

BLUelist¹ (blu,list) v.
to recommend a travel experience.

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist

THE ARTS

top picks

- Mariinsky Theatre (p188)
- Shostakovich Philharmonia (p189)
- Mariinsky Concert Hall (p189)
- Bolshoy Drama Theatre (p191)
- Bolshoy Puppet Theatre (p192)

The classical performing arts are one of the biggest draws to St Petersburg. Highly acclaimed professional artists stage productions in elegant theatres around the city, most of which have been recently revamped and look marvellous. Seeing a Russian opera or ballet in a magnificent baroque theatre makes for a magical night out, and Russian symphonic music is among the world's most moving.

While such shows remain an incredible bargain in other parts of the country, performing arts in St Petersburg is big business. The most popular theatres charge 'foreigners' prices', which are significantly more expensive than the price that locals pay. Generally speaking, even the foreigners' prices are still less than you would normally pay in the West for a similar performance, and rest assured that the cheapest tickets in the 'nosebleed' section are dirt cheap, no matter what your passport says.

Nearly all the drama is in Russian, which makes it more difficult for non-Russian-speakers to appreciate. However, the incredible 19th-century interiors and the sense of occasion surrounding the performances mean that seeing a play is an interesting night out, even if you only stay for the first half (and tickets are generally cheap enough to make this perfectly feasible).

The standard way to buy tickets is from a *teatralnaya kassa* (theatre kiosk) which are scattered about the city, from stores like Titanik (p156) or from the individual theatre box offices.

Listings and reviews appear in the *St Petersburg Times* and *In Your Pocket* (see p246).

BALLET & OPERA

Nobody has ever complained about a shortage of Russian classics at the ballet and opera. Take your pick from Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Rimsky-Korsakov or one of the other great Russian composers, and you are guaranteed to find him on the playbill at one of the theatres listed here. Choreography and staging of these classics is usually pretty traditional (some might even say uninventive), but then again, that's why they're classics.

Critics complain that the Russian renditions of well-known Western works often seem naive and overly stylised, so steer clear of Mozart. If you tire of Russian classics, keep your eye out for more modern productions and premieres, which are also staged at the Mariinsky and Mussorgsky-Mikhailovsky Theatres.

HERMITAGE THEATRE Map pp68-9

☎ 710 9030; www.hermitagemuseum.org; Dvortsovaya nab 34; 📄 Nevsky Pr

This austere neoclassical theatre – once the private theatre of the imperial family – stands on the site of the original Winter Palace of Peter I (p67). At the behest of Catherine the Great, Giacomo Quarenghi designed the theatre to resemble an amphitheatre, with statues of Apollo and the Muses occupying the niches. During the Soviet period, this hall was used more often for lectures and such, but it

reopened as a theatre in the 1980s. Appropriate for the setting, performances range from Tchaikovsky to Tchaikovsky. Some of the musical festivals (see p16) also use this venue for performances.

MARIINSKY THEATRE Map p102

☎ 326 4141; www.mariinsky.ru; Teatralnaya pl 1; tickets R300-2000; 📄 box office 11am-7pm, performances 7pm; 📄 Sennaya Pl

The most celebrated and most spectacular venue for ballet and opera in St Petersburg, the Mariinsky Theatre is an attraction in its own right, whether or not you manage to get tickets to see a performance. Known as the Kirov Ballet during the Soviet era, the dance company confusingly still tours the world under this name, as its Soviet-era association with Nureyev, Baryshnikov et al brings more ticket sales!

Despite this odd tie to the past, the current general and artistic director Valery Gergiev has led the venue bravely into the modern world. In 2004, plans were finally signed off to build a new theatre, known as Mariinsky II (see p57), behind the current building, attracting praise and derision from the usual quarters. The new venue is expected to be completed by 2009, although the original theatre will continue to function throughout the construction period. Recent artistic successes include the staging of Dmitry Shostakovich's first opera, *The Nose*.

MUSSORGSKY-MIKHAILOVSKY THEATRE Map pp68-9

☎ 545 4284; www.mikhailovsky.ru; pl Iskustsv 1; 📄 Nevsky Pr

While not quite as grand as the Mariinsky, this stage still delivers the Russian ballet or operatic experience, complete with multi-tiered theatre, frescoed ceiling and elaborate concerts. The inspiring pl Iskustsv (Arts Sq; p74) is a lovely setting for this respected venue, which is home to the State Academic Opera & Ballet Company. It's generally easier and cheaper to get tickets to the performances staged here than those at the Mariinsky.

YUSUPOV PALACE THEATRE

Map p102

☎ 314 9883; www.yusupov-palace.ru; nab reki Moyki 94; 📄 Sadovaya

Housed inside the outrageously ornate Yusupov Palace (p102), this elaborate yet intimate venue was the home entertainment centre for one of the city's foremost aristocratic families. While you can visit the theatre when you tour the palace, seeing a performance here is a treat, as you can imagine yourself the personal guest of crazy Prince Felix himself. The shows are a mixed bag – usually a 'Gala Evening' that features fragments of various Russian classics.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

It's not unusual to see highly talented musicians working the crowds inside the metro stations, violinists single-handedly performing Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and flautists whistling away at Mozart or Bach. That such talented musicians are busking in the streets (or under the streets, as the case may be) is testament to the incredible talent and training of Russian music students – and to the lack of resources of their cultural institutions. While it's possible to hear a good show in the metro station, a visit to one of the local orchestra halls is highly recommended. Besides the venues listed here, small-scale concerts are often hosted at the Vorontsov Palace (p75) and the Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace (p94).

GLINKA CAPELLA HOUSE Map pp68-9

☎ 314 1058; nab Reki Moyki 20; 📄 Nevsky Pr

This historic hall was constructed for the city's oldest professional choir, the Emperor Court Choir Capella, which was founded in 1473. Originally based in Moscow, it was transferred to St Petersburg upon the order

of Peter the Great in 1703. These days, performances focus on choral and organ music.

GRAND CONCERT HALL Map p84

Bolshoy Kontsertny Zal (BKZ); ☎ 275 1300;

www.bkz.spb.ru; Ligovsky pr 6; 📄 Pl Vosstaniya

This massive complex near pl Vosstaniya still often goes by its former name, Oktyabrskiy. Seating almost 4000 people, this is the venue for Russian 'stars' with a national following, whether they are pop singers or ballet dancers.

MARIINSKY CONCERT HALL Map p102

☎ 326 4141; www.mariinsky.ru; ul Pisareva 20;

📄 Sadovaya/Sennaya Pl

In April 2007, Mariinsky director Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra opened the new Mariinsky Concert Hall – just in time for the annual Stars of White Nights Festival. The new building is a magnificent multifaceted creation. It preserves the historic brick façade of the set and scenery warehouse that previously stood on this spot facing ul Pisareva, but the modern main entrance, facing ul Dekabristov, is all tinted glass and angular lines, hardly hinting at the beautiful old building behind. The state-of-the-art facility was financed primarily by private investors, including Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV CONSERVATORY

Map p102

☎ 571 0506; www.conservatory.ru; Teatralnaya pl 3; 📄 Sadovaya/Sennaya Pl

This illustrious music school – opposite the Mariinsky – was the first public music school in Russia. Founded in 1862, it counts Pyotr Tchaikovsky amongst its alumni and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov among its former faculty. Dmitry Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev are graduates of this institution, as are countless contemporary artistic figures, such as Mariinsky director Valery Gergiev. The Bolshoy Zal (Big Hall) on the 3rd floor is an excellent place to see the performances by up-and-coming musicians, which take place throughout the academic year.

SHOSTAKOVICH PHILHARMONIA

Map pp68-9

www.philharmonia.spb.ru; 📄 Nevsky Pr

Under the artistic direction of world-famous conductor Yuri Temirkanov, the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra represents

EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Marc de Mauny is a violinist with a strong interest in baroque and jazz music. In the 1990s, he was working for the British Council on cultural programmes in St Petersburg. Andrey Reshetin was a rock violinist who had been playing in the group Akvarium. Reshetin's creative development followed a path from rock to baroque, and he later founded the city's first baroque ensemble. When the two musicians discovered their overlap in interest, they came up with the idea to develop a festival celebrating baroque, medieval and other early music, now known as Early Music Festival (p19). We spoke to Marc about the development of the festival and early music in St Petersburg.

Why did you want to make a festival focusing on baroque and medieval music?

In Russia there is a strong musical focus on 19th and 20th century composition – and especially Russian composers. Our objective was to introduce the music of previous centuries and take advantage of its immense, rich musical legacy.

Why is St Petersburg fertile ground for such a project?

This city was born in the 18th century. It did not develop organically like Moscow. Peter the Great was determined to build this city according to a precise plan. It was built from scratch over the course of a few years and organised around 18th-century ideas. This space – the urban space – was crying out for more music from the same period.

Was the festival well received?

From day one. We have always attracted top names – the most talented individuals playing this kind of music. In 2007, we celebrated our 10-year anniversary. And now there are simultaneous festivals in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and all around the country.

What is the best way for visitors to St Petersburg to hear baroque and medieval music?

They should come in September and attend the events of the festival! At other times, there is much less early music being played in St Petersburg. But as a cultural form, early music has taken root. There is a strong following in the city and I am certain it will continue to develop. Now even Gergiev at the Mariinsky – and other directors at established institutions – are occasionally incorporating it into their repertoires.

the finest in orchestral music. The **Bolshoy Zal** (Grand Hall; ☎ 710 4257; Mikhailovskaya ul 2) on pl Iskusstv is the venue for a full program of symphonic performances, while the nearby **Maly Zal** (Small Hall; ☎ 571 8333; Nevsky pr 30) hosts smaller ensembles. Both venues are used for numerous music festivals, including the superb **Early Music Festival** (p19). The philharmonic is closed in July and August.

SMOLNY CATHEDRAL Map p84

☎ 271 9182; www.cathedral.ru; pl Rastrelli 3/1;  Chernyshevskaya

Although the Smolny Cathedral (p83) was closed for renovation at the time of research, it is usually a venue for musical concerts. While not as attractive as some of the other concert halls in the city (and certainly not as ornate as its gorgeous exterior), it is still an atmospheric place to hear music.

THEATRE

Due to the language barrier, drama and comedy are less alluring prospects than music and dance. Nonetheless, St Petersburg has a long tradition in theatre, which remains vibrant

today. Dozens of venues host local, national and international acting troupes. Performances are almost exclusively in Russian, but the repertoire is vast, from William Shakespeare to Anton Chekhov to Neil Simon and everything in between.

AKIMOVA COMEDY THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 312 4555; www.komedia.spb.ru; Nevsky pr 56;

 Gostiny Dvor

Housed inside the incredible **Eiseisevsky** (p152) building, this is a great place to see contemporary and classic comedies, including works by Neil Simon, Oscar Wilde and Mikhail Bulgakov.

ALEXANDRINSKY THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 710 4103; www.alexandrinsky.ru; pl Ostrovsokogo 2;  Gostiny Dvor

Formerly the Pushkin State Drama Theatre, this magnificent venue is just one part of an immaculate architectural ensemble designed by Carlo Rossi (see pl Ostrovsokogo, p75). The theatre's interior oozes 19th-century elegance and style, and it's

worth taking a peek even if you don't see a production here. This is where Anton Chekhov premiered *The Seagull*, which was pretty much universally hated by the public and critics alike. These days, the company has a huge repertoire, ranging from Russian folktales to Shakespearean tragedies.

BALTIC HOUSE Map pp114–15

Baltiyskiy Dom; ☎ 232 9380; www.baltichouse.spb.ru; Alexandrovsky Park 4;  Gorkovskaya

Known under the Soviets as Lenin Komsomol Theatre, this large venue has long hosted an annual festival of plays from the Baltic countries. Renamed in 1991, Baltic House also stages Russian and European plays, as well as a new and growing repertoire of experimental theatre.

BOLSHOY DRAMA THEATRE


Map pp68–9

BDT; ☎ 310 0401; www.bdt.spb.ru; nab reki Fontanki 65;  Sennaya Pl

Named for acting pioneer Georgi Tovstonogov, the BDT became the city's most innovative and exciting theatre under his direction between the 1960s and the 1980s. His 1957 staging of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* is still remembered as one of the peaks of Soviet theatre. Unfortunately, when Tovstonogov died in 1989, a suitable replacement was not found. As such, the theatre company has not really progressed since that time. Nonetheless, the theatre is one of the city's grandest, and its location on the Fontanka River is delightful.

KOMISSARZHEVSKAYA THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 571 0849; www.teatrvfk.ru; Italiyanskaya ul 19;  Gostiny Dvor

Now buried in **Tikhvin Cemetery** (p90), Vera Fedorovna Kommissarzhevskaya was a great St Petersburg actress who gained her reputation as leading lady in Vsevolod Meyerhold performances. In the early years of the 20th century, Kommissarzhevskaya founded an acting troupe that performed in the Passage concert hall, staging plays by all of the famous playwrights of the day, including Mikhail Gorky and Anton Chekhov. Revived in the midst of the Siege, the theatre was renamed in honour of the great actress. These days, headed by artistic director Victor Novikov, it is known for its modern treatment of classic plays.

LENSOVET THEATRE Map p92

☎ 713 2191; Vladimirsky pr 12;  Mayakovskaya
The LenSovet is among the more versatile theatre companies in town, staging performances of classical favourites as well as bold new experiments. Director Vladislav Pazi has received excellent reviews for his renditions of – among others – *A King, a Queen and a Jack*, based on the novel by Vladimir Nabokov, and *Lovely Sunday for a Picnic* by Tennessee Williams. Equally celebrated are some of the plays performed under guest directorship, including Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (V Ozhidaniy Godo) and Harold Pinter's *The Lover* (Lyubovnik).


MALY DRAMA THEATRE Map p92

☎ 713 2028; www.mdt-dodin.ru; ul Rubinshteyna 18;  Vladimirskaya

Also called the Theatre of Europe, the Maly is St Petersburg's most internationally celebrated theatre. Its director Lev Dodin is famed for his long version of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Devils*, which toured the world to great acclaim. He also got rave reviews for his version of Anton Chekhov's *Play Without a Name*, a superb *mise en scène* production that is sometimes subtitled in English for visitors during summer.

PRIYUT KOMEDIANTA THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 310 3314; Sadovaya ul 27/9;  Sennaya Pl
This delightful theatre's name means 'the actor's shelter' and it does a pretty good job of fulfilling its role, providing refuge for some of the city's best up-and-coming directors and producers. It was founded by actor Yuri Tomashevsky in the late 1980s, when the city turned over a defunct cinema that the group still uses. Recent successes have included Peter Shereshevsky's adaptation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband* and Georgy Vasiliev's ambitious staging of Viktor Yerofeyev's *Moscow Stations*, a sort of Russian *Train-spotting*. The theatre is slated for renovation in 2009.

MUSICAL THEATRE

While Russia does not have a musical theatre tradition in the 'Broadway' sense of the genre, there are a few theatres in St Petersburg that host folk shows and other musical variety acts.

FEEL YOURSELF RUSSIAN Map p102

☎ 312 5500; www.folkshow.ru; Nikolaevsky Palace, ul Truda 4; tickets R1280; 🕒 show 6.30pm; 📍 Nevsky Pr

Terrible title, but not a bad show of traditional Russian folk dancing and music. The two-hour show features four different folk groups, complete with accordion, balalaika and Cossack dancers. It is worth attending to get a look inside the spectacular Nikolaevsky Palace, if nothing else.

MUSICAL COMEDY THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 313 4316; Italiyanskaya ul 13; 📍 Nevsky Pr Formerly the Palace Theatre, this neoclassical beauty on [pl Iskusstv](#) (Arts Sq; p74) was built in 1801 as a palace. Only in the 20th century was it redesigned, and it opened as a theatre in 1912. It is famous as one of the few theatres that stayed open throughout the blockade. Recently renovated, the place still retains the opulent atmosphere of a palace, with a gorgeous gala staircase and a famous 'grotto buffet'. These days it hosts a wide variety of musical and theatrical performances, including crowd-pleasing classical ballets and operas.

CIRCUSES & PUPPET SHOWS

To entertain your kids the good old-fashioned Russian way, take them to the circus or to one of the many impressive puppet theatres in town.

BOLSHOY PUPPET THEATRE

Map p84

☎ 272 8215; ul Nekrasova 10; tickets R50–60; 📍 Chernyshevskaya

This 'big' puppet theatre is indeed the biggest in the city, and has been active since 1931. The repertoire includes a wide range of shows for children and adults. Don't forget: you can get free tickets if you are staying next door in the [Puppet Hostel](#) (p208).

CIRCUS IN AVTOVO Map p65

☎ 783 1501; Avtovskaya ul 1A; tickets R100–400; 📍 Avtovo

This place is on the far southern outskirts of the city and it may take quite a journey to get here. But how far are you willing to

go to see no-rules wrestling (only in Russia...)? Avtovo also hosts children's circus clubs and an annual international festival of circus schools. What a way to inspire your children to become tightrope walkers and lion tamers!

DEMMEI MARIONETTE THEATRE

Map pp68–9

☎ 571 2156; Nevsky pr 52; tickets R50–60; 📍 Gostiny Dvor

Since 1917, this venue under the arches on central Nevsky is the city's oldest professional puppet theatre. Mainly for children, the shows are well produced and professionally performed.

ST PETERSBURG STATE CIRCUS

Map pp68–9

☎ 314 8478; www.circus.spb.ru; nab reki Fontanki 3; tickets R100–600; 📍 Gostiny Dvor

The oldest and best established circus in the city, dating to 1827, occupies an ornate building on the Fontanka River. The performances, running about 2½ hours, usually tell a story based on a fairy tale or folklore. This venue also hosts circus troupes from other cities and countries.

CINEMA

While Hollywood blockbusters seem to be wildly popular, films are rarely shown in English: they are usually dubbed in Russian, and poorly at that. That said, subtitled films are occasionally shown; check the *St Petersburg Times* for current listings. Also, there are several foreign film festivals run by cultural centres such as the Alliance Française, Goethe Institute and British Council, with films often shown in the original language. See p50 for information about larger film festivals in St Petersburg.

AVRORA Map pp68–9

☎ 315 5254; www.avrora.spb.ru; Nevsky pr 60; 📍 Gostiny Dvor

Opening in 1913 as the Piccadilly Picture House, this was the city's most fashionable cinema in the early years of Russian film, and it has retained its position pretty consistently ever since. Renamed the more Soviet-sounding *Avrora* in 1932, it was here that a young Dmitry Shostakovich played piano accompaniment to silent movies. Today it's one of the best cinemas in town,

and most premieres (to which you can nearly always buy tickets) take place here.

DOM KINO Map pp68–9

House of Cinema; ☎ 314 0638; www.domkino.spb.ru; Karavannaya ul 12; 📍 Gostiny Dvor This cinema shows arty Russian and foreign films, as well as some higher brow Hollywood productions. It is also where the British Council holds its British Film Festival. Under renovation at the time of research, the whole place remains remarkably Soviet in a charming way.

JAM HALL ON PETROGRADSKY

Map pp114–15

☎ 703 7414; www.jamhall.ru; Kamennoostrovsky pr 42; 📍 Petrogradskaya

Now this is the kind of place that could never have existed in 20th-century Russia.

An old palace of culture has been transformed into a luxury cinema-going experience. With plush sofa-style seating, tables for your drinks and a well-stocked bar on site, this is the future – and we like it. Pity it mainly shows Hollywood blockbusters dubbed into Russian. There is another [Jam Hall on Leninsky](#) (off Map pp146–7; ☎ 703 7404; Leninsky pr 160; 📍 Moskovskaya).

MIRAGE UNIVER-CITY Map pp114–15

☎ 498 0758; www.mirage.ru; Bolshoy pr 35; 📍 Chkalovskaya; 📺

All the entertainment you ever need – under one roof. Come here to watch a film, eat sushi, play pool, hear live music (Thursday and Friday night) or surf the web (see p244). The films are generally the latest from Hollywood, but you are unlikely to see anything in English.

BLUelist¹ (blu,list) v.
to recommend a travel experience.

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- Sunday-morning bike tour with Skat Prokat (p199)
- Zenith football match at Petrovsky Stadium (p200)
- Banya at Circle Baths (p197)
- Ice skating on Yelagin Island (p198)
- Splashing around at Waterville Aquapark (p197)

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, physical fitness is not exactly a priority in Russia, which is a kind of antithesis to Wellville. Exercise was always reserved for sportsmen and soldiers, while somebody running on the street was invariably trying to catch a bus. As in all areas of life, however, times are changing in this workout underworld. Russians – some of them, at least – are discovering the joys of health and wellness, not to mention the fun of an active lifestyle.

HEALTH & FITNESS

The number of gyms and fitness centres in St Petersburg is growing, but these private clubs are generally out of the price range of everyday middle-class Russians. Whether for reasons financial or cultural, attendance at such facilities is much lower than in the West. The same is not true of the Russian *banya* (bathhouse), which is still a popular way for Russians to relax and socialise. It is a uniquely Russian activity that all visitors should experience.

GYMS & POOLS

Most public swimming pools require bathers to obtain a health certificate prior to going in the water. There is usually an on-site doctor who can provide the necessary paperwork for a small fee (and sometimes without any sort of examination), as long as you look healthy.

FITNESS HOUSE Map pp108–9

☎ 715 8715; www.fitnesshouse.spb.ru; nab Makarova 2; one-time entry R1000, one-month membership R5000; ☎ 7am–11pm Mon–Fri, 9am–10pm Sat & Sun; 📄 Nevsky Pr

In a prominent place opposite the Strelka, this upscale gym offers a slew of fitness classes, from yoga to pilates to body sculpting. The huge complex has a dedicated room for every kind of equipment, including stationary bikes, cardio equipment and free weights. A sauna and spa are also on site, as is the lively Greenwich Pub.

PLANET FITNESS – PETROGRAD SIDE

Map pp114–15

☎ 332 0000; www.fitness.ru; Petrogradskaya nab 18; one-time entry R930–1240; ☎ 24hr; 📄 Petrogradskaya

The city's biggest Planet Fitness outlet is on the Petrograd Side in the prestigious City Centre business centre. Its facilities include a big swimming pool, tennis courts and the requisite machines. Classes include stand-

ards such as yoga and spinning, as well as more exotic fare like kickboxing and karate. For relaxation, finish up with a massage or a visit to the sauna. Rates are cheaper before 5pm.

PLANET FITNESS – SENNAYA

Map p97

☎ 315 6220; www.fitness.ru; Kazanskaya ul 37; ☎ 7am–11pm Mon–Fri, 9am–9pm Sat & Sun; 📄 Sadovaya

While rates and facilities differ dramatically between Planet Fitness locations, the outlet near Isaakievskaya pl (St Isaac's Sq) is among the most central and least costly. Facilities include weights and cardio equipment, as well as a steamy sauna.

PLANET FITNESS – SMOLNY

Map p84

☎ 275 1384; www.fitness.ru; nab Robespiera 12; ☎ 7am–11pm Mon–Fri, 9am–9pm Sat & Sun; 📄 Chernyshevskaya

St Petersburg's first and largest chain of fitness centres now has 11 locations around the city, but the first was in Smolny. Classes include aerobics and yoga, while weights machines and cardio equipment are also available. The cardio room overlooks the Neva River, offering a lovely view as you cycle or run. Afterwards, enjoy the sauna and hot tub, or a fresh fruit drink from the juice bar.

SPORTS COMPLEX Map pp114–15

☎ 232 8377; Kronverksky pr 9A; entry R300, medical exam R200; ☎ 6.30am–11pm; 📄 Gorkovskaya

While the new chains of private fitness centres cater to New Russians and other people with fancy pants, most people with athletic tendencies spend time at someplace similar to this sports complex, which is the Russian version of the YMCA. It's not as shiny and new as the private clubs, but the 25m swimming pool under a glass roof is heavenly.

Other facilities include weights, aerobics classes and clubs for every sport imaginable.

VMF POOL Map pp108–9

☎ 322 4505; Sredny pr 87; entry R350; ☎ 7am–9pm; 📄 Vasileostrovskaya

Another old-school facility that is out of the way on Vasilevsky Island. Nonetheless, the huge pool was renovated in 2007 and now offers an excellent place to swim laps or cool down.

WATERVILLE AQUAPARK Map pp108–9

☎ 324 4700; www.waterville.ru; ul Korablistroiteley 14; adult/child Mon–Fri R500/350, Sat & Sun R700/530; ☎ 9am–11pm; 📄 Primorskaya
Calling all kids! This huge complex at the Park Inn – Pribaltiyskaya (p211) features miles of water slides and rides, waterfalls, jet streams and wave pools. There is something for everyone here, as special pools for younger children have shallow waters and warmer temperatures, while a two-lane 25m pool is dedicated to water aerobics and lap-swimming (aka 'adult swim'). Also on site: an international 'sweating complex' featuring Russian *banya*, Finnish sauna, Turkish *hammam* and Indian sauna. Prices quoted are for four hours of fun, but all-day admission is also available.

BANYA

Nothing beats St Petersburg winter like the *banya* (bathhouse). Less hot but more humid than a sauna, the Russian bath sweats out all impurity, cleansing body and soul.

Enter the *parilka* (steam room) stark naked (yes, the *banya* is normally segregated by gender). Bathers can control the temperature – or at least increase it – by laddling water onto the hot rocks. You might add a few drops of eucalyptus to infuse the steam with scent. Then sit back and watch the mercury rise. To eliminate tox-

ins and improve circulation, bathers beat each other with a bundle of birch branches, known as *veniki*. When you can't take the heat, retreat. A public *banya* allows access to a plunge pool, usually filled with ice-cold water. The contrast in temperature is invigorating, energising and purifying.

The *banya* has always been essential for surviving the coldest Russian months. (Apparently, in the early days, Peter the Great was often sighted running naked from the bathhouse to jump in the Neva.)

A *banya* is not complete without a table spread with snacks, or at least a thermos of tea. And just when you think you have recovered, it's time to repeat the process. As they say in Russia, 'S *lyokum parom*': Easy steaming!

A few old-fashioned *bani* are recommended following. See also Gyms & Pools (opposite) and Spas (p198) for facilities that may have a sauna or *banya* on site.

CIRCLE BATHS Map pp122–3

Kruglye Bani; ☎ communal 550 0985, private 297 6409; ul Karysheva 29a; communal per person R25, lux per person R320, private R800; ☎ 8am–10pm Fri–Tue; 📄 PI Muzhestva

Among the city's classiest communal bathhouses, the Circle Baths has a heated circular open-air pool. The 'lux' *banya* is an upgraded communal option, segregated by gender with certain days designated for men or women, so call in advance to find out the schedule. Otherwise, you can reserve a private *parilka* for up to four people, open around the clock

KAZACHIE BANI Map p97

☎ 712 5079; Bolshoy Kazachy per 11; per hour R1000; ☎ 24hr; 📄 Pushkinskaya

Following a trend that is occurring throughout the city, the communal *banya* is no longer open, but the private 'lux'

EASY STEAMING

The dos and don'ts of the *banya* (bathhouse):

- Do take advantage of the plunge pool (or at least the cold shower, if there is no pool on site). It's important to bring your body temperature back down after being in the *banya*.
- Don't bother with a bathing suit. Most public *bani* are segregated by gender, in which case bathers steam naked. In mixed company, it is customary to wrap yourself in a sheet (provided at the *banya*).
- Do rehydrate in between steams. While it is customary to drink tea, or even beer, it is also important to drink water or juice.
- Don't stop at one! Most bathers will return to the *parilka* (steam room) anywhere from three to eight times over the course of an hour or two.

banya is an excellent option for a group of up to 10 people.

MYTNINSKAYA BANYA Map p84

☎ 274 4229; Mytninskaya ul 17-19; per hour R850; ☎ 24hr by reservation; 🚗 M1 Vosstaniya

Unique in the city, Mytninskaya Banya is heated by a wood furnace, just like the log-cabin bathhouses that are still found in the Russian countryside. In addition to *parilka* and plunge pool, the private 'lux' *banya* includes a swanky lounge area with leather furniture and a pool table.

SECOND COURTYARD Map pp108-9

Vtoroy Dvor; ☎ 321 6441; www.dvor.boom.ru in Russian; nab Leytenanta Shmidta 29; public per person R300, private per hr R1100; ☎ public 10am-4pm, private bookings 4pm-10am; 🚗 M Vasilostrovskaya The name of this place refers to its location, tucked into the second courtyard behind an apartment block on the Vasilevsky Island embankment. The small but sparkling facility includes a Finnish sauna and Russian steam room, as well as a small plunge pool. It's a public *banya* by day, but in the evening you can book the whole place out for your private party (up to eight people). A small on-site kitchen provides catering services, so you don't have to bring your own snacks.

SPAS

An upscale spa might have a Russian *banya* on site, however, a visit to such a facility is a completely different experience – with all of the delicious decadence of indulgence, but none of the democratic charm of the traditional *banya*.

BEAUTY FORMULA Map pp122-3

Formula Krasoty; ☎ 295 0436; www.salon-spa.spb.ru; Novolitevskaya ul 15a; ☎ by appointment; 🚗 M Lesnaya

Indulge yourself at this amazing, all-in-one day spa. Whether you need a massage, a facial or a new tattoo, you can get it at this upmarket facility in the Akvilon business centre. In addition to the extensive menu of treatments, there is a Turkish bath, a Finnish sauna and a Russian *banya*.

THAI MASSAGE Map pp146-7

☎ 710 1451; www.e-med.spb.ru; Podolskaya ul 40; ☎ by appointment; 🚗 M Tekhnologichesky Institut Thai massage is a body treatment that is carried out by massage and medical thera-

pists to give greater immunity to illness and better health. Similar to acupuncturists, massagists concentrate their efforts on a localised part of the body in order to activate trigger points and stimulate blood flow to the specific site. Advocates claim that the benefits are immediate. A visit to this clinic is not your typical relaxing massage session, but it may remedy what ails you.

ACTIVITIES

Ice skating, sledding and skiing are forms of entertainment that date back to St Petersburg's earliest days, as the aristocrats found plenty of fun to entertain themselves during the cold winter.

St Petersburg is still a great place to engage in such traditional activities, especially if you are here in winter. The younger generation has also discovered the appeals of other more Western activities, such as cycling and in-line skating. They are perhaps not as widespread as in European and American cities, but it is not unusual to see active types speeding along St Petersburg's sidewalks and streets.

ICE SKATING, SKIING & SLEDDING

There's no shortage of winter in St Petersburg, so take advantage of it. Several indoor and outdoor venues offer the opportunity to rent ice skates and see where all those great Russian figure skaters come from. Or if you prefer a softer landing, St Petersburg's parks offer miles of snowy slopes for skiing and sledding.

ICE PALACE Map p65

Ledoviy Dvoretz; ☎ 718 6620; www.newarena.spb.ru; pr Pyatiletok 1; weekdays/weekends R270/300; 🚗 M Pr Bolshhevik

This fancy arena was built for the World Ice Hockey Championships which took place here in 2000. The home arena for the local hockey team SKA (see p200), it also has a public skating rink. Hours are irregular, so call or check the website. Rental of ice skates is included in the price.

YELAGIN ISLAND Map pp114-15

☎ 430 0911; www.elaginpark.spb.ru in Russian; ice skating per hr R100-150; ☎ ice skating 11am-9pm; 🚗 M Krestovsky Ostrov

This car-free island becomes a winter wonderland in colder temperatures, with

sledding, cross-country skiing and ice skating. Skis and skates are both available for hire. In summer months, it's a great place to rent in-line skates as there is no traffic to contend with. See p120 for more information on the island.

SWIMMING & SUNBATHING

Don't forget that St Petersburg – despite the northern clime – is surrounded by water. Of its 40-some islands, several have coastlines facing the Gulf of Finland. For swimming, sunbathing and otherwise escaping the city heat, the best beach is near Sestrotretsk. Take an *elektrichka* (suburban train) from Finland Station to this village, from where it is a 10-minute walk through the forest to a long, sprawling beach facing the gulf. Alternatively, Ozerki, a series of small lakes in the northern part of the city have a pleasant coastline and warmer waters. Take the metro to 🚗 M Ozerki and walk west to the lakeshore. See p196 for information on indoor swimming pools.

If you just want to sunbathe, join the crowds on the southern side of Zayachy Island in front of the wall of the Peter & Paul Fortress. Swimming in the Neva River is not advisable, although many people do it and don't appear to die.

CYCLING

Pancake-flat St Petersburg is a great city for cycling (just make sure you avoid the major traffic-choked roads). For good information on cycling events in the city, see the website of the local cycling group *VeloPiter* (www.velopiter.spb.ru in Russian). A weekly group ride takes place at 11pm on Friday nights in summer, departing from Dvortsovaya pl and traversing the city.

Rent bikes at the shops listed following. Remember to bring your passport and a sizeable chunk of roubles (R3000 to R5000) for a deposit. See p246 for information on bike tours.

SKAT PROKAT Map p92

☎ 717 6838; www.skatprokat.ru; Goncharnaya ul 7; per hr/day R100/400; ☎ 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, 24hr Fri & Sat; 🚗 M1 Vosstaniya

This tight-run outfit offers excellent Sunday-morning bike tours of the city (see p246). Rental bicycles are brand new mountain bikes by the Russian company Stark. Week-end or weekly rates are also available. Or, if you are in town for a while, this place also sells second-hand bikes.

VELOCITY Map pp68-9

☎ 922 6383; www.velocity.spb.ru; Nevsky pr 3; per hr/day R100/400; ☎ 10am-10pm; 🚗 M Nevsky Pr The price of bike rental includes use of an mp3-player and a route map, so bikers can take a self-guided tour. Other offers include an all-night ride (summer only), two-for-one discounts at designated times and used bikes for sale. Enter through the courtyard.

BOWLING & BILLIARDS

Bowling has become a popular entertainment option in St Petersburg, with vast complexes offering bowling and billiards, as well as bars, video games and – in some cases – dancing.

BOWLING CITY Map p97

☎ 380 3005; www.bowlingcity.ru; ul Yefimova 3; per hr R360-960; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 M Sadovaya/Sennaya Pl This is the most central outlet of a network of bowling clubs, which provides countless entertainment options including bowling and billiards. Besides the 36 bowling lanes, there is karaoke, a sports bar and pool tables. Rates vary according to time, meaning that it's more expensive to play in the evenings and on weekends. The website is also a vast repository for information about bowling in Russia.

SPECTATOR SPORT

Russia's international reputation in sport is well founded, with athletes earning international fame and glory for their success in hockey, gymnastics and figure skating. In 2007, all of Russia was reeling from the announcement that the 2014 Winter Olympics would take place in Sochi, in southern Russia. St Petersburg governor Valentina Matvienko responded almost immediately, declaring that St Petersburg would propose itself as a candidate for the 2020 Summer Games (a second attempt after an unsuccessful bid in 2004).

Anna Kournikova attracted world attention to Russian tennis, but she was known more for her photogenic legs than her ripping backhand. Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova leads a cohort of young Russians who dominate the women's game. The local favourite is Grand Slam-winner Svetlana Kuznetsova, also known as 'Kuzzi', who was born in Leningrad. Although she lost in the final round of the US Open in 2007, she rose in the rankings to her career-high No 2 in the world.

The St Petersburg Open is an international men's tennis tournament held in St Petersburg every year (see p19). This is where Marat Safin grabbed the attention of the tennis world, when he won in 2000 and 2001, before going on to win four Grand Slam titles.

The most popular spectator sport in Russia is football; the most popular St Petersburg team is **Zenith** (Zenit; www.fc-zenit.ru), which plays in Russia's *vysshaya liga* (premier league). Although Zenith is consistently ranked second behind the Moscow team Spartak, the St Petersburg team has a fan base that's loyal to the point of extremism, which makes for a fun and rowdy crowd at the games. In 2003 Zenith was triumphant, winning the Premier League Cup, but Spartak has won every other year since 1996, so the rivalry is intense. Despite the excellent matchups between the premier league's 15 teams, the most famous Russian football club these days is 'Chel-sky', billionaire Roman Abramovich's entry in the English premier league.

Despite (or maybe because of) the sport's popularity, running a football club in Russia has become a risky business – in the post Soviet-era, seven football officials have been the victims of assassination attempts. Corruption is believed to be rife in the clubs, with match fixing a particular problem.

Popular winter sports include ice hockey and basketball. Both of these sports lose many of their best players to the American professional leagues. The top local team is **Spartak** (www.bcspartak.ru in Russian), though it has not fared very well in Russia's *basketbolnaya super liga* (basketball super league).

In 2005, the National Hockey League (in North America) cancelled its season when players and management were unable to resolve a labour dispute. As a result, 72 players (many of them Russian) came to play in Russia's *super liga* – a windfall of the world's best hockey players. The St Petersburg ice hockey team is **SKA** (Army Sports Club; www.ska.spb.ru).

ICE PALACE Map pp122–3

Ledoviy Dvorets; ☎ 718 6620; www.newarena.spb.ru; pr Pyatiletok 1; weekdays/weekends R270/300; 🚇 Pr Bolshevikov

The St Petersburg ice hockey team SKA play in this new stadium from September to June. Built for the World Ice Hockey Championships in 2000, this 12,000-seat stadium is a swanky state-of-the-art facility compared to other sports arenas in town. Tickets are available at the box office.

JUBILEE SPORTS PALACE

Map pp114–15

Yubileyny Dvorets Sporta; ☎ 323 9322; pr Dobrolyubova 18; 🚇 Sportivnaya

This 7000-seat stadium is home to the local basketball team, Spartak, who play here from October to April. Buy tickets at the stadium box office or at a *teatralnaya kassa* (theatre kiosk scattered around the city).

PETROVSKY STADIUM Map pp114–15

☎ 328 8901; www.petrovsky.spb.ru; Petrovsky ostrov 2; tickets R100–500; 🚇 Sportivnaya

Zenith, St Petersburg's top football team, normally plays at this huge stadium on Petrovsky Island (a small island on the Petrograd Side). The stadium was closed for renovation at the time of research, but is expected to reopen in time for the 2008 season. Tickets can usually be purchased at designated ticket outlets or at the stadium – check the website for the schedule or look for posters plastered around town.

SCC PETERBURGSKY STADIUM

Map p65

☎ 264 8958; pr Gagarina 8; 🚇 Park Pobedy

This huge facility seats up to 25,000 fans. As such, it is often used for major concerts and sporting events, including the annual St Petersburg Open tennis tournament.