police and military posts. A dozen civilians were killed plus between 41 (Basayev figures) and 91 (Russian figures) guerrillas and a number of security personnel. President Putin promises severe retaliation for any future actions which does not bode well for peace in this region.

### Climate

In winter, the Black Sea coast relishes being Russia's warmest place – it's rarely freezing.

#### 'CAUCASIAN MALE, HEIGHT...'

Ever wondered why white people are referred to as Caucasian? Well, in 1795 the German ethnologist Johann Blumenbach visited the Caucasus and was impressed by the health and physique of the mountain people. Despite them not being quite white he used the term Caucasian as one of his five great divisions of mankind. In bartending, a Caucasian is a mixed drink also referred to as a White Russian.



In summer (June to September) it's warm and humid, around 25°C. To the north, the continental climate provides three or four freezing winter months from November to February, then temperatures shoot up to about 30°C from June to August.

The higher you go, the cooler it gets – many Caucasus peaks are permanently snow-covered – but on a sunny summer day you'll still be sweating at 3000m. November to April/May is the wettest season, with the coastal strip getting significant rainfall of around 1200mm to 1800mm annually.

### National Parks

The most significant is Prielbruse National Park (p487), containing the magnificent Mt Elbrus, glaciers and waterfalls and home to bear, chamois, wild goat and an enormous range of plant life. While not a national park, Teberdinsky Nature Reserve (p481) maintains a near-pristine temperate ecosystem with chamois, bear, lynx, boar and reintroduced bison against a backdrop of majestic mountains.

### Language

While Russian is spoken and understood by all, there are a significant number of local languages, especially in eastern mountain areas. In tourist centres on the coast and in the Mineral Waters area there will be some who can speak a little English.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia are no-go areas; they're just too dangerous. Unfortunately terrorist activity is no longer confined to just those states; the Beslan school massacre has made North Ossetia a place to avoid, and the attacks on military and police posts in Nalchik mean you should also consider avoiding the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.

Elbrus, the most popular place in the central Caucasus, has remained untouched by recent troubles but a prudent traveller will check on the latest advice before going. The western Caucasus is as safe as the rest of European Russia.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

International flights go from Armenia, Turkey, Germany and Belarus to Rostov-on-Don, Sochi and Mineralnye Vody. These

### ACCOMMODATION

While accommodation is plentiful, many places can't or don't want to be involved in registering foreigners. The places included in this chapter do register foreigners. Seaside accommodation gets a huge price hike starting in May and increasing monthly to August, then prices reduce in September and again in October. Seaside accommodation prices quoted here are for June, which we reckon is the best time to visit. Inland cities don't have seasonal price changes. Places with skiing have high-season prices during their skiing seasons and low season is generally September to early November; see Dombay (p481) and Elbrus (p488) for more details.

airports plus Anapa, Krasnodar and Nalchik also receive domestic flights, mostly from Moscow and St Petersburg. Check schedules as they change regularly.

### BOAT

See the Novorossiysk (p461) and the Sochi (p468) section for ferries to Georgia and Turkey.

### TRAIN

Main lines from the north funnel through Rostov-on-Don and then diverge. One runs to Mineralnye Vody with a line down to Kislovodsk, and another to Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia. The second runs to Krasnodar dividing into a line to Novorossiysk and Anapa, and the other to the coast and Sochi. Unless you have a Ukrainian visa and a multiple-entry Russian one, avoid any northbound Moscow trains that go via Ukraine. Otherwise, some trains travel to Ukraine and Belarus but foreigners are not allowed on the few *elektrichki* from Sochi that cross the Abkhazia border.

### Getting Around

Train is easiest and most comfy for travelling between major centres; use bus, *marshrutka* and *elektrichka* for local travel. As schedules and prices fluctuate, check at bus and train stations before making your move. Public transport to the mountains is very limited for Dombay and Elbrus. Given the mountain terrain, the most ob-

vious route on the map may not be practicable. Taxis are plentiful and can even be used between towns and for getting into the mountains.

## KUBAN STEPPE КУБАНСКАЯ СТЕПЬ

From Rostov-on-Don, the overland routes to the Caucasus and the Black Sea coast cross the intensively cultivated Kuban Steppe, named after its river flowing from Elbrus into the Sea of Azov. The trip from Rostov-on-Don to Pyatigorsk or Kislovodsk on the northern fringe of the Caucasus can be made in a day – by road it's just under 500km.

### ROSTOV-ON-DON РОСТОВ-НА-ДОНУ

☎ 863 / pop 1.1 million / 📍 Moscow

Rostov-on-Don is an expansive town with the bustle of a regional capital, but the wide leafy streets and scattered parks take away any notion of crowding. Passing through the city is the Don River, celebrated in Mikhail Sholokhov's novels of the Civil War – *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *The Don Flows Home to the Sea*.

The Don is no longer quiet. In 1952 the Lenin Ship Canal linked the Volga and the Don near Volgograd, creating an immense network of canals, lakes and rivers. Ocean-going ships can now sail across Russia from the Arctic to the Mediterranean.

For those travelling through here, Rostov-on-Don and the Cossack capitals make a pleasant stopover for a couple of days. If possible, take a trip on a ferry along the Don or maybe cruise up to Moscow.

### History

When serfs, paupers and dropouts fled to the south in the 15th century they established communities in the Don River basin and their capital at Starocherkassk. Known as Don Cossacks, these communities elected their own ataman (leader), formed armies and gained a degree of autonomy.

Their relationship with the central Russian government was turbulent: they initiated three major uprisings in the 17th and

18th centuries and put up furious resistance to the October Revolution. At other times they formed the backbone of armies securing Russia's southern borders.

### Orientation

Rostov-on-Don is mostly on the northern bank of the Don, which flows south of Moscow to the Sea of Azov. The main east-west axis, Bolshaya Sadovaya ul, passes many of the city's hotels and restaurants; the bus and train stations are at its western end.

### Information

**Agentstvo URDV** (☎ 263 1222; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 113; 🕒 8am-7pm) Plane and train ticketing.

**Comfort Internet** (☎ 295 0589; Pushkinskaya ul 141; per MB R3, per hr R25; 🕒 9am-11pm)

**Post & telegraph office** (☎ 240 7776; ul Lermontovskaya 116; 🕒 8am-6pm)

**Russian Voyage** (Russkii Voyazh; ☎ /fax 244 1066; Temernitskaya ul 83; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Agent for Don River cruises.

**Sberbank** (☎ 240 4715; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 39; 🕒 8am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques; ATM.

### Sights & Activities

The **Regional Museum** (☎ 240 5213; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 79; admission R60, with gold exhibition R190, camera R50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) has a special section featuring early-AD gold artefacts with some spectacular jewellery and weaponry. Other exhibits effectively cover the region's pre-history, including nearby Tanais and tribes who predated the Cossacks. While there are well-presented Cossack displays, the better exhibits are at Novocherkassk. Upstairs is mainly devoted to revolutionary Russia but our favourite item was a massive 2m long, 1.5m wide 1956 hi-fi and TV system.

The lavish **Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral** (☎ 240 2947; ul Stanislavskogo 58; 7am-7pm) pokes its golden domes above the lively open-air market. Within is a glorious display of Orthodox religious art and decoration.

Central on Bolshaya Sadovaya ul, **Gorky Park** is the summer meeting place among the trees for revelling, with funfair rides, street stalls, karaoke joints and plenty of bars.

### Tours

Russian Voyage sells tickets (singles, full board) for Don and Volga cruises, May to September. These sail to Volgograd (from

R7150, five to six days, three cruises in May and June, one in July), Samara (from R13,650, 11 days, one cruise in June), As-trakhan (from R13,650; 11 days, one cruise in July and September) and Moscow (from R1430, 11 to 12 days, two cruises in season).

## Sleeping

Being a regional capital, places fill up quickly during the week so book ahead.

**Intourist Hotel** (☎ 238 4746; fax 232 5427; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 115; s/d incl breakfast from R800/R1400, lyux R3000, apt from R3000; 🚻 📺) Renovation has turned this into a modern hotel, both in facilities and quality of service. The buffet breakfast is superb: champagne, salmon caviar and Danish pastries! The cheaper rooms are perfectly good but for river views go for the top floors front side. An alternative to the expensive restaurant is the bar downstairs.

**Hotel Rostov** (☎ 290 7666; www.rostovhotel.ru; Budyonovskiy pr 59; s R1200-1400, d incl breakfast R2000-4000, ste R2700-7000; 📺 🚻) Very much a business person's hotel. Luxury climbs with price and a suite provides you with your own bar, dining room plus glass cupboard with fancy crockery. The cheap singles are comfortable but simple. Services include air and train ticketing, currency exchange, translation services and a fitness centre.

**Tourist Hotel** (☎ 238 4746; hottour@rost.ru; pr M. Nagibina 19; r incl breakfast R800-3500; 🚻 📺) Sun-glasses warning! Loud wallpaper and carpet designs in the cheap rooms. Still they're the best value compared to the crummy two-storey rooms that should be avoided. Facilities include an exchange office and a ticketing counter for train and plane.

## Eating & Drinking

**Café Salvador** (ul Universitetskaya 44; meals R150-360) Scribbly signage makes this a little difficult to find but once inside you'll know you're there. It revels in ultramodern design with blues, oranges and languid shapes formed by light and shadow. Certainly adding to Rostov's street cred, it's a place for a coffee, late drink or snack at any time.

**Café Mango** (ul Serafimovicha 49; meals R130-240) An intimate little side-street café, Mango does cheap snacks and is the sort of place to sit with a book and sink almost too many beers – the staff wouldn't mind.

**Zolotoy Kolos** (Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 43; coffee R30, cakes R6-16, pizza R60-100; 🕒 10am-11pm) The chocolate-

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Yolki Palki** (Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 68; meals R150-350) All visitors to Rostov should eat at this amazing mix of indoor theme park and restaurant. We're talking Disneyland rustic! Sprightly waiters wear twee Ukrainian national costume while customers are seated in forest glades under spreading oak trees, hanging vines and woven wooden fencing. The menu is diverse. If your Russian's not up to scratch then there's a buffet for picking and choosing. Sample the bliny, brave the *zalivnoe* (jellied fish), slurp the *okroshka* (cold soup) and wash it down with cranberry juice or *kvas*.

and-cream décor sets the scene for a big cake experience. Every cake and dessert shouts 'lick me'. If you don't want to drool over cakes and coffee there are big pizzas.

**Guinness Bar** (Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 57; meals R175-400; 🕒 10am-1am) At R200 for half a litre you need to be cashed up to drink Guinness all night but there's cheaper local beer. The food is good, and there's a menu in English. Give the shrimp black pasta a try.

**Central Market** (☎ 299 9576; cnr Budyonovskiy pr & ul Stanislavskogo; 🕒 6am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 7am-8pm Oct-Apr) Stock up here for DIY feeding while checking out the jostling crowds and the array of items on sale.

## Entertainment

**Club Lila** (☎ 262 3819; Sotsialisticheskaya ul 68; cover R150; 🕒 6pm-2am) Eardrum alert! This club features live music by local groups in an underground cavern that reverberates with an earthquake of sound. There is a quieter area with seating just off the bar.

**Rostov Musical Theatre** (Musykalny Teatr; ☎ 264 0707; Bolshaya Sadovaya ul 134; 🕒 ticket office 10am-7pm) This modern and notable theatre, in the shape of a white concert piano, presents ballet and opera between September and June.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Flights go to Moscow Domodedovo (R2520 to R4900, daily) and St Petersburg (R6400, Tuesday to Thursday and Saturday).

Aeroflot-Don flies to Istanbul (US\$170, Monday and Friday), Vienna (€230, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday), Dusseldorf

### USEFUL BUS & TRAIN ROUTES FROM ROSTOV-ON-DON

Rostov's modern **bus station** (☎ 244 1010; pr Siversa 1) is near the train station.

Destination	Daily departures	Duration	Fare
Anapa	10.40am	10hr	R270
Krasnodar	6.16am, 3.45pm, 5.35pm	5¼hr	R171
Odesa (Ukraine)	4.40pm	18hr	R415
Pyatigorsk	9.30am	10hr	R355
Volgograd	6am-10.30pm	11hr	R370

Some major trains from Rostov's **train station** (☎ 267 0210; pl Privokzalnaya):

Destination	Train	Departures	Frequency	Duration	Fare
Kyiv	17/25	9.16pm	odds/evens	19½hr	R800
Kislovodsk	28	9.28pm	daily	10½hr	R705
Mineralnye Vody	830*	2.07pm	daily	6½h	R236
Minsk	37	6.50am	odds	35hr	R1600
Moscow	27	6.38am	daily	24hr	R2100
Novorossiysk†	44	2am	daily	7½hr	R570
St Petersburg	43	0.48am	daily	35hr	R2400
Sochi	76	8.03pm	daily	14hr	R750

\* *elektrichka* † passes through Krasnodar

(€235, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday) and Frankfurt (€235, Saturday).

### BOAT

Hydrofoils operate May to October from the river station **ticket office** (☎ 262 0280; Budyonovskiy pr), with boarding one hour before departure time. There's a Starocherkassk hydrofoil (R25) which departs at 2pm and returns at 4.20pm from Monday to Friday, 7am and 2pm on Saturday (returning 9.20am and 4.20pm) and 10am on Sunday (returning 9.20am). There is also an Azov hydrofoil (R27) that departs at 10am and returns at 5pm Thursday to Sunday.

## Getting Around

Buses 7, 12 and 13 and trolleybuses 1, 9 and 15 ply Bolshaya Sadovaya ul down to the train and bus stations. Avoid taxis loitering outside hotels; they have no concept of reasonable fares. **Romaks Taxi** (☎ 277 9691) is cheap and efficient.

## AROUND ROSTOV-ON-DON

### Starocherkassk Старочеркасск

☎ 863

Founded in 1593, Starocherkassk (Old Cherkassk) was the Don Cossack capital for two

centuries. Once a fortified town of 20,000, it's now a farming village with a main street restored to near 19th-century appearance.

Allegedly, Peter the Great met a drunken Cossack here sitting on a barrel, wearing only a rifle. This image of a soldier who'd sooner lose his clothes than his gun so impressed the tsar that he commissioned the scene as the Don Cossack army seal.

### SIGHTS

Near the main street's northwestern end is the **fortified house** of Kondraty Bulavin, leader of the Peasant War (1707-09). Bulavin lived and died in this solid stone house with 1m-thick walls and iron doors; nowadays it's a Unesco office.

Walk southeast, past the plain **SS Peter & Paul Church** (1751) on the left, and see sturdy **Cossack fort-houses** typically built on a high basement to avoid regular flooding. Further on, within a brick-walled ataman palace compound, there's a **ticket office** (☎ 29749; admission R40, camera/video R15/50 for each of Resurrection Cathedral, bell tower, palace compound, English- or German-speaking guide R150; 🕒 9am-5pm) for several sights.

Within the **palace compound**, the kitchen building has a display of Cossack weapons



while three floors of the palace are a cultural museum of Cossack Russia. Of particular interest is the bronze relief map of Staroherkassk showing its defensive advantage and a display of nonmilitary uniforms of Soviet Russia. Included are school uniforms, youth movement (Komosol) uniforms and uniforms for various public servants including holiday costumes for coal miners.

Adjacent is the **Church of Our Lady of the Don** (1761), which was the private church of the ataman. Within is a magnificent golden iconostasis with rows of saints in pious poses.

In the square at the main street's eastern end, Stepan Razin rallied his followers in 1670 and was later clapped in chains on the same spot. The **Resurrection Cathedral** (Voskresensky sobor) here contains a soaring golden iconostasis, a baroque chandelier and an unusual floor of metal tiles. Peter the Great provided the design of the church, and sent builders from Moscow as well as bells, ironwork, church utensils and 100 roubles; when he visited in 1709 he helped lay the altar brickwork. The adjacent **bell tower** provides a bird's-eye panorama.

Most summer weekends, Staroherkassk holds a 'Cossack fair', which features music, dancing, crafts and horse riding.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The hydrofoil is a delightful way to travel for a weekend visit from Rostov-on-Don. Otherwise, it's the frequent *marshrutka* 131 (R20, 45 minutes) from pl Karla Marksa, Rostov; Last return service is 5.45pm. A taxi (about R250) is the only option between Staroherkassk and Novoherkassk.

### Novoherkassk Новочеркасск

☎ 86352 / pop 185,000

In 1805 the Don Cossacks moved their capital to Novoherkassk (New Cherkassk), 40km northeast of Rostov; this is said to be the setting for Nobel laureate Mikhail Sholokhov's novel, *And Quiet Flows the Don*.

Ataman Matvey Platov, a Cossack general whose brigade chased Napoleon back to Paris, is a national hero; a monument here commemorates him as do many streets and squares in Russia that bear his name. The **Don Cossacks Museum** (Donskoy muzey; ☎ 41366; ul Atamanskaya 38; admission R100, camera/video R20/100; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has an admirable collec-

tion of memorabilia and paintings depicting Cossack history and culture. Pride of place goes to a sword presented to Platov in England.

The interior of **Ascension Cathedral** (Voznesenskaya sobor; ☎ 27025; pl Ermaka; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) is covered with frescoes. Dark greys, browns and greens echo solemnity and spirituality around a huge narthex that amplifies every whispered prayer.

Catch bus 3 along Bolshaya Sadovaya ul to Rostov's old bus station and transfer to bus 101 (R18, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes); at Novoherkassk catch a *marshrutka* (R5, 20 minutes) into the centre.

### Tanais Танаис

☎ 86349

From the 3rd century BC until the 4th century AD, the Greek trading colony of Tanais flourished at the mouth of the Don. The Roman writer Pliny wrote, 'At the mouth of the River Tanais is a city and for everyone who comes here there is Europe on the left and Asia on the right'.

Travel 30km from Rostov towards Taganrog and a turning near Nedvigovka takes you to the Tanais excavations and a **museum** (☎ 20249; admission R25; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Nov). Several hectares reveal a patchwork of foundation walls of what was once an extensive settlement. More parts are continually being uncovered and a typical house has been re-created to give a sense of place. The best way to get there is the Tagangrog bus; get off at the turning and walk the last 2km.

### Azov Азов

☎ 242

In the 13th century Genoese merchants established a trading settlement here but in 1471 they were turfed out by the Turks, who built a massive fortress to keep the Russians out of the Black Sea. For 200 years they were successful.

Today it's a sleepy country town but well worth visiting for the comprehensive **museum** (☎ 40771; ul Moskovskaya 38/40; admission adult/child R20/5, camera/video R50/100; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Prime attraction is a complete mammoth skeleton that dwarfs everything else in the room it's crowded into. That apart, there are prehistory exhibits, some Turkish items, a model of Azov Fort defended against Peter the Great in July 1696 and, up the intriguing

metal stairs, a section on the Civil and Great Patriotic Wars. Only a renovated stretch and some embankment remains of **Azov Fort** (Azovskaya Krepost). From the top you can sit and watch the busy river port.

*Marshrutky* (R28, 45 minutes, every 15 minutes) for Azov leave from Rostov's bus station. The return hydrofoil from Rostov departs at 5pm Thursday to Sunday and other ferries on their way to Rostov call in at 7.30am and 6.30pm daily.

### KRASNODAR КРАСНОДАР

☎ 861 / pop 650,000 / ☎ Moscow

When Catherine the Great travelled south to tour the lands conquered from the Turks, her lover Potemkin had cheerful façades erected along her route. These hid the mud-splattered hovels that made up the newly founded city bearing her name, Yekaterinodar ('Catherine's gift').

Krasnodar no longer needs those façades, as many of the elegant, turn-of-the-20th-century buildings have been externally restored. Modern development has happened elsewhere and single-storey buildings still line the main street. Wander east through the backstreets or better still hop on a rickety tram down ul Kommunarov and enjoy the vista of old houses.

On summer weekends part of Krasnaya ul becomes a pedestrian zone and is quickly populated by those out to promenade, meet friends or slip into party mode at dusk. Street musicians, karaoke stands, artists and vendors compete for pavement space with cafés and bars while clothes shops open their doors to entice a stream of young customers.

### Orientation

The road from Rostov-on-Don feeds into the northern end of Krasnaya ul, Krasnodar's 2km-long leafy colonnade of a main street. Train and bus stations are to the southeast and the airport is 15km to the east.

### Information

**Aerobusiness** (☎ 251 6246; Krasnaya ul 75; ☎ 9am-8pm) Air and rail ticketing.

**Alfa Bank** (☎ 259 6464; Krasnaya ul 124; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) Cashes travellers cheques, ATM.

**Hotel Moskva** (☎ 253 1807; Krasnaya ul 66; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Wed-Sun) Changes money and cashes travellers cheques Wednesday to Saturday.

**Hotel Moskva air ticket counter** (☎ 273 9304;

☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) Domestic flights only.

**Main post office** (☎ 253 2661; ul Karasunskaya 68; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun)

**Telecommunications Centre** (☎ 262 4039; Krasnaya ul 118; ☎ 24hr) Internet access available until 8.45pm for R30 per hr.

### Sights

You'll find Scythian and ancient Greek figures at the **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 267 9034; ul Voroshilova 67; admission per exhibit R30, camera R50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, 10am-4pm Fri). Although the captions are in Russian, there's enough of visual interest – natural history, prehistoric items, Cossack and revolution history and the German occupation – to make a visit worthwhile.

Housed in a stately, newly renovated 1905 building, the **Art Museum** (Khudozhestvenny muzey; ☎ 268 0977; Krasnaya ul 13; admission per exhibition R50-60, camera/video R50/100; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 10am-4.30pm Fri) is well worth a visit, often with good travelling exhibitions – Picasso, Klee, Chagall and Dali drawings during our visit. Upstairs under painted ceilings is the permanent collection including a portrait of Catherine the great, who seems to be concealing a hot-air balloon under her huge dress.

### Sleeping

**Hotel Intourist** (☎ 259 6697; Krasnaya ul 109; r R1300-2600; ☎ ☎ ☎) Good rooms but too much furniture – some have seating for eight people. The friendly reception staff speak English and can arrange airport transfers, airline ticketing and excursions.

**Hotel Moskva** (☎ 273 9304; fax 273 9301; Krasnaya ul 60; r incl breakfast from R1300) Tired basic rooms and indifferent reception staff but the hotel has lots of rooms, is very central and if you arrive late in the evening checkout isn't until 24 hours later.

**Hotel Tsentralnaya** (☎ /fax 273 9962; cnr uls Mira & Krasnaya 25; s/d without bathroom from R650/740, s/d with bathroom R1300/1700) They've been renovating. Reception pushes the decent doubles in preference to the cheap, ordinary and timeworn ones. Your wallet and powers of persuasion will determine which room you get.

### Eating

**Khrustalny Restaurant** (☎ 259 6697; Hotel Intourist, Krasnaya ul 109; dishes R150-600; ☎ 7am-midnight)

### TRAINS FROM KRASNODAR

Some major trains from the Krasnodar **train station** (☎ 262 0887; pl Privokzalnaya):

Destination	Train	Departures	Frequency	Duration	Fare
Kyiv	18	4.06pm	odds	24hr	R1000
Mineralnye Vody	834*	7.28am	odds	6hr	R500
Minsk	38	1.30am	odds	40hr	R1500
Moscow†	104	10.29pm	daily	23hr	R2700
St Petersburg†	36	1am	odds	36½hr	R2900
Sochi	801*	7am	daily	5hr	R400

\* *elektrichka*

† trains pass through Rostov

Quite a surprise for a three-star hotel restaurant. There's a varied menu, reasonable prices, good food and friendly service. For the gourmet, snails, frogs' legs and caviar appear on the menu.

**Eastern Fairy Tales** (☎ 267 2567; Krasnaya ul 17; meals R150-750; ☎ 9am-11pm) Waitresses in belly-dancing costumes serve up an eclectic mix of Uzbek, Korean and Japanese food in this prettily decorated restaurant painted in cucumber-cool colours and adorned with calligraphic motifs. The food's good, the divans are comfortable and for smokers there are *nargilas* (water pipes) to go with exceptionally good coffee.

**Bar Kit** (Krasnaya ul 60; business lunches R150, snacks R50-90; ☎ 10am-late) This undercover pavement café is the ideal viewing place for watching Krasnodar at work or play. The menu's fairly standard but the food's good and the beer tastes fine on a hot summer's night.

There's a host of food stalls around the bus and train stations on pl Privokzalnaya.

The **central market** (ul Budyonnogo; ☎ 7am-6pm) is one block to the west of Hotel Intourist. There's also another **market** (nr uls Kommunarov & Gogolya; ☎ 7am-6pm) that's an excellent source of fresh fruit and spicy pickled Korean food.

### Getting There & Away

Siberia Airlines, Aeroflot and Kuban Air have flights to the main Moscow airports daily (R2080 to R4000). Pulkovo Airlines and Kuban Airlines fly to St Petersburg (R5600, daily) and Kuban also flies to Sochi (R950, Wednesday).

Internationally, Kuban Air flies to Frankfurt (€398, Saturday) and Hanover (€398,

Sunday). Belavia flies daily to Minsk via Moscow (US\$165 return).

*Marshrutka* 15 goes to the airport from outside the central market; taxis charge R200 for this trip.

The **bus station** (☎ 262 5144; pl Privokzalnaya) has a handy touch-screen display with bus times and fares. Useful services are Novorossiysk (R87, three hours, frequent), Anapa (R112, 3½ hours, frequent) and Rostov (R184, five hours, seven daily).

## BLACK SEA COAST ПОБЕРЕЖЬЕ ЧЁРНОГО МОРЯ

A narrow coastal strip edges the Black Sea from where rolling hills ascend fairly rapidly into mountains in the southeast and low uplands in the northwest. This is Russia's seaside playground. A long summer from June to October gives rise to warm to hot weather, plenty of sunshine and a warm sea. Several resort towns dot the sometimes-rugged coast and Sochi is the pearl.

While the sea is unexciting – pebbles all the way to Anapa, which has the only sandy beach – it is safe swimming. Despite pollution of the Black Sea at depth, dolphins can often be seen frolicking off the coast. The interior, slashed by deep valleys, provides some terrific walking through lake and waterfall-filled terrain. Skiing is popular at nearby Krasnaya Polyana and Mt Fisht from about January to April.

## NOVOROSSIYSK НОВОРОССИЙСК

☎ 8617 / pop 242,000 / ☎ Moscow

Novorossiysk is home to the Russian navy and much of the country's cement production comes from dismantling the surrounding hills. For travellers it's a transport hub for the nicer seaside towns of Anapa, Gelendzhik and Sochi, or maybe a boat to Turkey.

The Krasnodar road skirts the south of the port to become Anapskoe sh and then ul Sovietov as it arrives in the CBD.

The **post office** (☎ 251627; ul Sovietov 36; ☎ 8am-9pm) has an ATM outside.

### Sights & Activities

Novorossiysk is peppered with WWII memorials. In 1943, a small Soviet landing party heroically held out here for 225 days, forming a bridgehead for the counter-offensive against the occupying Germans. The immense memorial at **Malaya Zemlya** celebrates their feats. This huge concrete construction represents a landing ship disgorging a party of soldiers and sailors depicted in chunky bronze.

Inside the 'ship' is an amazing walk-through **gallery** (☎ 233 747; admission R50, camera/video R15/50; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Jun-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), with plaques of heroes and a recording of a solemn, deep-voiced choir singing patriotic songs.

More memorials lie on pr Lenina where the party landed, and further east at **Dolina Smerti** (Death Valley), where the Russians came under the fiercest bombardment.

Novorossiysk's maritime and war history is celebrated in the **Town History Museum** (Muzey istorii goroda; ☎ 610 027; ul Sovietov 58; admission R50, camera/video R30/50; ☎ 10am-6pm Sat-Wed). A small section deals with Soviet leader Brezhnev's involvement in Novorossiysk's wartime defence.

The **Planetarium Gagarin** (☎ 644 812; ul Sovietov 53; adult/child R30/20; ☎ 9am-5pm) has heavenly shows every hour.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Novorossiysk** (☎ 606 505; reserve@hotel-novoros.ru; ul Isayeva; unrenovated s/d from R600/826, renovated s/d from R1715/2014) Best option in town, but choose the rooms at the back that come with a balcony overlooking the sea. However, don't buy breakfast vouchers but pay in the restaurant. As for laundry, read the

### MONEY LAUNDERING Patrick Horton

Laundry is so matter of fact that you often hand it over without regard to the price. Imagine my consternation when charged US\$50 for 14 items. I complained to the floor staff and was told that prices were prices. I took the issue up the ladder of command, and all were apologetic but that's what I had to pay. The director wouldn't see me and security staff were loitering around in case I did a runner. What else but pay up and resolve always to look at prices first.

boxed text, above. The 3rd-floor restaurant has smiling staff and meals from R125 to R270; try the bliny with strawberries and yogurt for breakfast. The menu is partly in English.

**Hotel Brigantine** (☎ 216 373; fax 216 446; sh Anapskoe 18; s/d from R550/700, deluxe/lyux from R1800/2200; ☎ ☎) The hotel has rooms ranging from unrenovated basic boxes to more luxurious rooms with TV, fridge and phone. There's an ATM in the lobby decorated with wood carved with maritime motifs.

**Dublin** (ul Sovietov 44; meals R200-400; ☎ 24hr) Bar owners the world over must think there's a bit of the Irish in all of us, just desperate to talk the blarney and down pints of Guinness. This underground Irish pub is a good starting place. Decent meals here cross the global divide; salads are good and the Shanghai chicken curry needs that Guinness to put out the fire.

**Morskoy Yorsh** (☎ 604 940; Sea Terminal; meals R155-460; ☎ 10am-2am) Ignore the prohibited zone sign at the end of the sea terminal and climb upstairs. This place is a bit posh now so no larking around. Come here during the week as on weekends it heaves. The place is good for fish dishes but definitely not the poisonous puffer fish after which the restaurant is named.

### Getting There & Away BOAT

An infrequent passenger ship (full board in four-berth cabin from R2000, voyage 36 hours) sails to Istanbul on a Tuesday, fortnightly in winter increasing to three or more a month in summer. Boarding is at 2pm for a 6pm sailing. Tickets are bought from helpful **Transflot** (☎ 607 066; fax 254 756;

seaport customs area; ☎ 9am-5.30pm), which has an English-speaking receptionist.

#### BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 252 245; ul Chekhovskogo) runs bus services to Krasnodar (R87, 3½ hours, seven daily from 6am to 7pm), Sochi (R171, nine hours, 7.50am and 8.30pm) and Gelendzhik (R22, one hour, six daily), plus *marshrutky* to Anapa (R50, 45 minutes, six daily).

#### TRAIN

From the **train station** (☎ 298 126; ul Zhukovskogo) three daily trains go to Moscow (R2500, 26 to 34 hours) passing through Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don. For Sochi or Mineralnye Vody change at Krasnodar.

### AROUND NOVOROSSIIYSK

#### Abrau-Dyurso Абрау-Дюрсо

This area, 20km from Novorossiysk, has been famous since 1886 when Tsar Alexander II granted land for champagne vineyards. Catch a frequent *marshrutka* from Novorossiysk bus station and join a **tasting tour** (☎ /fax 8617-285 405; admission R250; ☎ 10am-5pm). You'll get to see the process and be led through dark, musty tunnels where millions of bottles are stored, before sampling some rather nice champagnes.

#### Anapa Анапа

☎ 8617 / pop 57,000

The pleasant sheltered bay, sandy beach and direct train line north make Anapa a favourite seaside resort for those as far away as Moscow. Compared to quieter Gelendzhik it's brasher and more commercial, but it has the beach, aqua parks, hotels and restaurants to make it attractive for those who want to dip their toes or more in the Black Sea.

#### INFORMATION

**Internet Café** (☎ 50025; ul Krasnodaskaya 8; per hr R40; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-10pm).

**Sberbank** (☎ 56222; ul Lenina 14; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Cashes travellers cheques – or 'road cheques'; Visa and MasterCard ATM.

**Sputnik** (☎ 50522; sputnik@anapa.kuban.ru; ul Kalanina 27; ☎ 8am-8pm) Sells plane and train tickets.

#### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pavement sellers hawk one-hour around-the-bay sea cruises (R200, daily in summer) and

weekend four-hour cruises (R500) including the dolphinarium down the coast at Utrish.

Roaming Greeks established several dozen trading settlements on the Black Sea coast and Anapa, founded as Gorgipaya in the 4th century BC, was a walled city and significant regional centre. The **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 43154; ul Naberezhnaya 4; adult/child R30/20, camera/video R25/50; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) has items from that period – pottery, weapons, jewellery, coins and household items. Behind the museum are some of the excavated foundations.

Most Russian seaside resorts come with a place like **Aqua Park** (☎ 12262; ul Tsentralnaya Naberezhnaya; adult/child R400/200; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct). These fun parks, filled with swimming pools, water slides and sunbaking areas, are a blessing for families.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

Expect to be greeted at the bus and train stations by people with rooms (R150 to R300) and apartments (R500 to R1500) for rent; check that they can register you.

**Anapa Ocean** (☎ 51078; anapaocean@au.ru; ul Pushkina 19; per person full board & treatment Oct-Apr R750-850, May-Sep R1200-1600, lyux r Oct-Apr from R1700, May-Sep from R3200; ☎ ☎ ☎) This sanatorium, a tower adorned with golden corrugated panels, overlooks the sea. Standard rooms are a few notches above basic while *lyux* come with a small sitting room, balcony and pretty floral sheets. Rooms at the top front enjoy a sea view and are near the swanky top-floor bar-restaurant with outside patio. Other facilities include a cinema and fitness club.

**Ship** (ul Naberezhnaya; meals R100-360; ☎ 9am-late) The embankment comes to a promontory at the Ship, where the restaurant has a commanding view of the bay. The ideal sunset spot to unwind with a beer and snacks.

**Laskovy Bereg-2** (Victory Park; meals R125-300; ☎ 24hr) This outdoor restaurant on the embankment edge of the park has tasty summer specialities such as bliny with shrimps and *okroshka* (a cold soup of cucumbers, vegetables and eggs in sour cream), *kvas* and yogurt.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY & AROUND

The **bus station** (☎ 56861; ul Krasnoyazmeykaya) has services to Krasnodar (R109, 3½ hours, 16 buses daily) and Krasnodar airport (R117, four hours, 12.35pm and 7.30pm).

The **train station** (☎ 33186; ul Krestayanskaya) has three daily trains to Moscow (R1600, 11.28am, 12.15pm and 5.27pm, 31 to 36 hours), passing through Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don.

Daily Aeroflot flights leave Anapa **airport** (☎ 33218) for Moscow (R2830 to R6000), Sochi (R1602, Saturdays June to September) and St Petersburg (R5925 to R6175, daily June to September).

A taxi to the airport costs R200.

#### Gelendzhik Геленджик

☎ 86141 / pop 50,000 / ☎ Moscow

The town of Gelendzhik sweeps around a curving bay that provides shelter for this laid-back seaside resort. The beach is pebbly but the calm sea is clean and inviting.

**Vneshtorbank** (ul Karla Marksa 6) has a MasterCard and Visa ATM.

#### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

With displays of Adygean life and culture, the **Historical Museum** (istorichesky muzey; ☎ 35287; ul Ostovskogo 1; adult/child R30/15; ☎ 9am-5pm) makes a rare admission that until the Russian invasion in the 1830s this was the land of the Adygeans who left in a diaspora to other countries.

One-hour sea cruises (adult/child R200/100) are available from the sea terminal, an obvious jetty jutting out to sea. They allow for 15 minutes swimming out in the bay and tempt you with dolphin sightings.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hotel Kavkaz** (☎ 71225; kavkaz@smt.ru; ul Mayachnaya 3; s/d full board from R2100/2400, lyux from R2640; ☎ ☎ ☎) A large renovated 1930s holiday resort with sports facilities, private beach and organised excursions. Standard rooms are surprisingly good with pleasant furnishings. As prices rise space increases, armchairs appear and *lyux* rooms gain air-con and sitting rooms.

**Pansionat Stroitel** (☎ 26100; gelhotelsea@gl.kuban.ru; r per person R490-1200; ☎) Gelendzhik's cheapie but it's closed in winter. There's a big range of rooms, cheaper with shared bathroom while the more expensive have bathrooms and air-con. In the grounds, near the sea, are 12 cottage units with attached bathrooms and air-con.

**Golden Orb** (☎ 34455; ul Mira 26/2; s R1000, r R1400-1800) The Orb has several good-quality

rooms, some in lurid satin green, with full facilities and large bathrooms; the ground-floor rooms are suitable for people with disabilities. The owners have two other guesthouses.

**Bistro Katalpa** (ul Mira 16; meals R140-320) A pleasant small café with a street-front courtyard shrouded in vine leaves and shaded by a tree canopy. The crab and mushroom salad with Russian black bread is highly recommended.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses ply to Novorossiysk (R22, one hour, six daily) from the bus stand north of the town on the Novorossiysk road. A taxi from the sea front to the bus stand should be about R50.

### SOCHI СОЧИ

☎ 8622 / pop 329,000 / ☎ Moscow

Sochi may not have the best European beaches and there's still an element of tackiness but the city is in makeover mode. Investment money is being pumped in, some by government and some by developers who've gone overseas, seen what they've liked and copied it in Sochi.

Wander the downtown area by the elegant sea terminal and you're in a garden city where the scent of magnolia trees mingles with the tang of salt carried on sea breezes. Follow the sea embankment (*naberezhnaya*) and you'll cruise by a blur of restaurants, bars, shops and souvenir stalls jostling for attention. The place oozes booze and food and at night resounds to a pumping mix of Russian ballads, rousing Armenian tunes, Western pop and a little dance music.

If crowds are not your scene you can escape into the hills and mountains. If you're a snow bunny then Krasnaya Polyana (Red Valley) is the place; the snow lingers into late spring, allowing you to ski in the morning and swim in the sea in the afternoon.

Summer season is from the end of May to the end of September, with crowds pouring in during July and August when, coincidentally, prices are at their highest. We reckon that June is the best time to come, when the city is at its freshest.

#### Orientation

Greater Sochi, some 150km long, is the world's second-largest conurbation after



**SOCHI**

**INFORMATION**

1	Book World Книгомир	1	D2
	Bookshop Книжный Магазин	2	D2
	Comstar Комстар	3	D1
	Kodak	(see 23)	
	Main Post Office Главпочтамт	4	C2
	Main Telephone Centre		
	Переговорный Пункт	5	C2
	Moscow Capital Московский Капитал	6	C3
	Reinfo Рейнфо	7	C3
	Service Avia Сервис Авиа	8	C3
	Sochi Telecom Сочи Телеком	9	D2
	Territorial Aero Communications Agency Территориальное Агентство Воздушного Соеобщения	10	D2
	Vneshtorgbank Внешторгбанк	11	D2

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

	Aquarium Аквариум	12	D1
	Art Museum Художественный Музей	13	C3
	Church Of Michael the Archangel Храм Михаила Архангела	14	C3
	Lenin Mosaic Мозаика Ленина	15	C1
	Luna Park Луна Парк	16	C3
	Mayak Маяк	17	C2
	Stadium Стадион	18	C5
	Ticket Office Билетные Кассы	19	C4
	Town History Museum Музей Истории Города	20	D2

**SLEEPING**

	Chernomorje Sanatorium Черноморье Санаторий	21	C3
	Hotel Magnolia Гостиница Магнолия	22	C3
	Hotel Moskva Гостиница Москва	23	C2
	Hotel Primorskaya Гостиница Приморская	24	C3
	Hotel Sochi Гостиница Сочи	25	C3
	Hotel Zhemchuzhina Гостиница Жемчужина	26	C4
	Park Hotel Парк Отель	27	C3
	Resort Bureau	(see 20)	

**EATING**

	Cafe Cinzano	(see 23)	
	Home Kitchen Домашняя Кухня	28	C2
	La Pizzeria Ла Пиццерия	29	C2
	Market Рынок	30	D1
	Natasha's Наташа	31	C2
	Paterson Supermarket Супермаркет Патерсон	32	C4
	Stolovaya No 17 Столовая 17	33	C3
	Yarona Mama Японна Мама	34	C3

**DRINKING**

	Tinkoff Тинькофф	35	C3
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**ENTERTAINMENT**

	Circus Цирк	36	C4
	Festival Hall Зал Фестивальный	37	C2
	Green Theatre Зелёный Театр	38	C1
	Malibu	(see 17)	
	Park Rivera	39	D1
	Saint Tropez Ст Тропез	40	D1
	Stereo Стерео	41	C3
	Summer Theatre Летний Театр	42	C4
	Winter Theatre Зимний Театр	43	C3

**SHOPPING**

	Art Salon Художественный Салон	44	C3
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**TRANSPORT**

	Bus Station Автовокзал	45	D2
	Cable Car Канатно-Кресельная Дорога	46	C4
	Information Office	(see 47)	
	Sea Terminal Морской Порт	47	C2
	Ticket Office	(see 47)	

Los Angeles. Sochi itself stretches 7km from the Sochi River to Matsesta. Kurortny pr, a few blocks from the sea, links the northeastern cluster of train and bus stations, harbour and shopping centre, the hotel district and the arboretum in the southeast.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Bookshop** (☎ 923 352; ul Navaginskaya 12; ☎ 9am-8pm) Sells maps and some Russian-language guides to the area.

**Book World** (Knigo Mir; ☎ 609 159; ul Gorkogo 54; ☎ 9am-6pm) Maps, CDs and a few English fiction titles.

### CULTURAL CENTRES

**British Council** (☎ 605 240; www.britishcouncil.ru; ul Gagarina 10a; ☎ noon-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr, Mon-Fri May-Sep) Free Internet and library.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Comstar** (☎ 622 695; ul Moskovskaya 5; per hr R30; ☎ 8.30am-11pm)

**Sochi Telecom** (☎ 624 430; ul Vorovskogo 6; per hr R36; ☎ 9am-8pm)

### INTERNET RESOURCES

**www.sochiclub.ru** A perkily written site on Sochi.

### MONEY

**Hotel Lazurnaya** (Kurortny pr 103) ATM and cashes travellers cheques.

**Moscow Capital** (☎ 622 729; ul Sokolova 25/14; ☎ 11am-10.30pm) Currency exchange kiosk and ATM.

**Vneshtorgbank** (☎ 923 319; ul Karl Libknekhta 10; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) Barely competent bank cashes Amex travellers cheques; MasterCard and Visa advances.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

**Kodak** (☎ 608 080; Hotel Moskva foyer; ☎ 9am-7pm) Films and printing. Burning digital photos to CD costs R35.

### POST

**Main post office** (☎ 922 810; cnr Kurortny pr & ul Vorovskogo; ☎ 8am-6pm)

### TELEPHONE

**Main telephone centre** (☎ 920 564; ul Vorovskogo 6; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-7.45pm)

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Reinfo** (☎/fax 622 042; www.heliski.ru, www.reinfo-sochi.ru; Park Hotel Business Centre, room 316; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Well-established tour operator with extensive range of programs: skiing, hiking, sailing,

white-water rafting; excursions to Krasnaya Polyana, Mt Fish, Vorontsovskaya Cave and lesser-known places. Can book sanatoriums and Krasnaya accommodation.

**Service Avia** (☎ 924 050; Kurortny pr 50; ☎ 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 9am-8pm May-Sep). Air and rail ticketing, excursion booking.

**Territorial Aero Communications Agency** (☎ 923 603; ul Navaginskaya 16; ☎ 8am-7pm) Air ticketing.

## Sights & Activities

No matter that it's narrow and stony, Sochi's beach is dressed up in season with artificial trees, sunbathing loungers, awnings and private changing pavilions to imitate a South Seas ambience. And the Russians love it.

The snow-capped mountains which lie behind Sochi can only be appreciated from a **sea cruise** (☎ 609 603; Sea Terminal; R250; ☎ 11am-7.30pm), and there may be the bonus of seeing dolphins.

The **Town History Museum** (Gorodskoy Istorichesky muzey; ☎ 929 349; ul Vorovskogo 54; adult/child R30/15, camera/video R40/150; ☎ 9am-6pm) has a superbly presented and impressive collection. What shines is the space display with the *Soyuz 9* capsule that returned to Earth in June 1970 after 18 days in orbit. On board were local lad, engineer Sevastyanov, and his pilot Nikoliev. Space suits, photographs, equipment and food complement the capsule.

Sochi's lovely **arboretum** (Dendriari; ☎ 975 117; Kurortny pr; admission R30; ☎ 8am-dusk), with more than 1500 species of trees and shrubs from the world over, is attractively laid out and relaxing to wander through. Pay at the ticket office and then take the **cable car** (adult/child one way R80/40; ☎ 8am-dusk) to the top and walk back down.

Try the large **Lenin Mosaic**, opposite Park Rivera, for a backdrop with a difference for your holiday photos.

The **Art Museum** (Khudozhestvenny muzey; ☎ 622 947; Kurortny pr 51; adult/child R30/15; ☎ 10am-6pm) resides in a classical building that's an artwork in itself. There are visiting exhibitions and an expansive permanent collection.

## Sochi for Children

Being a family holiday resort there's a lot of fun places for children.

**Circus** (☎ 920 375; cnr Pushkina & Kurortny prs; tickets R150-300; box office Jun-Sep ☎ 9am-6pm) Sochi's circus presents Russian and international performances.



**Luna Park** (☎ 623 847; ul Ordzhonikidze 6; rides R30-60; 🕒 10am-5pm winter, 10am-midnight summer) Another summertime place for young children with rides and jumping castles.

**Mayak** (☎ 623 648; Naberezhnaya; adult/child per day R600/300; 🕒 10am-5pm summer) For a self-contained aqua park, Mayak has most things you could want – pools, water slides, sunbaking couches and cafés and bars for energy top-ups after all that hard enjoyment.

**Stereo** (☎ 620 070; Kurortny pr 37; adult/child R70/50; shows 3pm & 5pm) In the 1970s Russia produced 3-D movies, some of which can be seen here.

Inside **Park Rivera** (☎ 693 434; Kurortny pr; 🕒 24hr) are several **fun fairs** (rides R20-150, day pass R550; 🕒 10am-midnight) including a rollercoaster and a Ferris wheel. There's an **aquarium** (admission R100; 🕒 10am-10pm) plus a tacky range of art and craft shops, pony rides and an avenue of magnolias with trees planted by cosmonauts, including one planted by an Afghani.

## Tours

Pavement sellers, most hotels and many travel agents sell excursion tours that are the easiest way of visiting places around Sochi. Typical tours are Sochi (R150, two hours), Mt Akhun Bolshoy (R180, three hours), Agura Waterfall (R180, three hours) and Krasnaya Polyana (R250, seven hours).

## Festivals & Events

The season starts in late May with a weekend **beer festival**. The fizz has gone out of it over the last few years and it's been shifted to a wholesale food market (ul Gorkogo).

A weeklong **film festival** in June attracts the film stars of Russia and the occasional foreign actor. Outdoor screens in Park Rivera have free screenings but for those in the Winter Theatre you have to pay.

The season closes in late September with the Velvet Season **fashion show**, another weeklong extravaganza attracting top names in the fashion industry.

## Sleeping

Sochi has many hotels and willing citizens with a room or apartment to rent. Rates can increase by about 25% monthly between May and August.

## BUDGET

An option is to rent a **room** (Oct-Apr R250-400, May-Sep R1000-1500) from those offering them

at the train station but check if they can register foreigners.

Alternatively, the booking agency **Resort Bureau** (Kurortnoe byuro; ☎ /fax 922 976; propan@sochi.ru; 🕒 24hr) parks a mobile office outside the train station and has an office at the Town History Museum.

**Hotel Sochi** (☎ 621 987; www.sochi-magnolia.ru; Kurortny pr 50; s with shared bathroom R370, s/d incl breakfast R596/1092) The city's best-value option. If you can't organise registration then you can be a phantom resident of one of their bare-bones singles. Other rooms are quite adequate. This hotel and the Hotel Magnolia (in the same block) are run by the same outfit so go to the Magnolia to check in and have breakfast.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Primorskaya** (☎ 925 743; management@heliopark.ru; ul Sokolova 1; s/d economy R295/395, unrenovated R545/900, budget R550/715, renovated R590/990) This sprawling, pale-yellow hotel, with elements of charm remaining from its 1936 origins, covers a large block around a central patio. Many categories and options of rooms are available to suit thin wallets. Being as near to the sea as geography allows makes it a favourite and it quickly books up in season.

**Hotel Zhemchuzhina** (☎ 661 188; fax 661 888; ul Chernomorskaya 3; r from R900, lyux from R3500; 📺 📺 📺 📺) This 965-room place by the sea has its own beach and tennis courts, and is serviced by helpful and smiling staff. The cheapest rooms, unrenovated and without sea views, are on the 1st floor while the renovated section is a vast improvement with better furnishings. *Lyux* rooms have the best sea views, with balconies and air-con.

**Hotel Moskva** (☎ 608 010; reservation@moskva-hotel.ru; Kurortny pr 18; s/d 865/1310, lyux R1505/2140; 📺) Smack in the town centre the Moskva is a large, noisy and run-down place that's in the throes of restoration. For the budget-minded the standard rooms are quite adequate, doubles have sea views and balconies, and *lyux* rooms boast a lounge and air-con. Breakfast costs R120 to R160 extra.

## TOP END

**Park Hotel** (☎ 693 000; info@radissonpark.ru; per Morskoy 2; s/d Jan-Mar & Nov-Dec R2113/2600, Apr-Jun & Oct R3218/3705, Jul-Sep R3705/4193; 📺 📺 📺 📺) The resurrection of this old Soviet-era hotel now shines as a beacon of blue-tinted glass. Within are very pleasant rooms, many with

## SANATORIUMS

Built in the 1930s many sanatoriums are mini-Romanov palaces with beautiful grounds, swimming pools, tennis courts and some with cable cars to their private beaches. All offer full board and treatment.

A typical Russian holiday would once have been a month at the sanatorium related to one's profession, such as the stately Metallurg for metal workers. Book well in advance as they run near to capacity and you'll need either a medical reference or to pay for a sanatorium diagnosis.

**Chernomorje Sanatorium** (☎ 609 060; fax 623 898; ul Ordzhonikidze 27; r full board per week from R5400; 📺 📺 📺) This sanatorium, belonging to the former Ministry of Railways, will take walk-in customers if they have vacancies. Full board means all meals plus access to a private beach, fitness centre and medical treatment – all fun and games while trying to recover your health.

The Resort Bureau (opposite) and Reinfo (p465) can book, including the following sanatoriums:

**Aktyor** (☎ 976 022; Kurortny pr 105a; per person R950-1160)

**Avangard** (☎ 921 271; Kurortny pr 83; per person from R1430)

**Matsesta** (☎ 677 166; matsesta@sochi.ru; per Lechebny 2; treatment only 8-12 days R1999-4000)

**Metallurg** (☎ 972 398; Kurortny pr 92; per person R1050-1210)

sea views and air-con, cable TV, fridges, bathtubs plus an array of beside-the-wash-basin goodies. One floor has nonsmoking rooms. An ATM, bar, restaurant, two types of sauna and a fitness centre complete the picture.

**Hotel Lazurnaya** (☎ 663 333; fax 663 292; Kurortny pr 103; s/d incl breakfast from US\$149/169; 📺 📺 📺 📺) Oozes luxury. On the edge of Sochi this four-star is set in copious grounds with a private beach. All 300 rooms have sea views, Internet connections and cable TV. Moving up in price gains safes, bigger bathrooms, bidets, Jacuzzis and private balconies. Guest facilities include bars, a top-notch restaurant, a travel agency, saunas, health centre and pool (nonresidents US\$25 per day).

## Eating

There are so many restaurants and cafés tapping into a world of cuisines that you could eat in a different place every day throughout the summer.

## RESTAURANTS

**Patskha Restaurant** (☎ 308 3388; Cheltenham Alley, Khosta; meals R350-1000; 🕒 9am-late) Heaps of character here. Linger for long, drawn-out meals lubricated with local wine. The delicious cuisine is Georgian and the prime dish is trout or sturgeon which you catch yourself from a pool outside. Keep an eye on what you're ordering as the bill rapidly mounts, leaving you with a hole in your wallet.

**Home Kitchen** (Domashnyaya Kukhnya; ul Kooperativnaya 4; meals R80-250; 🕒 9am-10pm) Near the sea

terminal this unpretentious eatery comes in two parts served by a central kitchen. Opt for the older more homely part for a cosy meal in company or the modern section for a quicker meal. The Greek salad was one of the best we've ever tasted.

**Yapona Mama** (☎ 334 111; ul Ordzhonikidze 25; meals R110-700; 🕒 10am-midnight) Russia has discovered Japanese cuisine and this smallish restaurant is one of several in Sochi. The illustrated menu greatly helps in ordering if you don't know the Russian for sushi or tempura. You can order a couple of pieces or mix and match to make a big feast.

**La Pizzeria** (☎ 926 064; Naberezhnaya; meals R180-400) Down on the seafrost this restaurant has a large canopied bar at the front and a rustic Italian interior. A menu in English reveals a large range of pizzas and pasta. The salmon pizza is probably the best but order 'small' unless you have a huge appetite.

## CAFÉS

**Café Cinzano** (meals R160-570; 🕒 9am-midnight) Hanging onto the end of the Hotel Moskva, this café has some of the best food in Sochi. Try the bliny stuffed with mushrooms or salmon caviar, the peach pie or the wide range of salads.

**Stolovaya No 17** (per Morskoy 3; meals R40-100; 🕒 8am-7pm) A piece of history. This wonderful canteen is a relic of Soviet days when 30m queues waited patiently for a cheap meal. Now there's a kitchen full of babushkas serving a range of tasty options presented at a pick-and-choose counter. Plastic

tablecloths cover metal tables decorated with plastic flowers and you get to eat with aluminium cutlery.

**Natasha's** (ul Vorovskogo 3-1; meals R110-200; ☎ 8am-11pm) If you've never tasted *khachapuri* or are addicted to the snack then this pavement café is the specialist. They create a two-handed bowl of pastry, fill it with a pool of melted cheese and then float an egg in it.

#### SELF-CATERING

**Sochi's market** (ul Moskovskaya; ☎ 6am-6pm) Has fresh fruit and vegetables. Try fresh pomogranate juice in season and for nibbles *churchkhela*, very tasty sticks of nuts coated with fruit jelly.

**Paterson Supermarket** (cnr Kurortny pr & ul Dmitriyevoy; ☎ 9am-11pm) A large supermarket with everything you might need.

#### Drinking

**Tinkoff** (☎ 951 111; ul Primorskaya 19; meals R200-600; ☎ noon-1am) Below the Winter Theatre this new brewery-restaurant rises up from the sea embankment as a three-storey monument to the new Sochi. They brew decent beer here. In summer live bands play on the top-floor open terrace.

#### Entertainment

There's no central listing for events; just keep an eye on the billboards.

#### NIGHTCLUBS

**Saint Tropez** (☎ 646 350; ul Moskaya 19; cover R200; ☎ 8pm-5am) Sochi's premier nightclub has two dance floors to suit the mood. One with low-level lighting, cool music and snuggle-up tables and the other lit with hyper-active spots resounding to pulsating techno.

**Malibu** (Naberezhnaya; cover Mon-Fri R200; ☎ 10pm-4.30am) An open-air spot that throbs to the sound of DJ-spun music while the moon casts a silvery path over the ocean.

#### THEATRE

**Winter Theatre** (Zimny Teatr; ☎ 629 616; pl Teatralnaya; ☎ 10am-7pm booking office) Built in a majestic, imperial style this massive, colonnaded building would add grace to any world capital. Opera, ballet and drama are presented here.

The following places put on drama performances and concerts in the summer:

**Green Theatre** (Zelyony Teatr; ☎ 641 014; Park Rivera; ☎ box office 11am-8pm)

**Summer Theatre** (Letny Teatr; ☎ 920 795; Park Frunze; ☎ box office 10am-8pm)

#### LIVE MUSIC

**Festival Hall** (☎ 928 670; ul Ordzhonikidze 5; tickets R300-1000) Many of Russia's top music acts play in Sochi in summer and this massive hall, with its open front to the sea embankment below, plays host to most of them.

#### Shopping

**Art Salon** (☎ 921 482; Kurortny pr 29; ☎ 10am-6pm) Sochi has a thriving artistic community and the Art Salon is choc-a-block with paintings, woodcarvings, icons and pottery items.

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

Sochi's **airport** (☎ 440 888) is at Adler. Aeroflot flies daily to Moscow (R2923) and in summer there's a weekly flight to Mineralnye Vody (R928, Sunday). Pulkovo flies to St Petersburg (R6200, daily). Flights are more frequent during summer.

Belavia flies to Minsk, Belarus (US\$130, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, May to October), and daily via Moscow (US\$130).

##### BOAT

The sea terminal has an **information office** (☎ 609 603; ☎ 8am-8pm) and a **ticket office** (☎ 609 617; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed, Sat & Sun).

#### Trabzon, Turkey

There's a Thursday and Sunday sailing (Pullman R1650, shared cabin R2300, 11 hours) that boards at 6pm for an 11pm departure. Return journeys are Friday and Monday.

#### Poti & Batumi, Georgia

A boat sails on Tuesday to Batumi (R1730, 12 hours, 6pm), calling at Poti (R1580), and returns at 6pm on Friday.

A quicker hydrofoil leaves on Friday for Batumi (R1750, six hours, 1pm), also calling at Poti (R1750), and returns at 1pm on Tuesday.

##### BUS

Services from the **bus station** (☎ 646 435, ul Gorkogo 56a) include those to Krasnodar (R180, eight hours, 10.10am and 1.30pm), Novorossiysk (R172, nine hours, 8.30am and 12.25pm) and Kislovodsk (R445, 17 hours,

4.30pm). Bus 125 goes to Adler (R15, 40 minutes, 12 daily).

##### TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 609 009; ul Gorkogo) has a **service centre** (☎ 924 459; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-8pm) for inquiries and ticket sales. Four daily trains go to Moscow (R2200, 27 to 37 hours), more in summer. Train 644 goes to Kislovodsk via Mineralnye Vody and Pyatigorsk (R800, 17 hours, 5.11pm, odd dates) and train 642 goes to Rostov via Krasnodar (R1000, 14 hours, 6.31pm daily).

#### Getting Around

To get to the airport take bus 124C (R15, one hour, 10.10am, 12.50pm, 4.50pm and 7.15pm) from Sochi bus station. A taxi costs about R200.

Much of Sochi is quite walkable; there's no transport along the embankment. *Marshrutky* charge R7.

#### AROUND SOCHI

##### ☎ 8622

Except for Mt Fisht and Zelenaya Roscha the easiest way to visit the following places is on an excursion.

#### Zelenaya Roscha Зелёная Роща

Stalin's dacha, **Zelenaya Roscha** (Green Grove; ☎ 695 600; zelrosha@mail.sochi.ru; Kurortny pr 120; admission R100; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat), dates from 1936. Visiting requires prior arrangement with a travel agency (see p465), but this is an amazing place built to accommodate a small, private man who without remorse caused death and misery to millions of Russians. You can also arrange to sleep here.

The depth of the water in Stalin's swimming pool (just 1.5m) and the height of the stair treads, sofas, chairs, tables, bed and even billiard table were fixed to accommodate his small stature (165cm). Security was extremely tight: a guard every 15m around the dacha, a secret lift and tunnel down to the sea, and the painting of the buildings green to camouflage them within the forest.

Visitors can see Stalin's private rooms (some original furniture remains), the movie theatre where he checked every film before public release and his billiards room. Stalin was a lousy player, and he played only those he could beat or were wily enough to lose.

#### Agura Valley Агурское Ущелье

The Agura Valley cuts a cleft into the rolling foothills with Mt Bolshoy Akhun on its eastern flank and the precipitous **Orlinye Skaly** (Eagle Cliffs) on the west. Within the cleft are three waterfalls, one at 30m, crashing down into water holes.

There are three routes to view the waterfalls. The first is a rough road leading up by the right-hand side of the Matsesta clinic to the top of the Orlinye Skaly escarpment. This reveals fine views over the waterfalls, Mt Bolshoy Akhun and the snow-capped peaks in Abkhazia. Also sharing the view is a golden statue of Prometheus waving his broken chains; see the boxed text, below.

A more strenuous option is a three-hour hike up beside the Agura River from the Sputnik skyscraper on the main Sochi-Adler road.

The remaining option is a downhill ramble from Mt Bolshoy Akhun.

#### Mt Bolshoy Akhun Гора Большой Ахун elevation 662m

An 11km-road, just south of the Agura turning, signposted 'Akhun' leads up to a **lookout tower** (admission R35; ☎ 10am-6pm low season, 10am-9pm high season). The tower gives commanding views of Sochi, Adler and Mt Fisht.

Below the tower is the rustic **Prokhlada Café** (dishes R30-60; ☎ 10am-late) with outside tables and an inside restaurant. Inside boasts a roaring fire in winter and in summer there's often live music. It serves good shashlyk but try the *lobiyo* (spicy bean stew).

A path by the tower wanders down through the Agura Valley. It's a two-hour descent along the river and waterfalls, longer if you start enjoying homemade wine sold by locals near the water hole (good for swimming). The path ends in a small car park by the Salkhino restaurant.

#### PROMETHEUS UNCHAINED

In Greek mythology Prometheus stole fire from the gods to give to humankind. As a punishment, Zeus had him chained to a mountain in the Caucasus and had a vulture devour his liver every day. His sentence was meant to run for 30,000 years but he was freed by Hercules after 30.

Catch a *marshrutka* back to Sochi from the main road, a 1.5km walk away.

### Vorontsovskaya Cave

Воронцовская Пещера

Usually done on an excursion **Vorontsovskaya Cave** (☎ 643 267; adult/child R110/55, guide R100; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue & Sat winter, 11am-6pm summer), 41km from Sochi, has about 500m of illuminated passage with stalactites and the like.

### Mt Fisht Гора Фишт

elevation 2867m

About 100km from Sochi, but reachable only by helicopter or a four-day return trek, Mt Fisht is the start of the Caucasus mountain range. Contact Reinfo (p465) for heliskiing and guided hiking.

### Krasnaya Polyana Красная Поляна

elevation 550m

A spectacular road passing through a deep, narrow canyon leads up from Adler to Krasnaya Polyana (Red Valley). At the end, about 70km from Sochi, is a small settlement surrounded by mountains up to 2375m high.

Krasnaya Polyana is a well-developed ski resort with chairlifts for intermediate skiing and snowboarding, and heliskiing for the experienced.

In the last few years there's been an explosion of hotel building aimed at making the place a major European skiing centre. A few shops, bars and cafés are clustered around the chairlift station.

### INFORMATION

There is an ATM at the Pyramid restaurant in the Peak Hotel.

**Alpika Service** (☎ 697 930; 🕒 8.30am-6pm winter, 10am-6pm summer) Ski equipment hire near the chairlift station.

**Emergency services** (☎ 430 422)

**Paraguide** (☎ 697 917; 🕒 10am-6pm) Paragliding, rafting, heliskiing and 4WD tours located near the chairlift station.

**Weather reports** (☎ 697 916)

### ACTIVITIES

The main skiing season is November to May. Spring takes over as the snow retreats, blanketing the slopes with a mass of flowers. While Krasnaya Polyana can be 'done' on a day excursion, a few days is needed

to gain a real appreciation of this bracing environment.

Easiest access to the mountains is by the four **chairlifts** (sightseeing R500, all-day skiing adult/child R600/300; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-May, 10am-5.30pm Wed-Sun Jun-Oct) which take you up in 15-minute stages to 1500m.

Apart from plenty of hiking there are **jeep rides** (per hr R600, 2-day/1-night camping per person US\$50) in summer. Contact Paraguide, Reinfo (p465) or local jeep drivers.

Alternatively there's year-round **horse riding** (R500) for a 14km return trip to the mineral springs or mountain biking.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Lazurnaya Peak Hotel** (☎ 663 600; resp@lazurnaya.ru; ul Zashitnikov Kavkaza 77; s/d incl breakfast & dinner from €130/170 low season, €170/210 high season; 📞 📺). Apart from high-class accommodation this hotel provides everything. There's an ATM, bars, restaurant, fitness centre, baths and sauna, ski instructors, equipment hire and transfers. The nightclub will use up any energy left after skiing and there's a big open fire in the foyer to collapse around.

**Ibis** (☎ 622 042; ul Zashitnikov Kavkaza; chalets winter/summer R3300/2000) Ibis is a rustic collection of cosy wooden cottages taking five or six people at a squeeze. A café provides full board for an extra R200 per person.

**Hotel Tatyania** (☎ 918 405 9662; malekon@sochi.ru; r winter/summer from R3000/2000) On the Krasnaya Polyana road, Tatyania is a brand-new midrange hotel with furnishings just out of the wrappers and glistening white bathrooms. The hotel has a restaurant, billiards and bowling. Winter prices include transfers to the chairlift.

**Restaurant Pyramid** (meals R80-300) One of several clustered around the lowest chairlift station, the Pyramid offers European and Caucasian cuisine. House speciality is trout, kept in a pool outside, and you start your menu choice by going out with a fishing rod.

### SHOPPING

Plenty of stalls sell big hairy Caucasian hats, tacky souvenirs, homemade wine, pickles and honey to the swarms of day visitors.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Sochi take bus 125 (R15, one hour, 12 buses daily) and change at Adler to bus 135 (R38, 1½ hours, nine daily).

Taxi drivers lurking around Adler bus station will offer a ride to Krasnaya Polyana for R100 per passenger. Alternatively, take a day tour from Sochi (see p466).

### DAGOMYS ДАГОМЫС

☎ 8622 / 📞 Moscow

Dagomys resort, 12km from Sochi, stands in its own hilly grounds, between the sea and the Sochi-Dagomys road, 1km away. Built for the peak of foreign tourism in late Soviet times, the resort is not as lively as Sochi. The attraction is for a quiet holiday with everything in one place.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Dagomys** (☎ 524 053; fax 522 100; ul Leningradskaya 7; s/d incl 2 meals from R940/1250, lyux from R2050/2400; 📞 📺 📺 📺) A white pyramid hogging the skyline, this four-star, 1800-bed hotel offers everything from basic doubles to two-floor apartments with double bathrooms. The hotel has several bars (including a rooftop one), restaurants, a post office, exchange kiosk, shopping arcade and a service bureau for excursions, car rental, plane and train tickets. There are extensive sanatorium facilities and resort features of beach, indoor and outdoor pools (nonguests R250 per day), sports centre with tennis courts and a concert hall-cum-cinema. Given such services, the unadventurous need go nowhere else.

**Olympic** (☎ 521 194; fax 524 625; ul Leningradskaya 7a; s/d from R1010/1390) Below Hotel Dagomys, this three-star has well-equipped rooms similar to Dagomys' cheaper options. All rooms face either sea or mountains.

**Motel Meridian** (r per person from R670) Adjacent to and run by the Olympic. The motel-style rooms range from two beds and a kitchenette to a spacey two-level suite with bedroom, sitting room and kitchenette.

**Restoran Dubrava** (☎ 521 490; ul Leningradskaya 7; meals R260-800) This roundhouse restaurant with excellent European food is well worth a visit even from Sochi. It's rather an eclectic place with Belgian Trappist beers, Scottish single malt whiskies and *nargilas* (water pipes) on the menu. The courteous and friendly staff can speak some English. Booking would be advisable in season.

### Getting There & Around

A free lift from the Dagomys complex (R30 for nonguests) speeds you quickly down to the beach.

*Marshrutky* leave Sochi bus station for Dagomys (R14, 20 minutes, every 15 minutes) and stop on the main road. A taxi shouldn't cost more than R300.

### AROUND DAGOMYS

Dagomys boasts the world's most northerly tea plantations. Performances at **Tea Houses** (☎ 521 955; admission R150; 🕒 11am-5pm summer), a traditional wooden lodge, celebrate Russian culture in song and dance. The upper room has a magnificent tiled fireplace and chimney centrepiece and a collection of decorated samovars; downstairs there are models of the multidomed wooden churches of Kizhi to admire.

A taxi from Dagomys should cost about R200.

## MINERAL WATER SPAS МИНЕРАЛЬНЫЕ ВОДЫ

The central Caucasus rises from the steppe in an eerie landscape studded with dead volcanoes and spouting mineral springs. The curative powers of the springs have attracted unhealthy, hypochondriac or just holiday-minded Russians since the late 18th century, when wounded soldiers appeared to heal quicker after bathing in them. The area had already passed from Turkish to Russian hands in 1774 but still came under attack from local tribes. The first settlements were forts that evolved into graceful spa towns.

Today Kavkazskie Mineralnye Vody (Caucasian Mineral Waters) is a holiday resort where the healthy outnumber the ailing. The atmosphere is relaxed, the air fresh and the walks lovely. The parks and elegant spa buildings recall the 19th century, when fashionable society trekked from Moscow and St Petersburg to see, be seen and look for a spouse.

Many of the 130-plus springs have fizzled out for lack of maintenance. Those remaining feed fountains in drinking galleries and provide the elixir for sanatoria treatment



### USEFUL BUS & TRAIN ROUTES FROM MINERAL WATER SPAS

The main Mineral Water Spas **bus station** (☎ 86531-56111) is at the airport.

Destination	Departures	Buses daily	Duration	Fare
Kislovodsk	9.40am-8.30pm	7	1hr	R43
Krasnodar	7.10am-9.10pm	12	8hr	R336
Nalchik	6.40am-6.30pm	9	2hr	R90
Pyatigorsk	8am-6pm	14	½hr	R20
Rostov	9.55am-8.55pm	4	10hr	R400
Sochi	6.20pm	1	16hr	R550
Teberda	2.45pm	1	5hr	R182

The **train station** (☎ 86531-46120; ul Pushkina 33) at Mineral Spas picks up trains originating in Kislovodsk (passing through Pyatigorsk), Nalchik and Vladikavkaz. The **Servis Centre** (☎ 86531-56239; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-7pm) can assist with ticketing.

Destination	Train	Departures	Frequency	Duration	Fare
Kyiv	25	2.02pm	evens	26hr	R1240
Minsk	145	5.38pm	odds	37hr	R1410
St Petersburg	49	7.03pm	daily	44hr	R2570
Moscow*	27/33/41	3 trains	daily	32-34hr	R1940-2800
Moscow†	3	9.17pm	daily	26hr	R2950
Adler (Sochi)	389/643	8.29pm	odds/evens (summer)	12hr	R690
Novorossiysk‡	387	9.27pm	evens	11hr	R690
Nalchik	6810	3.08am	daily	5hr	R74

(\* via Rostov (†) via Kyiv, Ukraine (‡) via Krasnodar

of muscle, bone, heart, circulation, nervous system, joints and skin problems. For a fee, at some sanatoria, you can experience being plastered with supposedly curative black mud or being blasted by a shock shower.

Pyatigorsk and Kislovodsk are the main resorts, and Essentuki and Zheleznovodsk the minor resorts.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

The regional centre is Mineralnye Vody with the regional airport and train station. Despite being as flash as a country bus stand and, according to a BBC report, one of the worst run in Russia, the **airport** (☎ 86531-58221) is an important air transport hub.

Daily flights (R3590 to R4160) go to Moscow Vnukovo, Domodedovo and Sheremetyevo 1 with KMV Airlines, Aeroflot and Siberia Air. KMV (R5390 to R6500, Thursday and Sunday) and Pulkovo (R6400, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday) fly to St Petersburg.

KMV also flies to Baku, Azerbaijan (R4500, Thursday and Saturday), Yerevan, Armenia (R4000, Monday, Tuesday and Friday), and Munich (US\$300, Tuesday).

KMV Avia charter flights go to Istanbul (US\$220, Sunday) and Antalya (US\$270, Thursday and Saturday) in Turkey and to Salonika (€166, Friday) in Greece.

#### TAXI

Taxi prices from the airport are Pyatigorsk (R300), Kislovodsk (R500) and Dombay or Elbrus (R2000 to R2500). You may be able to negotiate a better price from an arriving rather than a rank taxi.

### PYATIGORSK ПЯТИГОРСК

☎ 8793 / pop 141,000 / elevation 510m /

#### Moscow

Pyatigorsk, the name being a Russification of Mt Beshtau (Five Peaks), began life as Fort Konstantinovskaya in 1780. It quickly developed into a fashionable resort as it attracted Russian society to its spas and stately buildings. Many of these buildings

remain today, making this an attractive town to ramble around and appreciate the bars and restaurants on pr Kirova.

### Orientation

Pyatigorsk sprawls around the foot of Mt Mashuk (993m). Tree-lined pr Kirova is the main street, running west from below the Academic Gallery through the town centre to the train station.

To the northwest the town's suburbs stretch towards the jagged crags of Mt Beshtau (1400m). To the south, on a clear day, the twin snow-covered peaks of Mt Elbrus can be seen from several points around town.

Crucially the antiquated tram network is a pleasant way to discover the town. Some trams, imported from Germany, still carry German advertisements.

### Information

**Book World** (Knigo Mir; ☎ 352 766; Upper Market;

☎ 8am-6pm) Some English books and maps.

**Hotel Intourist** (☎ 363 410; per hr R50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) Offers Internet access.

**Main post office** (☎ 335 136; cnr pr Kirova & ul Krainego; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun & Mon)

**Main telephone centre** (☎ 337 838; ul Krainego; per hr R44; ☎ 6am-11pm) Internet available from 9am to 8pm.

**Pyatigorsk Intour** (☎ 363 411; tour@infranet.ru; pl Lenina 13; ☎ 10am-6pm) Located inside Hotel Intourist. English-speaking staff, Elbrus and Dombay hikes/climbs, English-, French- and Spanish-speaking guides, hotels and sanatorium bookings, foreigner registration.

**Sberbank** (☎ 323 606; pr Kirova 59; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 8-11am Sun) Cashes travellers cheques; ATM.

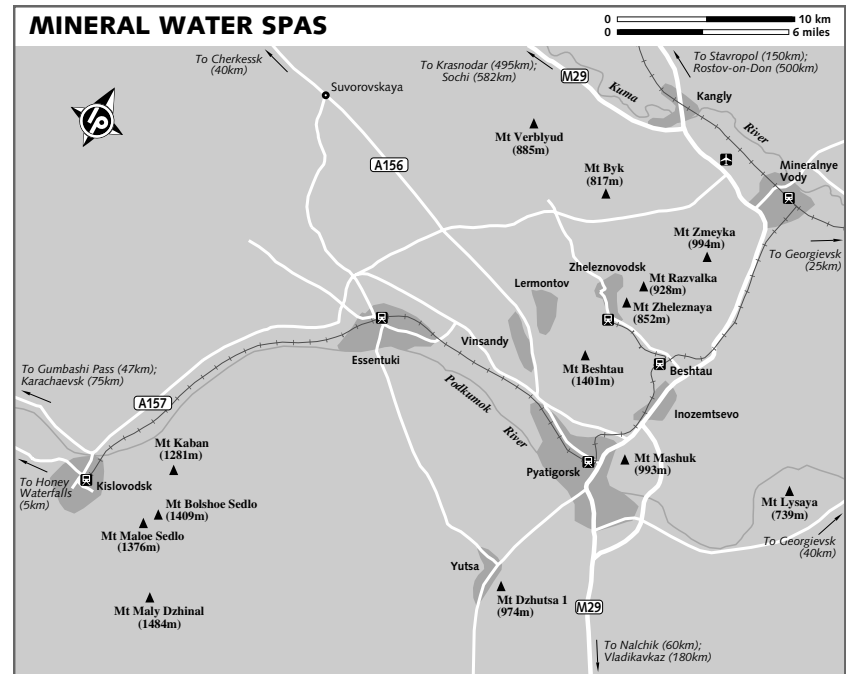
**Tourist Bureau** (☎ 350 110; ruse@megalog.ru; pr Kirova 70; ☎ 10am-6pm) Private company with excursions, ticketing, sanatorium bookings, English-speaking staff, foreigner registration.

**Tourism Light** (☎ 355 025; light@megalog.ru; ul Dzerzhinskogo 41; ☎ 10am-6pm) Airline ticketing, excursions, English-speaking staff, accommodation booking, foreigner registration.

### Sights

#### LERMONTOV SIGHTS

Many attractions revolve around larger-than-life writer, poet, painter, cavalry soldier, society beau and duellist, Mikhail





### A HERO OF OUR TIME

The Mineral Waters area is haunted by the Romantic writer Mikhail Lermontov, whose tale *Princess Mary*, from his novel *A Hero of Our Time*, is set here. In an uncanny echo of the novel's plot, Lermontov was killed in a duel at Pyatigorsk in 1841. The book – very short by Russian literary standards – makes a great travelling companion, as does *Lermontov, Tragedy in the Caucasus* by Laurence Kelly, which provides an intriguing background to the man and his society.

Lermontov had been banished twice from St Petersburg to serve in the army in Pyatigorsk: first, after blaming the tsarist authorities for the death in a duel of another 'troublesome' writer, Pushkin; and second, for himself duelling. Lermontov was challenged once again in Pyatigorsk for jesting about the clothes of one Major Martynov. Lermontov, firing first, aimed into the air but was in return shot through the heart. Many saw his death, like Pushkin's, as orchestrated by the authorities.

Many places in Kislovodsk and Pyatigorsk are linked to the man and his fiction, and a visit to the superb Lermontov museum in Pyatigorsk is essential.

Lermontov (see boxed text, above). With the aid of a taxi (about R150) and some walking, these attractions can be strung together as an enjoyable outing.

Take the taxi to the forest clearing that has the monument marking the **Lermontov duel site** (bul Gagarina). The actual duel site is unknown but is thought to be near the needle-point obelisk that even today is bedecked with flowers. Continue by taxi to **Proval**. This is a cave open to the sky where 19th-century couples would dance on a bridge over the pond of light-blue (and smelly) sulphurous water. At the time of research Proval was closed due to flood damage.

Walk from Proval southwest down bul Gagarina to an obvious path on the left that leads through woods to a little domed pavilion, the **Aeolian Harp**, long a favourite lookout point. Early morning should reveal a magnificent view of Mt Elbrus. It was built in 1831 to replace a real harp plucked by a weather vane.

From here walk down via **Lermontov's Grotto** to the **Academic Gallery** (pr Kirova) below. Formerly the Elizabeth Gallery, it was built in 1851 by English architect Upton to house one of Pyatigorsk's best-known springs – No 16 (currently closed). It was here that Lermontov's antihero, Pechorin, first set eyes on Princess Mary. A small gallery houses a **butterfly and insect exhibition** (adult/child R30/20; ☎ 11am-8pm) including live tarantulas and scorpions.

Below the gallery, the tree-shaded pr Kirova leads you past some glorious historical houses and various springs squirting out of spouts in walls. Look for the plaque an-

nouncing that Tolstoy served his military service here.

Lermontov's thatched cottage where he spent his last two months in 1841 is in the **Lermontov Museum** (Domik Lermontova; ☎ 52710; ul Buachidze 9; admission R100, camera/video R30/50; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun), a group of Lermontov-related buildings in a beautiful garden. The buildings still have some original furniture, copies of Lermontov's poems, sketches and a collection of watercolours of local scenes.

### PARK TSVETNIK

Prime attraction is the striking light-blue and beautifully proportioned **Lermontov Gallery** (Lermontovskaya galleryeya), built in 1901 in cast iron with stained-glass windows. Once a drinking gallery it's now a **concert hall** (☎ 58350; tickets R90-200; ☎ 9am-7pm).

Behind are the 1831 **Lermontov Baths** and the 1880 **Yermolov Baths**, now a treatment centre.

Opposite is a modern **Drinking Gallery** (Pitevaya galleryeya; ☎ 7am-6pm), where you can take the waters from endlessly gushing faucets. The taste is flat and yucky – diluted bad eggs come to mind. This is the sulphur content that's supposedly good for stomach complaints, probably because it kills off anything in your stomach. Behind, another drinking gallery offers two more from the 16 different underground springs.

Adjacent is the **university** (pr Kirova 36) with some expressive gargoyles and bas-reliefs on its upper façade.

From the Lermontov Gallery, a path leads past **Diana's Grotto**, a small artificial cave, up to Goryachaya (Hot) Hill, with a

much-photographed bronze **eagle sculpture** and a Chinese pavilion **lookout**.

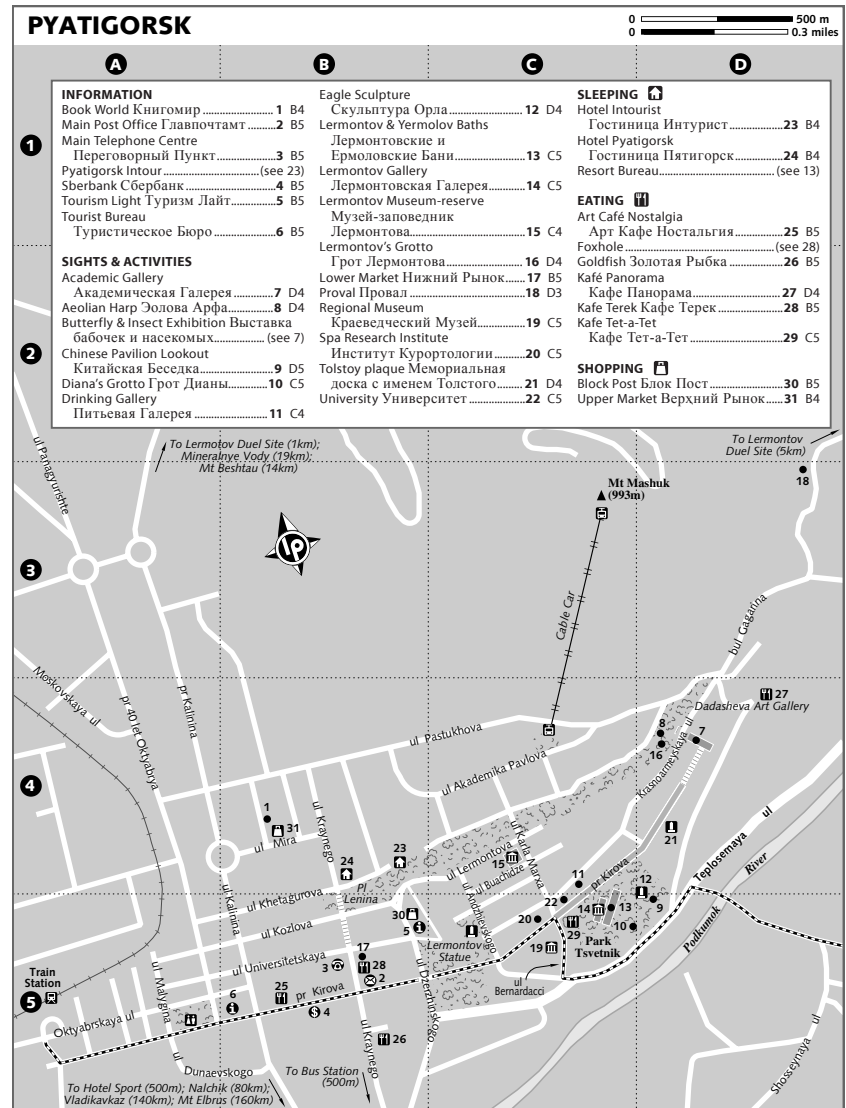
### MT MASHUK & AROUND

A **cable car** (☎ 974 008; bul Gagarina; per journey R50; ☎ 10am-5pm) whisks you up Mt Mashuk for fresh breezes and a great panorama, weather permitting. The best views of Mt

Elbrus are early in the morning; it's a fairly easy 45-minute climb.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Pyatigorsk's **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 54525; ul Bernardacci 2; adult/child R60/20, camera/video R20/40; ☎ 10am-5pm) marks the development of Pyatigorsk from fortress to



major 19th-century health resort, and its WWII history as a hospital town with a brief period of German occupation.

The striking classical building, the **Spa Research Institute** (Institut Kurortologii; pr Kirova 34), which develops mineral water treatments, was Pyatigorsk's first stone building. Built in 1828 (rebuilt 1955) it was once Restoratsiya, the town's first hotel and scene of balls described in *A Hero of Our Time*.

## Tours

Inexpensive day trips (R300) to Dombay or Elbrus and a worthwhile afternoon trip to Honey Waterfalls are sold from stands around pr Kirova.

## Sleeping

**Resort Bureau** (Kurortnoe byuro; ☎ 350 827; Yermolov Baths, pr Kirova 21; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri winter, 8am-3pm Mon-Sat summer) This private accommodation agency offers rooms with shared bathroom (per person R100 to R150) and apartments (from R350).

**Hotel Sport** (☎ 390 639; ul Dunaevskogo 5; r incl breakfast R1500, lyux R3000; Ⓟ) A hotel in a football grandstand but the nonviewing side, so you don't see any matches for free. The rooms are superbly furnished with blond-wood furniture, room-height mirrors and bathrooms with bidets and big tubs.

**Hotel Intourist** (☎ 363 410; www.pyatigorskintour.ru; pl Lenina 13; s/d from R1400/1500, lyux US\$2100; Ⓟ) The foyer has been refreshingly remodelled and the renovators are working their way through the rooms. Quality is middling and given the price OK. The restaurant is large and gloomy but small cafés on the 3rd and 8th floors provide decent breakfasts. All rooms have balconies but ask for a top-floor room looking towards Mt Elbrus.

**Hotel Pyatigorsk** (☎ 36703; ul Kraynegogo 43/1; s/d R260-840, s/d lyux from R780/1560; Ⓟ) Not a pretty place but it is cheap; odd numbers share bathrooms while evens have their own. The financially desperate can sleep on a sofa in a lounge for R130. There are exchange and air ticketing offices.

## Eating

**Art Café Nostalgia** (☎ 57051; pr Kirova 56; meals R110-580) More a statement of the new (European) Russia than a hark to the past. It's an elegantly designed café with a relaxed atmosphere either inside or on its covered

terrace. Service is attentive, with maybe an English-speaking waiter, and the food is light but ample and subtle in taste.

**Goldfish** (Zolotaya Ribka; ul Kraynegogo 59; meals R70-200) A jungle of rampant vines almost covers this sunken garden leaving hide-hole shelters containing wonky plastic tables. House speciality is the Goldfish salad – shrimps, salmon caviar, salad vegetables and a cognac dressing; afternoon tea is served with large lumps of Turkish delight.

**Kafé Panorama** (☎ 352 926; off Teplosernaya ul; meals R60-150) From humble railway carriage beginnings, Kafé Panorama has metamorphosed into a large swanky restaurant for those out for a night of dining, wining and dancing. The band hasn't changed; they've just cranked up the volume and added modern pop to their wild Armenian rhythms. The Armenian cuisine specialises in shashlyks and kebabs; try the *lulya*, a ground mutton or chicken kebab that melts in the mouth. It's best to take a taxi (R50).

**Kafe Terek** (ul Kraynegogo 49; meals R50-140; ☎ stolovaya 8am-5pm, restaurant 8am-midnight) This top-floor place operates as both a *stolovaya* (canteen) with a counter buffet and as an à la carte restaurant. If you're in for a quick feed go for the buffet and you have a choice of inside or terrace dining.

**Foxhole** (ul Kraynegogo 49; meals R22-50; ☎ 10am-midnight) In the basement of Kafe Terek, Foxhole has dark hideaways for intimate conversations or shady deals, or a more lighted area for dining. Bliny come with almost anything – cabbage, bacon, apricots, cherries or salmon caviar.

**Kafe Tet-a-Tet** (2nd fl, Tsvetnik Exhibition Hall; pr Kirova 23) The upper-level outside gallery provides a circle view on life below while all sorts of coffee and 34 varieties of tea plus yummy cakes provide the refreshments. The exquisite chocolate drink needs to be spooned rather than drunk.

## Shopping

**Block Post** (☎ 974 090; ul Dzerzhinskogo 37; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) Sells military and police gear plus some camping equipment. For about R300 you can buy one of those black-peaked hats with tops as big as dinner plates, worn by anyone with a uniform in Russia.

**Upper Market** (ul Levanevskogo; ☎ 7am-4pm Tue-Sun). This sells nearly everything and is a good place to look for footwear.

## Getting There & Away

Services from the **bus station** (☎ 53432; ul Punitimoviche 34) go to Nalchik (R66, two hours, 11 buses daily), Mineralnye Vody (R20, 40 minutes, five buses and five *marshrutky* daily) and Teberda (R162, 3½ hours, 3.35pm).

*Marshrutka* 113 leaves from Upper Market for Zheleznovodsk (R14, 20 minutes, frequent).

All trains from Kislovodsk stop at Pyatigorsk **train station** (☎ 50291; ul Oktyabrskaya). Add about 45 minutes to Kislovodsk departure times (see p472). The **service bureau** (☎ 351 334; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-8pm) will book your advance ticket while you sit in comfort.

## Getting Around

Tram 4 connects the train station with the town centre through pr Kirova. A taxi to Mineralnye Vody airport should cost R260.

## KISLOVODSK КИСЛОВОДСК

☎ 87937 5-digit numbers, 8793 6-digit numbers / pop 133,000 / elevation 822m / ☎ Moscow Kislovodsk (Sour Waters), the most popular of the resorts, is hillier, greener, prettier but more expensive than Pyatigorsk. 'Love affairs that begin at the foot of Mashuk reach happy endings here', Lermontov wrote. If you're not staying in Kislovodsk then come for a day trip.

## Orientation

The train station and Narzan Gallery at the eastern and western ends of ul Karla Marksa, respectively, link the centre with Kurortny Park spreading to the south. The bus station is on the Essentuki road on the northern edge of town.

The Kartinform Kislovodsk map (R40 from any kiosk or bookshop) shows the extensive walking trails.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Bukinist** (☎ 50214; ul Karla Marksa 3; ☎ 9am-6pm) Maps and art albums.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Narzan Network** (☎ 61000; pl Oktyabrskaya; per hr R44; ☎ 8am-8pm) Upstairs in the post office.

### MONEY

**APB Bank** (bul Kurortny) Opposite Narzan Gallery. MasterCard and Visa ATM.

**Sberbank** (☎ 61515; ul Kujbisheva 51; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm) Cashes travellers cheques and currency.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

**Kavkaz Photo** (☎ 20803; bul Kurortny 6; ☎ 10am-8pm) Film, processing, printing digital photos and downloading to CD.

## POST

**Main post and telephone office** (☎ 61000; Oktyabrskaya pl; ☎ post office 8am-8pm, telephone centre 7am-11pm)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Circus ticket office** (☎ 59658; ul Karla Marksa 1; tickets R150-200; ☎ 9am-6pm) Next to Bukinist; performances Saturday and Sunday at noon and 4pm.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**KMV** (KMB; ☎ 976 047; bul Kurortny 2; ☎ 8am-7pm) Airline ticketing.

## Sights

### NARZAN BATHS & GALLERY

The main **Narzan Baths** (bul Kurortny 4) are in a 1903 Indian temple-style building. Bathing in Narzan ('Drink of Brave Warriors' in Turkish) is said to prolong life and ease pain but you'll have to wait as the building is closed due to dodgy ceilings.

The rich, carbonic Narzan Spring bubbles up inside a glass dome and feeds 12 drinking fountains in the graceful, well-preserved 1850s **Narzan Gallery** (Narzannaya galereya; ☎ 50352; Kurortny Park; admission free ☎ 7-9am, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm) designed by English architect S Upton. Visitors who know Bath, England, another mineral springs watering place, will immediately recognise the architectural style executed in the same warm yellow stone.

### KURORTNY PARK

From June to August, this flower-covered park is filled with street artists, musicians, chess players and holidaymakers toting water bottles to and from the springs. Numerous stalls selling art and craft make this an open-air art gallery. The central feature is a semicircle **colonnade**, opposite which, up some steps, is a **Lermontov statue**. Caged in a grotto below is the **demon** from Lermontov's famous poem, *The Demon*, believed to be Lermontov's troubled alter ego.

Various forested paths then thread their way along the riverbank and uphill towards

Mt Maloe Sedlo. Most are numbered and signed as they're part of the exercise regime prescribed by the sanatoriums. The Kislovodsk map shows these walks.

The energetic option is to climb Mt Maloe Sedlo and catch the cable car down. The lazier option is to get a taxi to Ordzhonikidze Sanatorium and walk 500m to the **cable car** (kanatnaya doroga; ☎ 65691; adult/child one way R50/30; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm winter & 10am-1pm & 2-6pm summer) that will sweep you above tree height to the top of 1376m-high Mt Maloe Sedlo (Little Saddle), with its great panorama of valleys and plateaus. The last cable car leaves 30 minutes before closing.

If walking up, paths lead via a rose garden to the **Krasnye Kamni** (Red Rocks), col-

oured by their iron content and topped by an eagle sculpture. Further uphill are the **Serye Kamni** (Grey Rocks), featuring good views. Just past here you can slog up to **Krasnoe Solnyshko Hill** (Red Sun Hill), with possible views of Mt Elbrus.

From the top trails you can walk 5km southeast along the top to Mt Maly Dzhinal (1484m). Mt Bolshoe Sedlo (1409m) is 1km northeast. **Horse rides** (from R200) are possible.

#### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

To secure Russia's new southern frontier Catherine the Great built a line of forts along the Caucasus mountain range. Kislovodsk was one of them, and the **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 37049; per Mira

#### BOY FALLS FOR WRONG GIRL

Local legend tells the story of a girl from a rich family who fell in love with a boy from a poor family. Her father wouldn't let her marry her love as he'd promised her to an old, ugly but rich merchant. She refused the match and ran away with the boy, her family pursuing them to the edge of a cliff just outside Kislovodsk. Faced with a dilemma, the boy suggested jumping off together and ending their lives in love rather than misery. The girl agreed but said she was afraid. Her lover should jump first, she suggested, so he did – and died. Looking down at his splattered body, the girl decided not to join him and ended up marrying the old man.

11; adult/child per exhibition R30/10; ☎ 10am-6pm) is within the remaining walls of that 1803 fort. The first exhibit traces the city's history. Pushkin, Tolstoy and Lermontov were visitors and dissident writer Solzhenitsyn was born here. Disappointingly there's only one display devoted to him. The second exhibit chronicles the Great Patriotic War, Kislovodsk as a hospitable city and the six-month German occupation in 1942.

The small **Yaroshenko Museum** (Yaroshenko muzey; ☎ 31111; ul Yaroshenko 1; adult/child R40/15; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) houses the works of painter Nikolai Yaroshenko, who lived in this house surrounded by a most pleasant garden-orchard. Yaroshenko was an outstanding late-19th-century Russian artist, an incomparable portraitist and a leading proponent of Russian realism. A second building displays works of his contemporaries. An English-speaking guide is available.

Travel about 4km southeast into the valley of the Olkhovka River and you'll realise how beautiful the surrounding countryside is – a baize-green plateau cut by deep winding valleys with sides of crags and cliffs. One of these crags is Lermontovskaya Skala (Lermontov Cliff), where the climactic duel in *A Hero of Our Time* was set.

**Chaliapin House Museum** (Dom Shalyapina; ☎ 67560; adult/child R30/10; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon) is a wood and stained-glass villa near the train station. Chaliapin, the legendary Russian opera singer, lived here in 1917 and his downstairs room is devoted to photo-

graphs of his various roles. One can also admire marvellous plaster ceilings bursting with cherubs and fruit designs, and a lovely glaze-tiled chimney.

#### Tours

Pavement sellers and hotels sell excursions to Elbrus (R300, 6.30am Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday), Dombay (R300, 6.30am Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday) and Honey Waterfalls (R150, 2.30pm daily).

#### Sleeping

##### BUDGET

**Resort Bureau** (Kurortnoe byuro; ☎ 33165; train station; ☎ 7am-7pm) The bureau is an agency for several sanatoriums (accommodation and treatment R705 to R8025) and renters of rooms/apartments (from R100 to R500). A staff member can speak some English. Register your visa with the Tselebny Narzan Hotel.

**Hotel Druzhba Rostov** (☎ 66600; pr Dzerzhinskogo 22; s/d from R430/680; (P)) Some rooms have not been renovated so they're the cheapies. Advance booking is essential as the place is often full. There's a bar and restaurant.

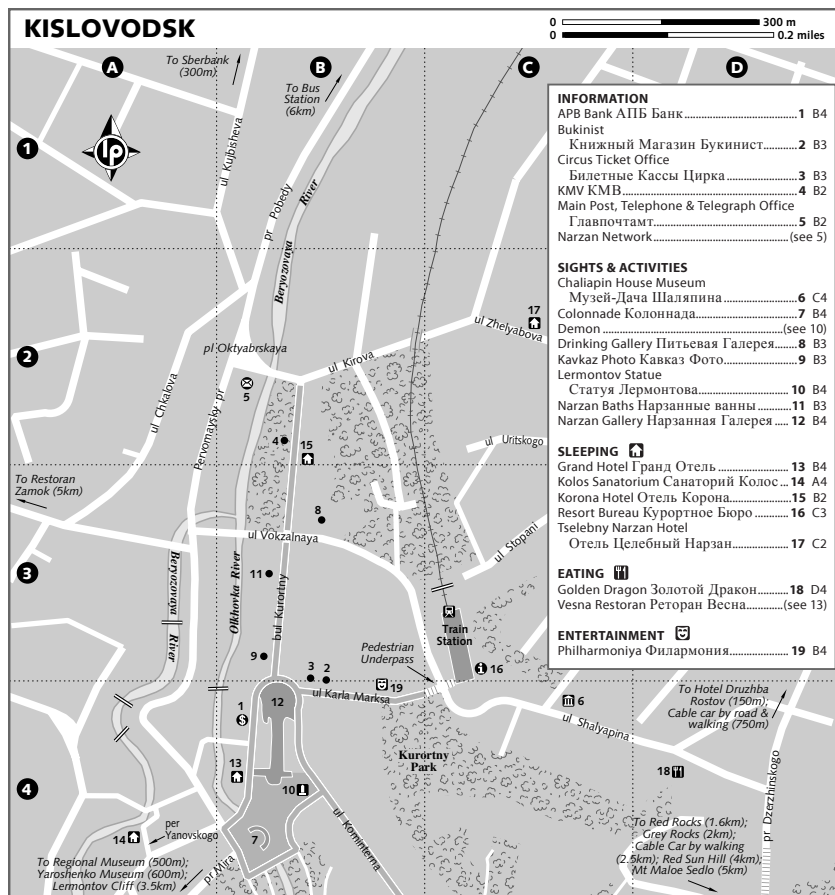
##### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Korona Hotel** (☎ 50396; koronabora@list.ru; bul Kurortnyy 5; r incl breakfast R3100; (P) ☎) The Korona is a new boutique hotel, tastefully decorated with attention to design. Apart from the usual phone/fridge/cable TV, rooms come with sofa beds for extra guests, safes and bathtubs; some have balconies. With only six rooms it's best to book.

**Tselebny Narzan Hotel** (☎ 66197; www.intourmarzan.kurortinfo.ru; ul Zhelyabova 5; full board/plus treatment

##### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Grand Hotel** (☎ 33119; grand@narzan.com; bul Kurortnyy 14; s/d incl breakfast from R980/1400) is definitely the nicest place in town with all those little extras that mark out a classy place – the smile of the receptionist, the grand entrance staircase and the readiness of the burly porter to heft two suitcases at a time up three flights of stairs. The rooms are well-furnished and spacious bathrooms come with bathtubs and hairdryer. The 3rd floor's the best; a lightly tinted blue glass roof makes you feel the sun is always shining when you come out of your room.





### TRAIN SERVICES FROM KISLOVODSK

From Kislovodsk's attractive **train station** (☎ 52270; ul Vokzalnaya) there's a frequent weekday *elektrichka* service through Essentuki (R11, 30 minutes) to Pyatigorsk (R16.50, 50 minutes) and Mineralnye Vody (R38.50, 1¾ hours); weekends only have three trains (11am, 4pm and 9.05pm). Major distance trains:

Destination	Train	Departures	Frequency	Duration	Fare
Kyiv	25	11.38am	evens	28½hr	R1250
Minsk	145	3.11pm	odds	40hr	R1430
Moscow	3	7.10pm	daily	27½hr	R1990
Moscow*	27	7.42pm	daily	35hr	R2840
Sochi	642	5.52pm	daily summer	14½hr	R760
St Petersburg	49	4.50pm	daily	46hr	R2660

\* via Ukraine

s R1950/2300, d R2300/3000, deluxe R5000; (P) (B) (M) (L) 'Either this wallpaper goes or I do': Oscar Wilde. The wallpaper stayed – they were his dying words – and is now on the walls of this hotel. Unless you have a Wilde temperament you can forgive the hotel's choice. All rooms are more than adequate; deluxe rooms have add-on sitting rooms and Jacuzzis. The hotel is a visa registration agency (R350) with exchange and plane ticketing counters. There's a sauna (nonguests per hour R50).

**Kolos Sanatorium** (☎/fax 31112; per Yanovskogo 7; full board s from R895-2500, d from R1320-4160) This is one of the few sanatoriums to accept foreigners. Medically they deal with heart, circulation, joints and nerves through mud baths, hot Narzan baths and shock showers (like being doused with a fire hose).

### Eating

**Golden Dragon** (Zolotoy Drakon; ☎ 67002; ul Shalyapina 12; meals R140-400) Tired of shashlyk? Golden Dragon's menu of Korean and Japanese food might tempt you. Attention to service, endless tea, hot towels, little plates and warmers for different dishes make you feel wanted. Live music and dancing begin after 7pm.

**Vesna Restoran** (☎ 33119; bul Kurortnyy 14; meals R80-250) The Grand Hotel's restaurant has first-class food and service. The menu in English offers a 'fragrant salting from the chief' for R85, although we didn't investigate further. On warm summer nights the restaurant spreads its tables outside and a man at a piano entertains the diners.

**Restoran Zamok** (☎ 34609; Alikonovskoe ushelje; dishes R210-400; ☎ noon-late; (B)) This modern

castle, 7km west of Kislovodsk in the Alikonovka gorge, was built to trade on the local legend of treachery and love (see the boxed text, p479). It's a favoured place for locals, visitors and wedding parties. The restaurant setting is pseudomedieval, the dishes are Georgian and the wine is hellishly expensive. A taxi should cost about R70.

The **café** (☎ 10am-6pm) on top of Mt Maloe Sedlo provides good shashlyk, salad and *lavash* (flat bread) plus big glasses of home-made wine. Eat on the balcony and look down on Kislovodsk.

### Entertainment

**Philharmoniya** (☎ 20422; ul Karla Marksa 1; tickets R90-1000) Founded in 1895, the Philharmoniya presents concerts, opera, musical and comedy events in a beautiful baroque and neoclassical auditorium.

### Getting There & Away

Services from the **bus station** (☎ 41161; ul Promyshlennaya 4) head to Anapa (R510, 13 hours, 6pm), Gelendzhik (R539, 15½ hours, 2pm even dates) and Krasnodar (R381, 10 hours, 12.40pm) via Mineralnye airport. *Marshrutky* leave from the train station for Pyatigorsk (R60, 7.30am to 1pm, frequent service).

A taxi to Dombay costs R1600 to R2500.

### ZHELEZNOVODSK ЖЕЛЕЗНОВОДСК

☎ 86532 / pop 29,000 / ☎ Moscow

The smallest spa town, Zheleznovodsk (Iron Waters) lies at the foot of Mt Zheleznaya (852m) on the northern side of Mt Beshtau.

It's an ideal half-day trip from Pyatigorsk by *marshrutka*. Get off on ul Lenina, where the pleasant park spreads up the mountain towards natural forest. Zheleznovodsk waters are used for digestive, kidney and metabolic problems.

Before walking up, have a nose around the red-and-white-striped 1893 **Ostrovsky Baths** (Ostrovskiy Vanny). They've been closed for a while but of particular interest is the Islamic influence – pointed arches, a pseudo minaret and decorative Arabic calligraphy.

Another beautiful building is the blue-and-white, iron-and-glass **Pushkin Gallery** (Pushkinskaya galereya), imported as a prefabricated building from Warsaw and erected in 1901. A companion to Pyatigorsk's Lermontov Gallery, it's a similar exercise in elegance and composition.

Another Islamic-influenced gem nearby is the Emir of Bukhara's blue-and-yellow late-19th-century palace, now part of **Telman Sanatorium** (Sanatory Telmana) complex. Lenin's wife and sister received treatment here.

Of the resort's 54 springs, only four remain, three with the same water. Others have run dry or fallen into disrepair. To see how the place looked in its heyday, visit the **local museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 42602; ul Lermantova 3; adult/child R10/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) across from Telmana Sanatorium. It has a good photograph collection.

## CENTRAL CAUCASUS ЦЕНТРАЛЬНЫЙ КАВКАЗ

The two mountain destinations most visited by foreigners for wonderful skiing, hiking and climbing are Dombay and Elbrus, accessible from Pyatigorsk, Kislovodsk and Nalchik.

Anyone considering hiking or climbing in this area should read *Trekking in the Caucasus* by Yury Kolomiets and Alexey Solovyev.

### DOMBAY ДОМБАЙ

☎ 87872 / elevation 1600m / ☎ Moscow

Zooming through a winding narrow and forested valley, visitors to Dombay are

### THE CAUCASUS RANGE

The remarkable 1100km-long Caucasus mountain range is 25 million years old and is a geographical, political and ethnic boundary, its watershed forming Russia's southern frontier with Abkhazia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The range is littered with glaciers, about 2000 of them, most edging down the northern side, and some are 13km or 14km long, especially in the middle third of the ranges where they are narrowest and the peaks highest. There are 200 peaks over 4000m, 30 over 4500m and seven over 5000m. Russia is proud of its highest European mountain – Mt Elbrus (5642m); Mont Blanc, highest in Western Europe at 4807m, is exceeded by 15 Caucasus peaks.

suddenly confronted with a sheer wall of mountains crowned with white shark-teeth summits. This is the heart of the Caucasus. Only those blasé about mountains would fail to be knocked off their perches by this stupendous vista.

Not only can you gawk from the bottom but also easily at 3000m, where you can scan snow peaks, glaciers and distant views.

Skiing, walking, hiking, climbing and plain sightseeing are what attract visitors. New hotels and cafés are being built for an increasing number of visitors; during the peak ski season, late December to April, hotels can be full and prices can triple.

Dombay is at the heart of **Teberdinsky Nature Reserve** (admission R20) which is rich in flora and fauna, see the boxed text, p483.

### Orientation

Three deep valleys watered by glacier-fed torrents – Alibek from the west, Amanauz from the south and Dombay-Yolgen from the east – meet here to flow north, eventually as the Teberda River. Straddling both sides of the Amanauz River is the village of Dombay. From here a cable car and four chairlifts ascend the Mussa-Achitara (Horse Thief) ridge to the east. Kiosks by the bottom cable car station sell maps.

### Information

The closeness of the Abkhazia border means that foreigners require permits for



anywhere other than the village environs and Mussa-Achitara ridge. Come with enough roubles. Hotel Gornye Vershiny has an ATM and exchanges foreign currency.

**BARS** (BARC; ☎ 58223; bars@dombai.info; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) Accommodation booking, excursions, guides, climbing, ski hire and border permit arrangement.

**Rescue Post** (Spasatel'naya Sluzhba; ☎ 58138;

☎ 24hr) Emergency help, plus advice on more technical hikes and climbs. Summer guide service except mid-July–August.

**Tourist Service** (☎ 58238; express@dombai.info.ru; per hr R100 ☎ 8am-11pm) Internet access, foreigner registration, border permit arrangement, excursions, hotel booking, ski hire and lessons, heliskiing, paragliding, rafting and kayaking.

**www.dombai.info** Infrequently updated but with some nonperishable information and photographs.

## Sights & Activities

### MUSSA-ACHITARA

Thrusting up the north side of the Dombay-Yolgen Valley, the 3012m-high Mussa-Achitara ridge provides magnificent skiing and views around the Dombay peaks, valleys and glaciers.

Access is by four **chairlifts** (per stage R100; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun) and a **cable car** (☎ 58238; adult/child R200/100; ☎ 9am-5pm high season, 9am-11am & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun low season). An additional cable car should be completed for 2006. Take chairlift 1 (1600–1700m) and 2 (1700–2260m) to the upper cable car station. Alternatively, take the cable car from near Hotel Solnechnaya Dolina. Chairlifts 3 (2260–2500m) and 4 (2500–3000m) complete the ascent.

### SKIING

Excellent skiing, similar to the European Alps, is possible from November until late May. There are good long, steep runs for experienced skiers from the Mussa-Achitara ridge down to 1620m. Plenty of terrain exists for ski touring if you have a local guide, but beware of avalanches. Ski equipment and snowboards can be rented at hotels or travel agencies.

### WALKS & HIKES

The following routes require a border permit (free), obtainable from one of the

## FLORA AND FAUNA

Altitude, climate ranges and inaccessibility have made the Caucasus extremely rich in flora and fauna. Three progressions of vegetation exist. By the coast and at lower altitudes temperate rainforest dominates with oak, beech and chestnut. Ancient groves of yew remain in places like the Teberdinsky Nature Reserve, along with gigantic 600-year-old beeches and a species of grass higher than a human. Conifer forests dominate with increasing altitude and above the tree line subalpine meadows are home to many flowering species and rhododendron bushes. Higher still, alpine grasslands have many endemic low-growing perennials.

Bear, wolf, wild boar, lynx, jackal, ibex, deer, tur (wild Caucasian goat), chamois and wild sheep populate the Caucasus. European bison, locally once extinct, have been reintroduced into the Teberda Reserve. The casual visitor is unlikely to see any of these except goat and bison, as they inhabit the large, wild, unpopulated tracts of the Caucasus. Birdlife is equally rich, especially with predators, including eagles, hawks and black griffon vultures.

travel agencies. A guide is essential for journeys near the border as some of the most spectacular sights are tricky to get to; you need to cross glaciers and torrential rivers. Plus there's a bear population. The hardy, friendly (somewhat English-speaking) guides at the rescue post know the terrain well and can give advice. Remember, these people are responsible for rescuing you if you get lost.

## Chuchkhur Waterfalls & Ptysh Valley

It's an easy scenic 6km walk from the start of chairlift 1 to two fine waterfalls on the Chuchkhur River. First, follow the vehicle track and then branch across Russkaya Polyana clearing; it's another two hours (5km) to the first set of waterfalls. Past the waterfalls, a steep path leads towards Chuchkhur Pass. Twenty minutes downstream from the falls, a path forks south for a steady 2km walk up Severny (North) Ptysh Valley and another waterfall, this one over 70m high.

## Amanauz Valley

A marked trail, steep in parts, leads south from the Dombay housing area and goes for about 4km, up through two sets of woods to a waterfall and Chyortova Melnitsa (Devil's Mill) viewpoint.

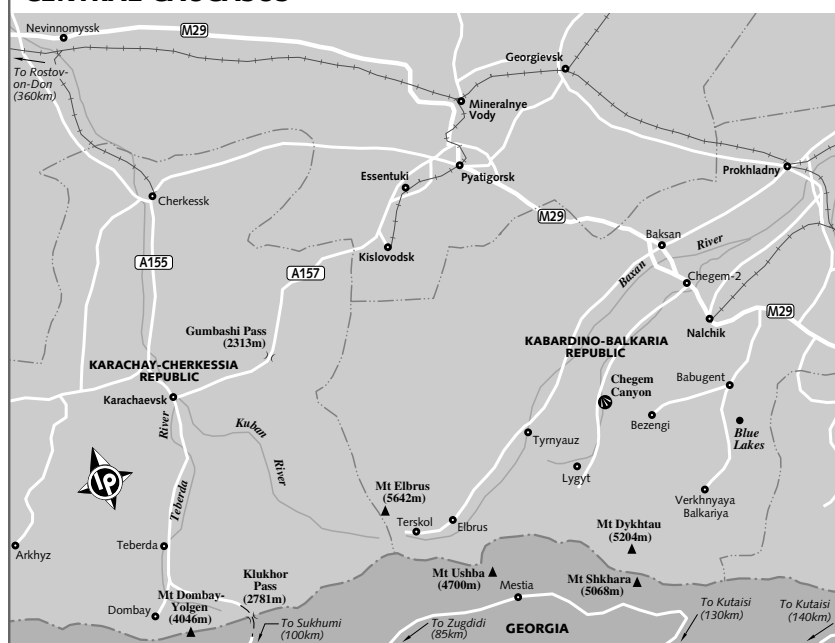
## Alibek Glacier

The track behind Hotel Solnechnaya Dolina leads 6km up Alibek Valley to a mountaineers' hostel, passing a climbers' cemetery after 2km. From the hostel a path ascends to little Lake Turie near Alibek Glacier, 9km from Dombay. A strenuous variation is to fork left from the path after the hostel, and head through woods to the dramatic Alibek Falls. If you cross the dodgy bridge at the foot of the falls and then scramble up the left side you can walk on the glacier and up the scree on its right side to Lake Turie.

## CLIMBS

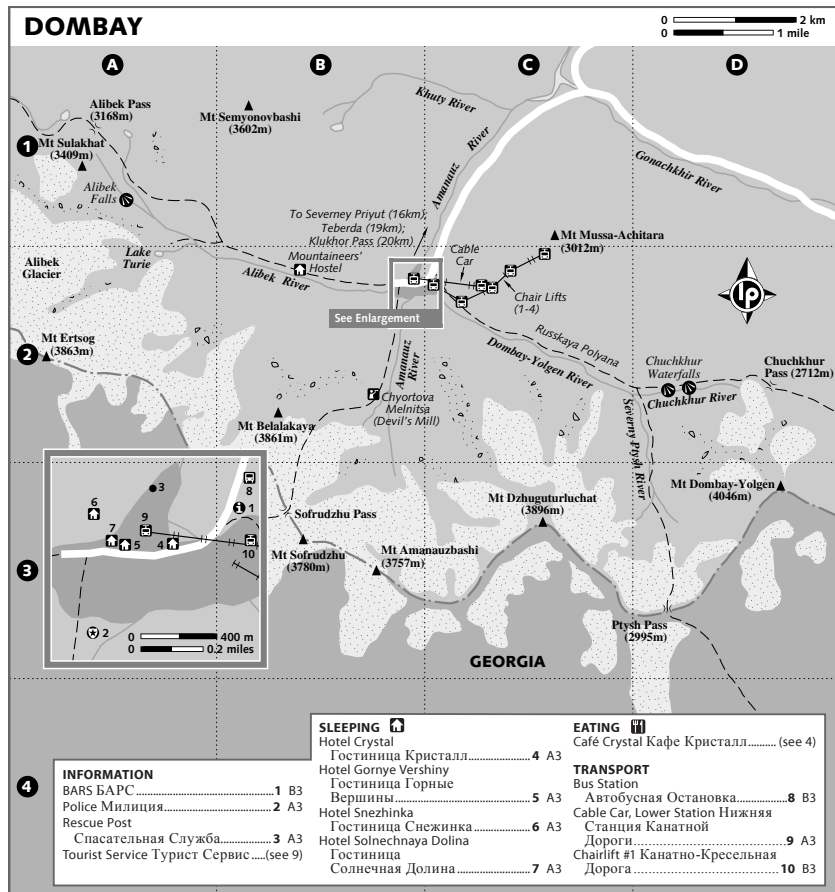
Peaks that can be tackled from Dombay include Sofrudzhu (3780m), Dombay-Yolgen (4046m), Sulakhat (3409m) and Semyonovbashi (3602m) above Alibek Valley.

## CENTRAL CAUCASUS



0 50 km  
0 30 miles





While the rescue post could provide some information, it's more useful for climbers to come in organised groups or to hire a guide from one of the local travel agencies.

## Tours

The travel agencies and hotels organise tours. Included are walks (R150 to R375, four to nine hours) to various waterfalls and lakes, and jeep excursions (R200 to R400, three to seven hours) to more distant lakes, waterfalls and medieval castle ruins.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Snezhinka** (Snowflake; ☎ 54321; dombay@ok.ru; d/lyux R1000/3500, 4-person cottage R12,000; 🍷 🚿) Just behind Hotel Solnechnaya Dolina, this

is one of the nicest of Dombay's hotels. Rooms are doubles only and there is a romantic three-storey wood-panelled cottage with open fire. Bar, restaurant, sauna and billiards complete the picture.

**Hotel Solnechnaya Dolina** (Sunny Valley; ☎ 58269; solndol@mail.ru; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast & dinner from R1000/2000/3000/3600; 🍷 🚿) Built in 1936 as the first hotel in Dombay, this picturesque and friendly place is made entirely of wood and without nails in the manner of north Russian buildings. A hint of pine resin pervades the air. Rooms are all well kitted out and *lyux* come with sitting rooms. Ski equipment can be hired here.

**Hotel Crystal** (☎ 58555; r low/high season from R800/1000, cottages R500/700; 🍷 🚿) The Cryst-

al is a friendly new hotel with standard rooms sharing bathrooms and good luxury wood-panelled rooms with balconies and mountain views. Cottages are simple rooms with shared bathrooms.

**Hotel Gornye Vershiny** (Mountain Peaks; ☎/fax 58230; d summer/winter R400/450, full board plus R200, deluxe from R1300, lyux R2400; 🍷 🚿) Despite being a relic of the Soviet love affair with concrete monstrosities, this hotel is popular with groups as it's cheap. Rooms are somewhat basic and timeworn, but it's the facilities that score – money exchange and ATM, sauna, bowling alley, disco in winter, free guided walks, skiing and snowboarding instruction with English- and German-speaking guides.

During peak seasons Dombay is blessed with a multitude of cafés and food stalls around the village, cable car stations and chairlift stops.

**Café Crystal** (meals R110-200; ☎ 9am-midnight) The smell of good cooking will lead you through the porch into a cosy room with refectory tables, where groups of Russians come to eat, tell tall stories, sink vodka and sing; expect to be invited in.

## Shopping

The local babushka knitting-circle has stalls all around the village and chairlift stations selling their output of shawls (R150 to R2000), socks (R30 to R100) and felt Georgian-style hats (R50 to R400).

## Getting There & Away

Public transport is very limited; a daily *marshrutka* departs Dombay's bus station for Cherkessk (R150, three hours, 8.30am) and returns at 1.30pm. Alternatives are an expensive taxi (up to R2500) or a day excursion from Kislovodsk or Pyatigorsk.

These excursions take you over the 2313m Gumbashi Pass, with gobsmacking views of Mt Elbrus lording it above the whole mountain chain. The coach stops for photographs. Arrange with the tour leader or driver to return another day but remember that the tours aren't daily. Take your passport for crossing borders between the republics.

## TEBERDA ТЕБЕРДА

☎ 87872 / ☎ Moscow  
Teberda, 20km north of Dombay, is home to the **Teberdinsky Nature Reserve Headquarters** (☎ 51261; admission R15; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm). The re-

serve has a nature museum and a small zoo that are covered by the entrance fee. There's decent **accommodation** (☎ 51433; per person with shared bathroom R200-250) in pleasant wood-lined rooms that come with a sitting room. Walks to the **Dzhamagatskie Narzany mineral springs** – west up Dzhamagat Valley and around seven hours for the round trip – start here, as do those to **Mukhinsky Pass** (east). You'll need a border permit for most of the walks and also a permit (R5) from the Nature Reserve headquarters. The reserve can provide guides for groups (five minimum) for R300 a day.

## NALCHIK НАЛЬЧИК

☎ 86622 / pop 283,000 / ☎ Moscow  
Nalchik, pleasant capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, strides the rise of the steppes to the foothills of the Caucasus. It was founded as a fort in 1822 to protect Russian advances into the Caucasus. Apart from a worthwhile museum and a side trips to Chegem Canyon and some medieval villages, visitors come to Nalchik to reach Mt Elbrus.

## Orientation

Two parallel streets, pr Lenina and pr Shogentsukova, run southwest through the centre from the train station on Osetinskaya ul. Kiosks on pr Lenina sell the excellent Kartinform Nalchik map that includes regional and detailed Elbrus maps.

## Information

### BORDER PERMITS

**Border police** (Pogranzastava; ☎ 916 510; Kabardinskaya ul 192; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) See the boxed text, p487, for further details on permits.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Internet café** (☎ 426 345; pr Lenina 41; per hr R40, after 1MB per MB R2.80; ☎ 10am-8pm).

### MONEY

**Sberbank** (☎ 426 836; ul Khuranova 9; ☎ 9.15am-1pm & 2-3.30pm) Cashes travellers checks, changes currency.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

**Smart** (☎ 423 010; pr Lenina 20; ☎ 9am-8pm) Burn to CD/print digital per photo R3/10.

### POST & TELEPHONE

**Main post & telephone office** (☎ 425 989; pr Shogentsukova 14; ☎ 8am-9pm) Has Internet access on 1st fl, per hr R35.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Air Communications Agency** (Agentstvo Vozdushnykh Soobsheny; ☎ 423 326; ul Lenina 43; 🕒 8am–6pm) Air ticketing.

**KMV** (KMB; ☎ 440 470; pr Lenina 32; 🕒 9am–7pm) Air ticketing; in the foyer of Hotel Rossiya.

## Sights

The interesting **Kabardino-Balkar National Museum** (Natsionalny muzey; ☎ 776 880; ul Gorkogo 62; admission R10, camera/video R30/100; 🕒 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sat) has a good 3-D topographical map of the mountains. Displays cover natural history, prehistory, origins of the Kabardian and Balkarian peoples, the Russian conquest and the industrial development of the state.

A large, fine park with a permanent **fairground** (pr Shogentsukova; 🕒 9am–dusk) stretches over 2km south of town. A **chairlift** (one way R40; 🕒 11am–7pm Mon, 9am–7pm Tue–Sun) crosses a lake to wooded hills and the Restaurant Sosruko.

If you're passing, the **Art Gallery** (Izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv; ☎ 423 778; pr Lenina 35; admission R10; 🕒 10am–6pm Sat–Thu) is worth the entrance fee for its rotating exhibitions of local art.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Grand Caucasus Hotel** (☎ 477 266; grand\_kavkas@mail.ru; ul Tarchokova 2; s/d incl breakfast from R1500/2000; 📍) In a wooded suburb southwest of town, this is the stateliest hotel in Nalchik. A carpeted grand staircase sweeps you upstairs to a mixture of fine rooms. Third-floor front rooms have big balconies for viewing the park.

**Hotel Rossiya** (☎ 775 378; pr Lenina 32; r R600–2100) The central Rossiya has improved since being renovated but guests still don't get any water between 11pm and 5am. Front rooms have little balconies from where guests can

address the early-morning assembly of stray dogs or lounging taxi drivers.

**Restaurant Sosruko** (☎ 720 070; off Profsoyuznaya ul; meals R100–345; 🕒 10am–late) This architecturally unusual restaurant, perched upon a hill, comprises the head of Sosruko (see boxed text, left), an outstretched arm and hand holding a flame. The restaurant is in the head, from where diners can gaze over the Caucasus range and see an ever-changing canvas of moody weather. An outdoor terrace leads to the top chairlift station. Order the Sosruko special, a concoction of mince, mushrooms and herbs in a pastry pear.

**Children's World** (pr Lenina; meals R60–220; 🕒 9am–9pm) Never mind the figure of a bearded, hook-handed pirate that greets you by the outline of a pirate ship, as this is not strictly a children's hang-out. Located by Hotel Rossiya, this department store does nice things with ice cream and fruit and is also a full-blown bar. Delectable cakes, snacks, salads and hamburgers are also on offer.

**Café Darida** (ul Pushkina 66a; meals R25–85; 🕒 8am–6.30pm) This *stolovaya*-café with cheap eats is near the Rossiya and is good for breakfast.

**Supermarket Bosfor Elbrus** (☎ 420 265; pr Lenina 43; 🕒 9am–9pm) Stock up for visits to Elbrus.

## Shopping

**Cherkess House** (☎ 426 171; pr Lenina 49; 🕒 9am–7pm) This shop sells all manner of Cherkessian items such as Cossack coats complete with breast pockets for gun cartridges (R7000), hats (R500 to R4000) and drinking vessels.

## Getting There & Away

There are daily flights to Moscow Vnukovo (R4030). A taxi to the airport is R70.

Buses from the **bus station** (☎ 915 923; ul Gagarina 124) serve Pyatigorsk (R70, 2½ hours, 11 buses daily), Kislovodsk (R75, 2½ hours, 1.10am, 10.40am and 5.05pm) and Mineralnye Vody (R75, 2½ hours, five daily).

From the **train station** (☎ 774 110; ul Osetinskaya) an *elektrichka* runs to Mineralnye Vody (R42, 3¾ hours, 7.16am). Train 41 to Moscow (R2100, 38 hours, 3.25pm) passes through Rostov (R900, 13 hours) and a section splits off to Sochi (R950, 16½ hours).

## AROUND NALCHIK

Turn southwest at Chegem-2, 17km northwest of Nalchik, to reach the **Chegem Canyon**. The spectacular part of the canyon is 44km

## BORDER PERMITS – AN ENCOUNTER WITH BUREAUCRACY

Free permits are issued by the Border Police (Pogranzastava) in Nalchik (p485). Life could be easier, like being on an organised tour where all this is done for you, but solo you'll need three copies of an application form completed in Russian. Detail your routes, dates, who's going – full names, dates of birth, citizenship and passport details. All of this is best done with an interpreter; it takes two days and don't be surprised if a small payment is suggested to ease matters along.

up the valley, just past the 30m **Chegem Waterfall**. The canyon is 250m high but only 20m wide, through which both river and road squeeze. The waterfall is spectacular after the snow melts in mid-June.

Verkhny Chegem, another 20km on, has several archaeological sites, including **Lyygt village** with stone mausoleums dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries. Within the village is an 18th-century three-storey defensive tower.

## ELBRUS AREA ПРИЕЛЪБРУСЬЕ

☎ 86638 / elevation (Terskol) 2085m /

📍 Moscow

Mt Elbrus rises imperiously on a northern spur of the Caucasus ridge at the end of the Baksan Valley. Surrounding it and flanking the valley are mountains that are lesser in height but equally awe-inspiring.

The tourist facilities that are littered along the valley floor make this potential Switzerland less attractive. Terskol is a disgrace, with its decrepit buildings, half-built or demolished constructions and a scrap yard of rusting steel work. But visitors come for the majestic mountains where there's energetic skiing, exciting hikes and climbing.

The area – known in Russian as Prielbruse – pulls in a more adventurous crowd than Dombay, but day-trippers can use chairlifts or cable cars to reach the slopes of Mt Elbrus, or they can view its peaks from across the valley. Given the visa registration and border permit complexities, most foreign tourists come on a prearranged tour group.

## Orientation

The road ends at Azau where the cable car starts up Mt Elbrus which can't be seen from the ground. In busy times stalls sell the knitting output of the local babushkas – mohair mittens, socks and sweaters – and smoky barbecues churn out shashlyks. A few cafés open all year and there's one hotel.

About 3km downhill is Terskol village with a few hotels, basic shops and a post office. Another 1.5km downhill is Cheget Polyana at the base of Cheget mountain. With new private hotels, cafés and market stalls, this little village is a more attractive proposition than Terskol.

The Kartinform Nalchik map includes a good Elbrus map; other maps are available from stalls in Cheget Polyana.

## Information

There are no police stations in Cheget, Terskol or Azau. The **Turbaza Terskol Hotel** (☎ 71140; Terskol) does have a MasterCard and Visa ATM.

**Doctor on call** (☎ 71103) There is no doctor's surgery, the doctor comes to you.

**Police** (☎ 71102)

**Post and telephone office** (☎ 71222; Terskol; 🕒 post 9am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat) The telephone section is open 24 hours and Internet is available until 8pm (per hr R60). Most hotels have international payphones.

**Rescue post** (Spasatel'naya Sluzhba; ☎ 71489; Terskol; 🕒 24hr) Handles mountain rescue.

## Sights & Activities

### MT ELBRUS

Mt Elbrus, enigmatically unusual with two peaks – the western at 5642m and eastern at 5621m – bulges nearly 1000m above anything else in the vicinity. It's Europe's highest mountain, lying on the Caucasus ridge that is the geographical divide between Europe and Asia. This volcanic cone has upper slopes reputedly coated in ice up to 200m thick; numerous glaciers grind down its flanks and several rivers start here. The name 'Elbrus', meaning Two Heads, comes from Persian while in Balkar it's 'Mingi-Tau' (meaning 'thousands', ie very big mountain).

The first, unconfirmed climb of Mt Elbrus was in 1829 by a Russian expedition with Killar, a lone Circassian hunter hired as a guide, apparently reaching the peak on his own. The lower peak was officially climbed on 31 July 1868 and the western

## LOCAL HERO

Like many other peoples in prehistory, Kabardians enjoyed their fires for warmth, cooking and defence. One day an evil giant called Inizh Nezakve came and stole their fire. The Kabardians suffered for many years until a hero, born out of a large stone, rose up. He was named Sosruko and grew up to meet his destiny – a fight with Nezakve. Victorious, of course, he returned with fire for his people.







little Bashkarinskoe Lake at the head of Adylsu Valley; it's a day-walk destination.

Another day walk is along **River Yusengi Valley**, south of Baydaev. For more adventure and a spot of camping (or paying US\$20 to stay at the Alpine base) there are longer walks south from Baksan up the **River Adyrso**.

## Tours

Rather than being just folk in offices selling tickets, the agencies below are either active tour arrangers and leaders or providers of specialist services for climbers, skiers and hikers.

**Adventure Alternative** (☎ 44-2890-70 1476; www.adventurealternative.com) UK company; organises Mt Elbrus climbs.

**Elbrus Navigator** (☎ 71424; elbrus@nm.ru; Terskol; ☎ 9am-9pm) Arranges foreigner visa registration, border permits, Mt Elbrus ascents, equipment hire, ski instruction, local excursions/hiking and program for the elderly. Good for dealing with all the permits.

**Go-Elbrus** (☎ 71335; www.go-elbrus.com; Terskol 5-5) Mt Elbrus ascents, trekking and heliskiing; English-speaking staff. Highly recommended.

**Lenalptours** (☎ 812-279 0716; www.russia-climbing.com; ul Vosstaniya 9-4, St Petersburg) Mt Elbrus ascents and ski tours.

**Pilgrim Tours** (☎ 495-967 3333; www.pilgrim-tours.com; Ostozhenka 41, Moscow) Located at Mt Elbrus base at the Shakhrezada Hotel in Azau. Mt Elbrus climbing tours.

**Viktor Yanchenko** (☎ 928 225 4623; Yanki-viktor@rambler.ru) English-speaking climbing and skiing guide.

**Wild Russia** (☎ 812-273 6514; www.wildrussia.spb.ru; Fontanka nab 59, St Petersburg) Mt Elbrus ascents.

## Sleeping & Eating

The busy time for Elbrus is winter up to the early May holidays and is the time for high seasonal prices.

Accommodation on Mt Elbrus itself is in the **Barrels** (☎ 903 491 8590; per person R360), a series of cylindrical huts about 200m beyond the chairlift, and at the new **Priyut 11** hut (Diesel Hut) at 4065m. Spaces are limited so book through a tour operator.

## AZAU

**Shakhrezada Hotel** (☎ 928 937 2815; Azau; r per person incl breakfast & dinner low/high season R500/600, lyux r R800/1200) Proximity makes this a favourite for climbers and hikers starting out for Mt Elbrus. All rooms are well furnished; standards have no phone or TV and

lyux have sitting rooms. The hotel plans to have Internet soon. There's a downstairs bar, bark-clad and stonewalled with tables you're encouraged to graffitii.

**Mir Bar** (meals R170-220; ☎ 9am-4pm) A bar at the cable car station for the snow-wet and cold with a large bum-warming open central fire. Once in here forget the weather, you're only two cable cars from a hot shower. Favourites here are a hefty plate of scrambled eggs, speckled with assorted vegetables and *khichin* (bread stuffed with meat or cheese) served with sour cream.

## TERSKOL

**Turbaza Terskol** (☎ 71140; r per person low/high season R430/600, lyux R580/750; ☎) The Defence Ministry hotel has cosy two-, three- and four-bed rooms in reasonable condition with full board. Facilities include a sauna, bar and cafeteria, ski equipment hire and minibus shuttle to the Azau chairlift during the ski season.

**Ming Tai Restaurant** (meals R190-370; ☎ 2pm-midnight) This Balkarian restaurant in the bowels of a large building is the only Terskol place open all year and can get hectic at the height of the season. Try the Cutlet Ming Tau that arrives on a plate like a hedgehog but hiding within is a tasty stuffing of egg, parsley and mushrooms in an unusual sauce.

## CHEGET

**Hotel Ozon-Cheget** (☎ 71453; Cheget Polyana; s/d with full board low/high season from R2790/3720, deluxe R3410/4340). Ozon is a very swish place built with a designer's flourish. It's *the* place to stay in Elbrus if you've got the means. The more expensive rooms have Jacuzzis plus open fires for winter cosiness while cold mountains loom outside the window. Standard rooms are a little less luxurious. The hotel offers fridges, satellite TV and phones in all rooms, a bar, billiards and an excellent restaurant that nonguests can use after 9pm.

**Hotel Nakra** (☎ 71357; fax 71220; Cheget Polyana; low/high season deluxe r R600/1200, lyux r R1000/1800; ☎) A possible all-year option. The Nakra has decently equipped rooms and good beds, some revelling in fluffy sheepskin blankets. Facilities include satellite TV, billiards and an expensive sauna (per hour R800). All rooms have mountain views.

**Hotel Cheget** (☎ 71400; fax 71203; s/d incl breakfast & dinner per person from R155-400) This is a huge, eight-storey ex-Soviet concrete block that's been used by tour groups for years. Consequently it's somewhat timeworn but clean and tidy. Seven- and 14-day stay visitors get chairlift passes, transfer to/from Mineralnye Vody airport and daily transfers to Azau. There's a useful cheap canteen for nonresidents and a cinema, ski equipment rental, shops and sauna.

**Café Goryanka** (meals R70-220; ☎ 7am-midnight) A locals' café, on the corner of Terskol and Cheget Polyana roads, plain but warmed by the friendly reception from the babushka owner. Leave your introduction to borsch until you get here: it'll set the standard, and servings are big enough to stand in for a meal.

## Shopping

Cheget Polyana is ringed with stalls selling kitschy souvenirs and useful things like woolly socks, sweaters, gloves and hats. Food stalls hawk shashlyk, *khichin*, *schorpa* (a Balkar soup) and soft drinks.

## Getting There & Away

Public transport is very limited. A daily *marshrutka* links Terskol and Nalchik (R200, three hours, 8am) returning at noon. Alternatively, take a taxi (R250 to R300) to Tyrnyauz and then a frequent *marshrutka* to Nalchik. Arrange with tour operators running out of Kislovodsk and Pyatigorsk to use their excursions as a means of getting to and from Elbrus.

## Getting Around

A taxi costs about R100 from Terskol to Azau or Cheget. In season plenty of *marshrutky* operate between Cheget and Azau. Otherwise walk or hitch a ride.

## NORTH OSSETIA

Lonely Planet advises against travel in North Ossetia. The state, on the fracture zone between the Russian Federation's loyal republics (of which it's one) and Chechnya, has become embroiled in the latter's tragedy. Four years of bombing incidents in the capital Vladikavkaz reached a crescendo in Beslan in September 2004. Hostage-takers, assumed to be Chechen militants, violently seized a school and held more

than 1000 children, teachers and parents hostage in a gym wired with explosives. Claim and counterclaim came from both sides as to who precipitated the massacre – militants or Russian special forces – but regardless more than 300 people died.

Most of the republic's population is Ossetian, thought to be descended from Sarmatians, an Indo-European people who arrived in the 4th century AD. They assimilated with local tribes to form the Alan state that lasted until the 13th century when the Tatars destroyed it. Some escaped deep into the mountains and by the 18th century their descendants, the Ossetians, were found mainly in the valleys west of Vladikavkaz. Ossetia was incorporated into Russia in 1774.

The other inhabitants are the Ingush. Stalin had most Ingush deported to Siberia in 1944 and incorporated western Ingushetia into North Ossetia. The Ingush were rehabilitated during Khrushchev's rule but returned home to find most of their property occupied by Ossetians.

Under Communist rule both Ossetians and Ingush coexisted peaceably, but this was an illusion. In June 1992 an autonomous Ingushetia was set up, leading to bloody clashes between Ossetians and Ingush in October 1992, with hundreds dying.

Russian forces were sent in but according to local accounts they sided with the Ossetians. Together they forced the entire Ingush population (50,000 plus) into Ingushetia to live in extremely poor conditions. Most of their houses were destroyed or confiscated and it's only in the last few years that the Ingush have been allowed to return.

Allegations that Ingush fighters were involved in the Beslan school massacre have led to renewed tensions between both communities.

While the capital Vladikavkaz has several museums, the real attractions are the arcane relics of old Ossetian settlements out in the valleys to the southwest, and the impressive mountain scenery. Dargavs, with its village of the dead, has 13th- and 14th-century family burial chambers whose occupants are still visible. Tsmity, in another valley, contains ruins of a medieval settlement.

## CHECHNYA, DAGESTAN & INGUSHETIA

Leonid Ragozin

### WHY DOES LONELY PLANET NOT GO THERE?

Only official delegations and journalists, who come on heavily guarded trips organised by the Kremlin, are allowed to visit Chechnya. Travelling to the war-torn republic independently would be like walking on the moon without a spacesuit. Neighbouring Dagestan and Ingushetia might seem more peaceful, but grim facts prove that they are almost as dangerous for foreign visitors.

### WHAT EXACTLY IS THE DANGER?

At the time of research, reports about casualties in the continuing war between Russian federal forces and the separatist Chechen guerrillas were appearing almost daily. Apart from the obvious risk of being killed in a shootout or a bomb attack, travellers in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia are exposed to the far greater risk of kidnapping. Many victims of kidnappings in this region have been brutally killed after months of torture.

The Chechen war has spilled over the borders a few times into Dagestan and Ingushetia. Although these regions are not considered war zones, they have proven to be way too dangerous for foreigners after several kidnappings of aid workers.

### WHAT IS THE CHECHEN WAR ABOUT?

The roots of the Chechen conflict stretch back to Russia's annexation of the area in the 19th century (see boxed text, p124). The current conflict, which broke out more than a decade ago, is far more complex than being just about a small nation's struggle for independence from a larger one. If you look at local opinion polls, you'll be left wondering why this war is still going on. Ordinary Chechens don't appear to be very much in favour of independence, nor do Russians seem particularly keen to keep Chechnya in their realm. Above all, both people want peace.

It is the story of lost chances. Chechnya enjoyed defacto independence twice

in 1990s, but both times moderate leaders failed to rein in gangs of kidnapers and radical Islamists, like Shamil Basayev, who has striven to outdo Osama bin Laden as a murderous terrorist. Brutal treatment of civilians and indiscriminate bombings cost the Russian troops their chance to be seen as a force liberating the republic from gangsters. The international community lost its chance to mediate the conflict through ignorance and the inability to see anything but a black-and-white picture.

Experts point out that the war is fuelled by the money made on arms trade across the frontline, illegal oil extraction and kidnappings. They say it is the dirty economy of the war that needs to be routed, before any lasting peace settlement can be achieved.

### IS THERE ANY CHANCE FOR PEACE SOON?

The last possibility of peace talks vanished with the killing of the separatists' nominal leader Aslan Maskhadov. Western governments agree that no deals can be made with Basayev, who leads the resistance, and after Iraq they have found it increasingly difficult to criticise Russia for whatever actions it takes in Chechnya.

The Kremlin understands the need to delegate more power in the republic to the Chechens themselves, including former rebels like Akhmad Kadyrov, who became Chechen president in 2003 but died in a bomb attack a year later. Experts blame the authorities for staking the chance for peace on dealings with just one clan (known as the Kadyrovtsy) instead of creating a broad coalition of people who want to end the war.

Planned local elections will show whether Moscow is keen to resolve this conflict by more democratic means, or if it will stick to the divide-and-rule policy. Even more depends on whether Moscow can help restore Chechnya's shattered economy and provide jobs to thousands of people who live in utter poverty.

### WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Russian forces nominally control all of Chechnya and there is certainly more stability than a few years ago, but the separatists' resistance is still very strong, which is reflected by nearly daily killings of policemen and troops. Putin has assigned most of

the military operations to units comprised of ethnic Chechens, many of them former rebels, led by Ramzan Kadyrov. Still in his 20s (at the time of writing), the son of the deceased leader seems to have even more power in the republic than Chechen president Alu Alkhanov.

Human rights activists blame Kadyrov for kidnapping civilians, particularly relatives of prominent guerrilla leaders. The authorities have admitted that disappearances of people are the main destabilising factor in the republic. In true Caucasus style, Kadyrov Jr has declared a blood feud on kidnapers, which many in Chechnya found quite ironic. Yet, there are signs of life slowly getting better. Residents of the Chechen capital Grozny say the clatter of builders' hammers is now heard more often than gunshot. The art museum and the puppet theatre have reopened, while in nearby Gudermes, Ramzan Kadyrov has built a modern sports centre, modestly calling it Ramzan.

### WHO ARE THE CHECHENS, THE INGUSH & THE DAGESTANI?

The Chechen and Ingush peoples are almost indistinguishable from each other, both culturally and linguistically. Under Soviet rule, they lived together in the Checheno-Ingush republic, but after Dzhokhar Dudayev proclaimed independence in 1991 (see p65), the Ingush preferred to stay within Russia and separate from the Chechens. Dagestan, which means 'mountain country' in Turkish, is an ethnographic wonder, populated by no fewer than 81 ethnic groups of different origins speaking 30 languages, mostly endemic.

The Chechen, Dagestani, Ingush and other groups in northwest Caucasus are known in Russia by the common name *gortsy* (highlanders). By reputation they are very proud, independent-minded and unruly. They live by strict codes of honour and revenge, and clan blood feuds are well entrenched in their patriarchal culture. Most of them are Sunni Muslims.

In the 19th century, the Dagestani-born religious leader Imam Shamil united most of the *gortsy* in a failed war against Russia. This kinship was broken during Soviet times, when Stalin exiled all Chechens and

Ingush to Central Asia for alleged collaboration with the Germans during WWII. Returning after Khrushchev's amnesty, many of them found the Dagestani occupying their land and houses. This created the bitterness between the groups that has increased since the Chechen incursion into Dagestan in 1999.

### ONCE IT'S SAFE TO GO, WHAT IS THERE TO SEE?

Dagestan has the most tourist sights of the three regions and is more likely to become a travel destination, although in the rather distant future. The 5000-year-old town of Derbent, on the Unesco World Heritage list, is graced by a magnificent ancient fortress and boasts an interesting multicultural population, comprising mountain Jews and Lezgins. In more peaceful times hordes of Russian tourists also used to visit beautiful mountain villages such as Gunib, which is famous for its silverware. Others preferred to bake on the sandy Caspian beaches.

In Soviet times, Checheno-Ingushetia was popular with hikers who came to see medieval clan towers standing amidst the graceful mountain landscape and to walk over mountain passes in Itum-Kale district into Georgia. Now, even after peace is restored, it will take years to clear the Chechen and Ingush mountains of mines and unexploded bombs.

### WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya's book *A Dirty War* and *Chienne de Guerre* by another fearless female war reporter, Anne Niva, are both available in English and are worth reading.

You can also find useful information on the following websites:

**Free Chechnya** ([www.chechnyafree.ru/index.php?lng=eng](http://www.chechnyafree.ru/index.php?lng=eng)) This pro-Moscow site has tons of information on Chechen life, as well as downloadable Chechen tunes for mobile phones!

**Human Rights Watch** ([www.hrw.org/campaigns/russia/chechnya/](http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/russia/chechnya/)) Remains a vocal defender of Chechen civilians against all sides in the conflict.

**War and Peace Reporting** ([www.iwpr.net/caucasus\\_index1.html](http://www.iwpr.net/caucasus_index1.html)) London-based institute with a network of stringers in the North Caucasus who provide an unbiased and detailed look on recent developments in the region.

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