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EATING

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In the past few years, St Petersburg has blossomed into a culinary capital. Foodies will be thrilled by the plethora of dining options, from old-fashioned *haute russe* to contemporary fusion. Young chefs are breaking down Soviet stereotypes and showing the world how creative they can be. They are importing exotic ingredients, rediscovering ancient cooking techniques and inventing new-fangled ones.

And St Petersburg diners are eating it up. Literally. Restaurants are packed with patrons eager to sample world cuisines, sip expensive wines, share small plates, eat raw fish, taste exotic fruits and smoke hookah pipes. Gone are the days when only the New Russian nouveau riche could afford to eat out: these days the new middle class also enjoys the pleasures of the palette.

When you tire of borscht (beetroot soup) and beef stroganoff, you will be able to find excellent European, American and Asian cuisine. Italian fare is popular and sushi is everywhere. Cuisine from former Soviet republics – especially Georgia and Armenia – is also ubiquitous and delicious.

If sampling the local delicacies is on your list of things to do in St Petersburg, you will not be disappointed (and if it is not on your list, it should be). For Russian food has undergone its own revolution since the end of Soviet rule: the bliny (crepes) are tastier, the *smetana* (sour cream) creamier, and the caviar more plentiful...

The *St Petersburg Times* has an online dining guide (www.sptimes.ru), as does the city's official tourist information site (www.visit-petersburg.ru). Additional online reviews can be found at any of the tourism portals listed on p20.

HISTORY

Seventy years of mistreatment by the Soviets has given Russian cuisine a bad rap. Today, many restaurants in St Petersburg allow the diner to experience Russian food as it is meant to be – exquisite *haute russe* masterpieces once served at fancy feasts and extravagant balls, as well as the tasty and filling meals that have for centuries been prepared in peasant kitchens with garden ingredients.

Options for dining out during the Soviet period were so limited that Russians hardly ever did it. They might have taken lunch at the local *stolovaya* (cafeteria) but otherwise they cooked at home, they ate at home and they drank at home. And home-cooked meals tasted far better than the slab of meat and lump of potatoes that came on the plate in most restaurants.

The past decade has done wonders for dining in St Petersburg. Now the options seem limitless, not only for traditional Russian fare, but also for sushi, pasta, coffee and more. Clever restaurateurs are inventing more interesting ways to present food. Likewise, Petersburgers are changing the way they eat. They may still take lunch at the *stolovaya*, but it is a modern *stolovaya* with a funky theme or an all-you-can-eat buffet. They go out for business lunches, for after-work drinks, for celebratory occasions and even just for dinner.

ETIQUETTE

Just because the restaurant scene in St Petersburg has exploded in recent years, it does not mean that Petersburgers no longer entertain at home: Russian hospitality has deep roots. If you visit a St Petersburg home, you can expect to be regaled with stories, to be drowned in vodka, to receive many toasts and to offer a few yourself. You can also expect to eat an enormous amount of food off a tiny plate. Once the festivities begin, it is difficult to refuse any food or drink: you will go home stuffed, drunk and happy.

Should you be lucky enough to be invited to a Russian's home, bring a gift. Wine, confectionery and cake are all appropriate. Keep in mind that food items are a matter of national pride, so unless you bring something really exotic (eg all the way from home), a Russian brand will be better appreciated. Flowers are also popular – make certain there's an odd number because even numbers are for funerals.

SPECIALITIES

Zavtrak (breakfast) in hotels can range from a large help-yourself buffet to a few pieces of bread with jam and tea. Traditional Russian breakfast favourites include bliny and *kasha* (porridge).

Russians have a preference for a fairly heavy *obied* (early-afternoon meal) and a lighter *uzhyn* (evening meal). Meals, and menus, are divided into various courses such as *zakuski* (appetisers), often grouped into either hot or cold; first courses (usually soups); second courses (or mains), also called hot courses; and desserts.

Appetisers

A typical Russian meal starts with a few *zakuski*, which are often the most interesting items on the menu. The fancier *zakuski* rival main courses for price.

Russia is famous for its *ikra* (caviar), the snack of tsars and New Russians. Caviar in Russia is no longer the bargain it once was, due to declining sturgeon populations and the good old market economy (see p153). The best is *chyornaya ikra* or *zirnistaya* – black (sturgeon) caviar. Much cheaper and saltier is *krasnaya ikra* or *ketovaya* – red (salmon) caviar. Russians spread it on buttered bread or bliny and wash it down with a slug of vodka or a toast of champagne. Vegetarians can try ersatz caviar made entirely from eggplant or other vegetables.

Most restaurant menus offer a truly mind-boggling array of *salati* (salads), including standards such as *ovoshnoy salat* (vegetable salad) containing tomatoes and cucumbers, or *stolichny salat* (capital salad) with beef, potatoes and eggs in mayonnaise. Even if you read Russian, the salads are usually not identifiable by their often nonsensical names.

First Course

Rich soups may well be the pinnacle of Slavic cooking. There are dozens of varieties, often served with a dollop of sour cream. Most are made from meat stock. The most common soups include borscht (delicious beetroot soup), *shchi* (cabbage or sauerkraut soup),

okroskha (cucumber soup with a *kvas* – a beer-like drink – base) and *solyanka* (a tasty fish or meat soup with salty vegetables and a hint of lemon).

Second Course

The second course can be *ptitsa* (poultry), *myaso* (meat) or *ryba* (fish), which might be prepared in a few different ways. Russian *pelmeni* (dumplings) are usually filled with meat, although they may also come with potatoes, cabbage or mushrooms. Other staples include *zharkoye* (hot pot) – a meat stew served up piping hot in a little jug, *kotleta po kievsky* (better known as chicken Kiev) and *shashlyk* (meat kebab), all of which will usually be found on any restaurant menu. Fish is extremely popular and freshly caught in St Petersburg, either from the Baltic or from Lake Ladoga. The range is enormous, but common staples include *osyetrina* (sturgeon), *shchuka* (pike), *losos/syomga* (salmon) and *treska* (cod).

Often you must order a *garnir* (side dish) or you will just get a hunk of meat on the plate. Options here are usually *kartoshki* (potatoes), *ris* (rice) or undefined *ovoshchi* (vegetables). *Khleb* (bread) is served with every meal. The Russian black bread – a vitamin-rich sour rye – is delicious and uniquely Russian.

Desserts

Perhaps most Russians are exhausted or drunk by dessert time, since this is the least imaginative course. The most common options are *morozhenoe* (ice cream), super sweet *tort* (cake) or *shokolat* (chocolate).

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Russian is a heavy, meat-dependent cuisine. Soups are usually made with beef or chicken stock; all traditional meals revolve around a meaty main course; and even salads usually

CATCH OF THE DAY

Every year, shortly after the ice melts on the Neva River, the *koryushki* (freshwater smelt) swim up the river to spawn. To local Petersburgers, this annual event – usually in early May – is a time of celebration, symbolising the end of a long, dark winter and the beginning of gorging on fish, whether fried, dried, smoked or pickled.

The *koryushka* is sometimes called the 'cucumber fish' for its distinctive smell (which disappears after cooking). For a few short weeks, this delicious fish appears on restaurant menus and in private homes. The city hosts an annual *koryushki* festival at the Peter & Paul Fortress. Across the city, cooks get busy: breeding this mild-flavoured fish with flour, salt and sunflower oil, frying it up in a pan, and serving it with a slightly sweet tomato sauce or straight up. It's a popular snack *k pivu* (with beer) or, of course, with vodka.

have dead animals mixed in with a few veggies. Most frustrating is the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. Until recently, vegetarians in St Petersburg had a pretty tough time of it.

Fortunately, the culinary revolution has opened up some new options for vegetarians and vegans. Most restaurants now recognise the need to offer at least one vegetarian choice on their menu. Additionally, there is no shortage of Indian and Italian restaurants, which offer plenty of meat-free options. St Petersburg even supports an excellent (and popular) all-vegetarian chain, Troitsky Most (see p171 or p175).

When dining at traditional Russian restaurants, veggies should keep in mind the following. Fish is plentiful and fresh in St Petersburg, so it offers an excellent alternative for seafood-eaters. Fresh vegetables are rare, but pickled vegetables are not: learn to love sauerkraut, beets and salty cucumbers. Most importantly, there is no shortage of starch in Russia. Bread, bliny and potatoes are always on the menu; and they are filling. During the 40 days before Orthodox Easter (Lent; *veliky post* in Russian), many restaurants offer a menu that is happily animal-free. If you are serious about your vegetarianism, timing your trip with this period will give you extra options when eating out. Ask for the *postniy menu* (Lenten menu).

PRACTICALITIES

Opening Hours

Most places are open from 11am or noon to 11pm or midnight daily, often with later hours on Friday and Saturday. In this guide, hours are listed only when they vary from this standard.

Restaurants rarely close between lunch and dinner, as the late lunch or afternoon snack is a popular custom. Discounts of up to 25% are often available before 4pm or 5pm. Alternatively, many places offer a fixed price 'business lunch' during this time, which is a great way to sample some of the pricier restaurants' dishes around town.

How Much?

Prices have been rising steadily but inexorably in St Petersburg and it's now standard to pay at least R600 per main course in an upscale restaurant, and about R200 to R300 in mid-range outfits. If you are on a budget, you'll be very well taken care of (not to mention in good company) at the fast-food joints and *stolovye*

(cafeterias) that cater to locals; see p167 for some recommendations. Many restaurants offer a fixed midday menu (business lunch) for R150 to R350 – a great way to sample the fare of some expensive restaurants.

Some restaurants set their menu prices in *uslovie yedenitsiy* (standard units; often abbreviated as y.e.), which is equivalent to euros (although you will have to pay in roubles calculated at the exchange rate of the day). Prices in this chapter are quoted in roubles, regardless of the currency quoted on the menu. Credit cards are widely accepted, especially at upscale restaurants.

Booking Tables

Booking tables is rarely required in St Petersburg, although it can't hurt to reserve your spot at a popular restaurant, especially on a Friday or Saturday night or during the busy tourist season (mid-June and early July). At upscale restaurants, you will always be welcomed more warmly if you book in advance.

Tipping

The standard for tipping in St Petersburg is 10%, while a lesser amount is acceptable at more casual restaurants. Self-service cafés and *stolovye* do not require any tip. Occasionally, the service charge is included in the bill, in which case an additional tip is not necessary.

Self-Catering

If you want to eat like an old-time Petersburg, you'll buy your food and cook it at home. Even if cooking in St Petersburg is not feasible, exotic foods and drinks are among the most interesting and affordable souvenirs by which to remember Russia. See the Shopping chapter (p150) for suggestions about where to buy such delicacies. Most characteristic are vodka and caviar, *zakuski* of the tsar's court and the Soviet politburo. High-quality vodka is often packaged in a wide variety of decorative bottles, some with historical or regional themes. Vodka connoisseurs admire the design and shape of the bottles almost as much as the fiery brew itself.

PRICE GUIDE

\$\$\$	over R600 a meal
\$\$	R300-600 a meal
\$	under R300 a meal

top picks

COOKBOOKS

- *Please, To the Table* (Anya Von Bremzen) A tried and true authority on Russian cooking. Learn to make bliny (and just about every other Russian dish) like the babushkas.
- *Tastes and Tales from Russia* (Alla Danishevsky) Each recipe is accompanied by a folk tale: a great way to introduce children to Russian cooking.
- *The Georgian Feast* (Darra Goldstein) One of the few English-language cookbooks focusing on this spicy Caucasian cuisine.
- *A Year of Russian Feasts* (Catherine Cheremeteff Jones) Part cookbook and part travelogue, Jones writes of her experiences with Russian traditions, culinary celebrations and day-to-day life.
- *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets' A Gift to Young Housewives* (Joyce Toomre) More of a history lesson than a recipe book, this tome is based on the most popular cookbook from the 19th century.

The Russian sweet tooth is notorious (a fact that's evidenced by the profusion of gold teeth). Russians adore confections and chocolate, and without fail, prefer locally produced treats over any old Belgian or Swiss chocolate. Never mind that the major Russian confectionaries are largely owned by Cadbury or Nestlé, Russian chocolate is a matter of national pride. (Keep this in mind when buying chocolate for Russian friends.) Many companies produce beautiful pieces with fancy wrapping and colourful boxes in honour of local events, holidays or historical places.

FARMERS MARKETS

The Russian *rynok* (market) is a busy, bustling place, full of activity and colour. Even if you are not shopping, it is entertaining to peruse the tables piled high with multicoloured produce; homemade cheese and jam; golden honey straight from the hive; vibrantly coloured spices pouring out of plastic bags; slippery, silver fish posing on beds of ice; and huge slabs of meat hanging from the ceiling. Many vendors bring their products up from the Caucasus to sell them in the capital. Prices are lower and the quality of product is often higher than in the supermarkets. Bring your own bag and don't be afraid to haggle.

For reviews of the following markets, see the Shopping chapter: Kuznechny Market

(p156), Sennoy Market (p156), Sytny Market (p157) or Maltevisky Market (p154).

SUPERMARKETS

Gone are the days when food shopping required waiting in a different line for each food item. These days, St Petersburg boasts many Western-style supermarkets, complete with prepackaged foods, Western brands and shopping carts. The selection is impressive compared to what stocked the shelves a decade ago. Unless you stick to Russian brands, prices tend to be at least as high as prices in the West.

Once a Scandinavian haven, Stockmann (see p152) has a pricey foreign goods supermarket in the basement. Other more affordable supermarket chains include Parnas (p154) and Lend (p156).

Peak inside Elisevsky (p152) for a glimpse of prerevolutionary grandeur, as the store is set in the former mansion of the successful merchant Eliseev. It now houses an upscale market selling caviar and other delicacies.

HISTORIC HEART

The historic heart of St Petersburg is also its culinary heart: the range of eating options is immense and ever-expanding. Choose from modern or traditional Russian, various ethnic cuisines, fast food and more. In general, the best places are not on Nevsky pr – you are better off exploring the back roads if you are in search of a satisfying, savoury meal.

WITHIN THE MOYKA

This inner circle of the Historic Heart is so packed with palaces, museums and churches that there is hardly any room left for regular places such as restaurants. But you'll find a few gems on the smaller streets, especially Gorokhovaya, Malaya Morskaya and Bolshaya Morskaya.

NEP Map pp68–9

Russian \$\$\$

☎ 571 7591; www.neprestoran.ru; nab reki Moyki 37; meals R600-800; M Nevsky Pr

Unlike most communist-theme restaurants in the city, NEP celebrates the early 1920s, a period of entrepreneurial activity and relative liberalism under Lenin's New Economic Policy. The restaurant's hip 1920s style evokes a kind of vaudevillian luxury, as does the delicious Russian menu. Live music and cabaret plays from 8.30pm from Wednesday to Sunday.

TANDOORI NIGHTS Map pp68–9 Indian \$\$

☎ 312 3886; Voznesensky pr 4; meals R400-600; **M** Nevsky Pr

The city's most stylish Indian restaurant is also among its most authentic, offering a mix of traditional and modern recipes road-tested by a top London Indian chef. Great choice for vegetarians.

TAVERNA OLIVA Map pp68–9 Greek \$\$

☎ 314 6563; www.tavernaoliva.ru; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 31; meals R300-500; **M** Nevsky Pr
Greek-themed photographs and folkloric art bring the requisite Mediterranean atmosphere to this cavernous hall. (The atmosphere is also 'enhanced' by live music, which can be a bit much.) Nonetheless, the place is extremely popular, and with good reason. The traditional Greek cooking is excellent, as attested to the Greek expats who seem to frequent this place. There is also a pleasant sidewalk café which offers a partial menu.

FIDELIO CAFÉ Map pp68–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 314 8444; Gorokhovaya ul 13; business lunch R200, meals R300-400; **M** Nevsky Pr
Pressed white linens and serious scrubbed waitstaff lend an upscale atmosphere to this surprisingly affordable café. The menu is not extensive, but what the café does, it does well: crispy pizzas and pastas with various tomato- and cream-based sauces. The three-course business lunch is a steal.

FAT FRIER Map pp68–9 Russian \$

Tolstiy Frayer; ☎ 314 5921; www.tolstiy-fraer.ru; Kirpichny per 1; meals R200-400; ☎ 10am-1am Sun-Thu, 10am-3am Fri & Sat; **M** Nevsky Pr
Now with branches around the city, this beer hall on the back streets of the Historic Heart provides a fun hideaway for some comfort food and a Baltika beer. The nostalgic communist paraphernalia recalls the days of Leonid Brezhnev, but thankfully the staff do not – there are smiles all round and good service.

PELMENY BAR Map pp68–9 Russian \$

☎ 570 0405; Gorokhovaya ul 3; meals R200-400; **M** Nevsky Pr

Specialising in the old Siberian standard *pelmeni* (dumplings), this cute café serves them up with beef, pork, salmon or mushrooms. Choose a soup or a salad as a starter, and you've got an immensely

top picks

RUSSIAN CUISINE

- **Molokhovets' Dream** (p168) Time-tested recipes from the Martha Stewart of Old Russia.
- **Old Countryside** (p175) The next best thing to home cooking.
- **Na Zdorovye** (p175) Enjoy the cuisine of Russian tsars and Soviet dictators in a hokey setting.
- **Kalinka Malinka** (opposite) Old-fashioned country cooking.
- **Yolki Palki** (p167) An easy and affordable way to sample some Russian favourites.

satisfying meal. The setting feels like a Russian *dacha* (country cottage), with its wood interior and whimsical dolls floating near the ceiling. Also an excellent place for solo travellers, as you can take the wolf as your dinner companion.

BUSHE Map pp68–9 Bakery \$

☎ 764 2927; www.bushe-bakery.ru; Malaya Morskaya ul 7; breakfast or snacks R50-100; ☎ 9am-9pm; **M** Nevsky Pr

Local Bushe devotees wait for the doors to open so they can enjoy a hot cup of coffee, a fresh-squeezed fruit juice or flaky pastry before heading to work. Sweet and savoury pastries run the gamut, filled with cream, fruit, meat, mushrooms and more. The bakery is Austrian, but it's Soviet in style (meaning not particularly efficient and certainly not overly friendly). But the baked goods are to die for, so who needs chitchat?

BETWEEN THE MOYKA & THE FONTANKA

The network of streets between the Moyka and Fontanka Rivers contain some of St Petersburg's finest dining. Nevsky pr is lined with restaurants, but your options are more plentiful (and more cost effective) if you get away from the main drag.

ONEGIN Map pp68–9 Russian \$\$\$

☎ 571 8384; Sadovaya ul 11; meals R800-1500; ☎ 5pm-2am; **M** Gostiny Dvor

You have to be in the know to know about Oegin, the hippest of places to see and

be seen. Down a small staircase from Sadovaya ul – and barely marked at street level – the restaurant has an interior that is an incredibly over-the-top display of New Russia. Antique and plastic furniture sit side by side, swathed in purple velvet and overhung by crystal chandeliers. Even with all this excess, the menu really delivers. Look out for decadent Russian dishes such as duck fillet with glazed forest berries in grape sauce or marble steak with foie gras and fresh asparagus. Reservations are recommended.

KALINKA MALINKA

Map pp68–9 Russian \$\$\$

☎ 314 2681; Italiyanskaya ul 5; meals R600-800; **M** Nevsky Pr

Kitsch but charming, this long-standing folkloric restaurant is in a basement on pl Iskusstv (Arts Sq). It specialises in country cooking, just as the peasants used to prepare, and the interior resembles a cosy country house. So try hot, homemade *solyanka* or rabbit à la Russe for a great introduction to unembellished Russian cuisine. Live folk music will accompany your evening meal.

GARÇON RESTAURANT

Map pp68–9 French \$\$\$

☎ 570 0348; nab kanala Griboedova 25; meals R600-800; **M** Nevsky Pr

While most French restaurants in town are painfully upscale, this gorgeous little bistro is both smart and unpretentious, and prices are reasonable given the excellent standard of the cooking. The interior is quaint yet romantic, but on a summer evening you can't beat the lovely outdoor patio overlooking the Griboedov Canal. Incidentally, the patio opens early on Sunday, making this an excellent choice for brunch.

SILK Map pp68–9 Asian Fusion \$\$\$

Shyolk; ☎ 571 5078; Malaya Konyushennaya ul 4/2; meals R600-800; **M** Nevsky Pr

Dreamy and decadent, this place is done up with gauze drapes, soft lighting and lounge-all-night sofas. It looks fabulous, and the food tastes pretty good too. This is fusion in the truest sense, as the mostly Japanese menu also features a few representatives from Europe. If you must eat sushi while in St Petersburg, this is a good place to do it.

TERRASSA Map pp68–9 European \$\$

☎ 337 6837; www.terrasa.ru; Kazanskaya ul 3; lunch R300-500, dinner R500-700; **M** Nevsky Pr
On the top floor of chic *Vanity* (p151) shopping centre, this too-cool café and bistro is the latest and greatest on offer by St Pete's culinary creatives. The centrepiece is the namesake terrace, a wide porch boasting unbelievable views of Kazan Cathedral, Nevsky pr and the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood. It is a spectacular setting. And indeed, at the time of research, reservations were necessary to sit on the terrace any time of day, any time of week. Inside, the atmosphere is Old World but understated. The focus is clearly on the food; if you have any doubt, take a peak inside the open kitchen, where chefs are busy preparing fresh fusion cuisine, exhibiting influences from Italy, Asia and beyond.

KOROVABAR Map pp68–9 Steakhouse \$\$

☎ 314 7348; Karavannaya ul 8; meals R500-700; ☎ noon-1am Sun-Thu, 1pm-3am Fri & Sat; **M** Gostiny Dvor

In case you could not tell from the Holstein décor, *korova* means 'cow'. And this so-called cow-bar milks this theme for all its worth. Cow hides hang from the ceilings and adorn the booths. Yet somehow, it works: the place is way more hip than it is hokey. The sophisticated menu features an excellent selection of steaks, among other things, and an incredible wine list. And if all that black and white has you longing for greener pastures, take a seat on the pleasant porch.

BAKU Map pp68–9 Uzbek \$\$

☎ 571 9123; Sadovaya ul 12/23; meals R400-600; **M** Gostiny Dvor

The amazing mosque-like interior is reason enough to stop at this new addition. Tiled walls, arched doorways and throw pillows whisk you to Azerbaijan – exactly what's intended. And there you can indulge in *plov*, the traditional dish of rice and lamb, subtly spiced with cumin and sprinkled with raisins, as well as grilled meats and vegetables. This is an experience to delight all of your senses.

THE OTHER SIDE

Map pp68–9 International \$\$

Drugaya Storona; ☎ 312 9554; www.theotherside.ru; Bolshaya Konyushennaya ul 1; meals R300-600; **M** Nevsky Pr

Calling itself a 'gastro bar and refuge', this newish place is attracting fans for its

friendly atmosphere, its innovative, international menu and its schedule of live music (see p184 for details). Take a seat on the patio on the pleasant pedestrian-only street or head into the cosy interior. The diverse menu hits just about every continent, with dishes ranging from rack of lamb served on a bed of couscous to grilled salmon on soba noodles. There is a range of sandwiches and other lighter fare available for the cost conscious.

TINKOFF Map pp68–9 German \$\$

☎ 718 5566; www.tinkoff.ru; Kazanskaya ul 7; business lunch R250, meals R300-600; ☎ noon-2am; **M** Nevsky Pr

St Petersburg's most fashionable – and arguably most delicious – beer comes from this huge factory-like bar and microbrewery. At its centre is a German-style beer hall, serving excellent schnitzel, sauerkraut and other specialities, including a hard-to-resist metre-long sausage. The boisterous and sociable dining area has great atmosphere and – of course – great beer. See p180 for more information about evening entertainment. Most importantly, pay no attention to the sushi bar in the middle of the restaurant.

KAVKAZ Map pp68–9 Georgian \$\$

☎ 312 1665; Karavannaya ul 18; meals R300-500; **M** Gostiny Dvor

Another long-standing favourite, Kavkaz means 'Caucasus' and features excellent Georgian fare. It's a casual affair: the basement digs are not so impressive to look at, but the portions are generous and the food – served on large wooden platters – is consistently delectable. This is the place to experience the legendary Georgian hospitality (and shashlyk and wine etc).

LA STRADA Map pp68–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 312 4700; www.lastrada.com.ru; Bolshaya Konyushennaya ul 27; meals R400-600; **M** Nevsky Pr

The atrium-style dining room, accented with tile floors, streetlights and mural-painted walls, evokes *la dolce vita*. And somehow, the otherwise Soviet-looking buildings that are visible through the glass ceiling are rendered more romantic in this context. It's an exceedingly pleasant atmosphere to feast on fresh pasta and delectable pizza – not too trendy and certainly not too cheap, but so satisfying.

YAKITORIYA Map pp68–9 Japanese \$\$

☎ 315 8343; www.yakitoriya.spb.ru; pl Ostrovskogo 5/7; meals R300-500; ☎ 11am-6am;

M Gostiny Dvor

With its efficient service and excellent fresh fish, it's easy to see why this chain has been so successful in St Petersburg and – indeed – across the country. This location off Nevsky pr is the most central of many locations. It features an actual sushi bar, which is ideal for solo diners. The woody interior is slick and modern, with a slightly upscale atmosphere.

MAMA ROMA Map pp68–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 314 0347; www.mamaroma.ru; Karavannaya ul 3/35; meals R300-500; ☎ 8am-11pm; **M** Gostiny Dvor

Mama's menu is almost too long, as it's hard to choose between the grilled meats and fish, the hardy homemade pastas drowning in delicious sauces and the crispy thin pizzas topped with your favourite meats and cheeses. The latter is the hands-down favourite because it is so affordable, but all of Mama Roma's offerings are fresh and delicious and prepared to order.

FACE CAFÉ Map pp68–9 European \$\$

☎ 571 9695; www.facecafe.ru; nab kanala Griboedova 29; meals R200-500; ☎ 9am-midnight; **M** Nevsky Pr; ☎

Despite the name, this little café on the banks of the canal does not exercise face control; indeed, it is one of the city's more welcoming venues – especially notable considering its cool minimalist décor and excellent menu. The subterranean space is well lit, with arched doorways and an unusual engraved Art Deco bar. The menu offers a little bit of everything, but the food is well prepared and artistically presented. It's highly recommended for breakfast, with homemade *kasha* and hearty omelettes that will keep you satiated throughout the day.

ZOOM CAFÉ Map pp68–9 European \$\$

☎ 448 5001; www.cafezoom.ru; Gorokhovaya ul 22; meals R200-400; ☎ 10am-10.30pm; **M** Sennaya Pl; ☎ wi-fi

Leather-bound menus include several pages dedicated to maps and geographic descriptions before they get to the goods. And they are good: Russian and European soups, salads and sandwiches, as well as fresh-squeezed juices, exotic coffee drinks and a seemingly endless tea list. Light pink

FAST FOOD: RUSSIAN-STYLE

Now that Russians are part of the capitalist world, they sometimes need to eat on the go just like the rest of us. There is no shortage of American fast-food chains around St Petersburg, but there are also a few uniquely Russian chains that are every bit as popular as their Western counterparts. Perfect for travellers who are short on time and/or short on cash, these options for *bystroya yeda* (fast food) offer an authentic Russian experience at a faster pace and lower price. Outlets are located around the city:

Blin Donald's (Map p84; ul Zhukovskogo 18; meals R60-100; ☎ 10am-10pm; **M** Pl Vosstaniya) This funny fast-food joint has somehow avoided legal action from a certain well-known American chain. Here you get fast-food bliny (crepes), chicken Kiev and borscht (beetroot soup) – all as far from the real thing as McDonald's apple pie, but a fascinating comment on post-Soviet Russia.

Chaynaya Lozhka (Tea Spoon; meals R150-250; ☎ 9am-9pm; **M** Smolny (Map p84; pr Chernyshevskogo 9; **M** Chernyshevskaya); Vosstaniya (Map p92; ul Marata 3; **M** Mayakovskaya); Vasilevsky Island (Map pp108–9; Sredny pr 32/44; **M** Vasileostrovskaya); Petrograd Side (Map pp114–15; Kamennostrovskiy pr 40; **M** Petrogradskaya) Chaynaya Lozhka is an excellent bliny, soup and salad joint that has become a citywide phenomenon. It's serve yourself cafeteria-style, but the bliny are made to order and the soups and salads are fresh and delicious.

Teremok (Map pp68–9; www.teremok.ru; cnr Malaya Sadovaya & Italiyanskaya ul; bliny R40-100; ☎ 10am-10pm; **M** Gostiny Dvor) Sprinkled all over the city, these kiosks are superb value, serving up fresh bliny with the fillings of your choice. There is no seating, so grab your snack to go and eat it at the standing-room-only tables in the vicinity. Besides this central location in the Historic Heart, there are Teremok outlets outside many metro stations.

U Tyoshi na Blinakh (meals R200-300; ☎ 24hr); Historic Heart (Map pp68–9; Malaya Morskaya ul 4/1); Vosstaniya (Map p92; Zagorodny pr 18; **M** Vladimirskaia); Petrograd Side (Map pp114–15; Syntinskaya ul 16; **M** Gorkovskaya) 'Auntie's pancakes' are being served up in so many locations now that it's a wonder she's not dropped dead yet. This cafeteria-style chain is a great place to fill up quickly and cheaply. Besides the tired-looking bliny, you can also sample hot soups, fresh salads and a variety of tasty pre-prepared mains.

walls are adorned with B&W photos, while well-stocked bookshelves and a range of board games (not to mention wi-fi access) encourage lingering. This is the kind of place where it's easy to become a regular.

IL PATIO Map pp68–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 314 8215; <http://il-patio.rosinter.com>; Nevsky pr 30; meals R300-500; **M** Nevsky Pr

Patio Pizza was one of the first post-Soviet restaurants to gain widespread popularity for its tasty pizza and extensive salad bar, all at prices that were manageable for Olga and Ivan Russian. Branches quickly spread around Moscow, and then across the country. Now this tried-and-true favourite has gone slightly upscale, with a new, more Italian name, and a new, more stylish look. Wood-oven pizzas and fresh salad bars are still the highlights of the menu.

KILIKIA Map pp68–9 Armenian \$\$

☎ 327 2208; Gorokhovaya ul 26/40; meals R200-400; ☎ noon-3am; **M** Sennaya Pl

An excellent option for the late-night munchies, the Kilikia is famous for its shashlyk, which sates the appetite of the

post-clubbing crowd. Otherwise, it's a popular spot for St Petersburg's Armenian community, which should tell you something about the authentic and delicious food. Live music plays most nights.

YOLKI PALKI Map pp68–9 Russian \$

☎ 571 0385; www.elki-palki.ru; Malaya Konyushennaya ul 9; meals R200-400; ☎ 24hr; **M** Nevsky Pr

Another chain restaurant that made it big in Moscow, Yolki Palki is now attempting to woo the St Petersburg diners – and having some success of it. Its wooden interior is decorated with stuffed animals and fake trees, reminiscent of the Russian countryside, and its menu specialises in reliable, affordable Russian country classics. The salad bar is the main drawcard here – a huge selection for one fixed price, with no waiting and no deciphering Russian menus. It's an excellent option for vegetarians.

STOLLE Map pp68–9 Russian \$

☎ 312 1862; www.stolle.ru; Konyushenny per 1/6; meals R100-300; ☎ 9am-11pm; **M** Nevsky Pr; ☎

This is one of St Petersburg's coolest places to come for coffee, although you'd be

a fool to leave without sampling one of its magnificent *pirogi* (pies). In fact, the entire menu is excellent, but the pies are irresistible. A 'stolle' is a traditional Saxon Christmas cake: the selection of sweets and savouries sits on the counter, fresh from the oven. It may be difficult to decide (mushroom or meat; apricot or apple?) but you really can't go wrong. This outlet on Konyushennaya pl is one of the city's largest, and it comes with a separate non-smoking room.

LITEYNY & SMOLNY

This is a largely residential and institutional neighbourhood which does not have a wide selection of restaurants. There are a few noteworthy exceptions located near the metro station (M Chernyshevskaya) and on ul Pestelya.

MOLOKHOVETS' DREAM

Map p84 Russian \$\$\$

Mechta Molokhovets; ☎ 929 2247; www.molokhovets.ru; ul Radishcheva 10; meals R800-1500; M Pl Vosstaniya

Inspired by the cookbook of Elena Molokhovets (see *A Gift to Young Housewives*, *opposite*), the Russian Martha Stewart, the menu here covers all the classics from borscht to beef stroganoff, as well as some more exotic fare. Start with berry kissel, a delicious sweet soup of brambles and wine, and don't bypass the speciality, *koulibiaca*, a golden pastry pie of fish or rabbit.

VOX Map p84 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 273 1469; ul Pestelya 4; meals R800-1200; ☎ 11am-1am; M Chernyshevskaya

On a quaint corner of the pedestrian-friendly Stolnyarny per and ul Pestelya, Vox has a prime spot for a sidewalk café. It's a delightful setting to sip a cool drink on a summer afternoon, especially when the Museum of Decorative & Applied Arts has a street exhibition, as it is sometimes prone to do. The interior is equally appealing and very upscale. Dim lighting, white linens and stripped-down décor provide a suitably sexy environment for antipastos, pastas, meats and seafood. This place maintains a cool ambience, despite the constant crowds. Reservations recommended.

BLACK CAT, WHITE CAT

Map p84 International \$\$\$

Chyornaya Koshka, Bely Kot; ☎ 279 7430; ul Pestelya 13/15; meals R600-800;

M Chernyshevskaya

This super-sleek place wins plaudits for contemporary design: exposed brick walls are hung with posters, light streams in through huge bay windows, and chiffon sheets hang between the tables for privacy. The place is named after the Serbian film *Black Cat, White Cat*. The menu features an eclectic mix of grilled meats, fresh salads and homemade soups, perhaps with a Serbian twist, though it's hard to pinpoint.

GIN NO TAKI

Map p84 Japanese \$\$

☎ 272 0958; www.ginnotaki.ru; pr Chernyshevskogo 17; meals R500-700; ☎ 11am-6am; M Chernyshevskaya

In a city awash with wannabe Japanese restaurants, this large and lively operation is one of the most authentic, with a wide range of sushi, sashimi, kebabs, tempura and bento box lunches. Unnervingly, the entire staff greets you very loudly in Japanese as you walk in the door. That exuberance aside, Gin No Taki makes for an excellent Japanese dining experience. Should you be inspired by the cooking, there is a Japanese grocery store next door.

SUNDUK Map p84 International \$\$

☎ 272 3100; www.cafesunduk.ru; Furshatskaya ul 42; meals R400-600; M Chernyshevskaya

Calling itself an 'art café', Sunduk is tucked into a tiny basement, its two rooms crowded with mismatched furniture, musical instruments, carefully posed mannequins and lots of other junk (or 'art') that creates a bohemian atmosphere. The European menu has a good selection of meat and fish, with plenty of Russian classics, all of which is pretty tasty. Live music nightly – see p185.

FAT FRIER Map p84 Russian \$

Tolstiy Frayer; ☎ 272 7943; www.tolstiy-fraer.ru; ul Belinskogo 13; meals R200-400; ☎ 10am-1am Sun-Thu, 10am-3am Fri & Sat; M Mayakovskaya
The original branch of this citywide chain is a great place for late-night dining. See p164 for a full review.

A GIFT TO YOUNG HOUSEWIVES

The most popular cookbook in 19th-century Russia was called *A Gift to Young Housewives*, a collection of favourite recipes and household management tips that turned into a bestseller. The author, Elena Molokhovets, a housewife herself, was dedicated to her 10 children, to the Orthodox Church, and to her inexperienced 'female compatriots' who might need assistance keeping their homes running smoothly.

This book was reprinted 28 times between 1861 and 1914, and Molokhovets added new recipes and helpful hints to each new edition. The last edition included literally thousands of recipes, as well as pointers on how to organise an efficient kitchen, how to set a proper table and how to clean a cast-iron pot. ('To clean a burned pan, strew five kopeks' worth of chloride of lime into the pot, fill with water, and boil this liquid until the pot is bleached white... then strain into a bottle. After yellowed linen is washed it may be soaked in this water for fifteen minutes or longer until it whitens.')

Molokhovets received an enormously positive response from readers who credited her with no less than preserving their family life. The popular perception of the time was that a wife's primary responsibility was to keep her family together, and keeping her husband well fed seemed to be the key. As one reader wrote, 'a good kitchen is... not an object of luxury. It is a token of the health and well-being of the family, upon which all the remaining conditions of life depend.' Molokhovets included some of these letters in later editions as testimony to her work.

The classic cookbook was never reprinted during the Soviet period. The details of sumptuous dishes and fine table settings – let alone questions of etiquette and style – would certainly have been considered petty and bourgeois by the Soviet regime. Yet still, copies of this ancient tome survived, passed down from mother to daughter like a family heirloom. Today, the book reads not only as a cookbook, but also as a lesson in history and sociology.

At the end of the 20th century, Molokhovets' 'gift' was bestowed upon the modern world, when Joyce Toomre, a culinary historian, translated and reprinted this historical masterpiece. The 1992 version, *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets' A Gift to Young Housewives*, includes Toomre's detailed analysis of mealtimes, menus, ingredients, cooking techniques etc. The hundreds of pages of recipes range from instructions for making wheat starch to details on stringing an eel by its eyes before frying. (As Toomre notes, some are included purely for historical value.)

PRAVDA Map p84 Russian \$

☎ 579 8902; www.pravda.salons.ru; ul Zhukovskogo 45; meals R100-300; M Mayakovskaya

There is nothing new about a retro Soviet-themed restaurant, but somehow it never grows tired: the propaganda posters, the portraits of Lenin, the *Internationale*. This so-called 'art café' actually promises 'communist lunches', which is rarely the object of such nostalgia. But the place is fun, as is the menu of old-fashioned Soviet favourites (and its prices really do hark back to the Soviet period!).

BALTIC BREAD Map p84 Bakery \$

Baltiisky Khleb; www.baltic-bread.ru; Grechesky pr 25; meals R100-300; ☎ 10am-9pm; M Pl Vosstaniya

This outstanding bakery-café is an excellent place to stop for breakfast, lunch or a late-afternoon coffee break. Seating is limited, so take your order *soboy* ('to go') and head to **Tauride Gardens** (p85). There is another outlet

in **Vladimirsky Passage** (p171) and one on the **Petrograd Side** (p175).

VLADIMIRSKAYA & VOSTANIYA

Plenty of places to eat are clustered around the metro stations at pl Vosstaniya and Vladimirskaaya, as well as along Nevsky pr. Zagorodny pr is also becoming something of an 'eat street', with plenty of restaurants to suit all price ranges.

MATROSSKAYA TISHINA

Map p92 Russian \$\$\$

☎ 764 4413; ul Marata 54/34; meals R600-800; M Ligovsky Pr

Generally accepted by all to be the city's finest seafood restaurant, this place is often completely full. The curious metallic maritime design complements the excellent menu of grilled, baked and fried fish.

top picks

FOR KIDS

Here are some suggestions for family-friendly feeding:

- Fat Frier (p164 or p168)
- Il Patio (p167 or right)
- Tinkoff (p166)
- Yolki Palki (p167 or opposite)
- Shinok (right)
- Bliny Domik (opposite)
- Russky Kitsch (p173)
- Na Zdorovye (p175)

You can even pick which trout or perch you want to end up on your plate.

BISTROT GARÇON Map p92 French \$\$\$

☎ 717 2467; Nevsky pr 95; meals R600-800;
🕒 9am-1am; 📍 Pl Vosstaniya

The more casual of two outlets, this gorgeous little bistro is smart and unpretentious, with low lighting, upscale but still charming décor, and professional staff. Prices are reasonable given the excellent standard of the cooking (and Parisian chef). See p165 for a review of the other Garçon.

IMBIR Map p92 Russian \$\$

☎ 713 3215; Zagorodny pr 15; meals R400-600;
🕒 noon-2am; 📍 Dostoievskaya

Effortlessly cool, Imbir combines ornate tsarist décor with contemporary design to brilliant effect. With a great atmosphere, it's always full. The hip local crowd come here for dark coffee and creative cooking, all of which is reasonably priced. The staff aims to please, which is a welcome change of pace from the typically cooler-than-thou attitude at trendy places.

ORIENT EXPRESS Map p92 Russian \$\$

Vostochny Ekspres; ☎ 314 5096; www.orient-express.spb.ru; ul Marata 21; meals R400-600;
📍 Mayakovskaya

All aboard for a taste of the romance, mystery and history of the legendary train line. Decked out like a luxury locomotive, this fun restaurant features booths that resemble train cabins and all the railway paraphernalia you can imagine. It's an absolute must for train spotters and anybody who is about to board the Trans-Siberian. Rest as-

sured, you won't get food like this once on board the real thing, so enjoy the Eastern-influenced menu, especially the selection of meats grilled over hot coals.

CHE Map p92 International \$\$

☎ 716 7608; www.cafecubche.ru; Poltavskaya ul 3; meals R300-500; 📍 Pl Vosstaniya; 📶 wi-fi

Few places are cooler to hang out than Che. Come by day for good lunch specials and wi-fi access or come by night for cold beer and live music. Either way, you will enjoy the loungy furniture, friendly service and laidback atmosphere. The mostly Russian menu features rotating 'specials' suggested by the chef, as well as standard soups, salads and other European fare.

SHINOK Map p92 Ukrainian \$\$

☎ 571 8262; Zagorodny pr 13; meals R400-600;
🕒 24hr; 📍 Dostoievskaya

Tucked into a folksy interior filled with embroidered linens and painted wooden handicrafts, Shinok is a fun, friendly place to sample Ukrainian fare. The waitstaff may look like Ukrainian peasants, but they speak English and are eager to please. Country cooking like hearty soups and meat-filled *vareniki* (dumplings) will satiate your appetite, and there is live folk music nightly at 7pm.

CAT CAFÉ Map p92 Georgian \$\$

☎ 571 3377; Stremyannaya ul 22/3; meals R300-500;
📍 Mayakovskaya

With vines hanging from the ceiling to evoke the Caucasian countryside, this popular restaurant dishes up Georgian favourites: hearty *khinkali* (meat dumplings), decadent *khachapuri* (cheese bread), grilled eggplant and zucchini. At the time of research, Russia and Georgia were ironing out their trade differences, so hopefully you can also wash it down with a delicious Georgian red wine.

IL PATIO Map p92 Italian \$\$

☎ 271 3177; Nevsky pr 182; meals R300-500;
📍 Pl Alexandra Nevskogo

There are not too many places to eat at the far end of Nevsky pr. Fortunately, Russia's favourite pizza place comes through for hungry travellers who want to grab lunch after visiting the monastery. See p167 for a full review.

YOLKI PALKI Map p92 Russian \$

☎ 273 1594; www.elki-palki.ru; Nevsky pr 88; meals R200-300; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Mayakovskaya
Prominently placed on this busy strip of Nevsky pr, this is one of several outlets of the favourite Russian chain. See p167 for a full review.

BLINY DOMIK Map p92 Russian \$

☎ 315 9915; Kolokolnaya ul 8; meals R200-400;
🕒 10.30am-11.30pm; 📍 Vladimirskaya

There is more than just bliny on the menu at this long-running favourite. Besides sweet and savoury pancakes of every kind, there are also soups, salads and other snacks. The place is set up like a cosy and welcoming country home. It gets very busy at noon, so come for breakfast or a late lunch.

TROITSKY MOST Map p92 Vegetarian \$

☎ 715 1998; Zagorodny pr 38; meals R200-300;
📍 Pushkinskaya

The Zagorodny pr branch is by far the nicest of this chain of vegetarian cafés, with the Indian spiritual-style *Trang Café* attached, and overlooking a small park. A huge selection of soups and salads, excellent pasta (including unbeatable lasagne) and other meat-free treats round out the daily-changing menu.

BALTIC BREAD Map p92 Bakery \$

Baltiisky Khleb; ☎ 331 3220; Vladimirsky pr 19; meals R100-300; 📍 Dostoievskaya

Strangely enough, despite the name this is a British bakery. This branch is located in the Vladimirsky Passage shopping centre, where you can pick up fresh bread, cakes and even ready-made sandwiches on the run. You can take away or eat in the small café area provided.

BUSHE Map p92 Bakery \$

☎ 312 3578; ul Razyezzhaya 13; breakfast or snacks R50-100; 📍 Vladimirskaya

This Austrian bakery has developed a huge number of local devotees, thanks to fresh-baked pastries and delicious coffee drinks. See p164 for a full review.

SENNAYA

There are loads of fast-food restaurants around Sennaya pl, including Chaynaya Lozhka (see boxed text, p167). For something

a bit more upscale, there are some worthwhile restaurants on Gorokhovaya ul and Kazanskaya ul.

KARAVAN Map p97 Central Asian \$\$\$

☎ 310 5678; Voznesensky pr 46; meals R600-800;
📍 Sadovaya

Despite the kitschy décor (epitomised by the camel in the corner), Karavan is a superb Central Asian restaurant with a lovely location overlooking the Fontanka River. Open grills line the dining room, giving an optimum view (and scent) of the kebabs that are on the menu. The grilled meats and vegetables are guaranteed to make your mouth water, while the wine list offers some excellent and unusual complements. Service is attentive and efficient.

CROCODILE Map p97 International \$\$\$

Krokodil; ☎ 570 4240; Kazanskaya ul 46; meals R300-500; 📍 Sennaya Pl

Service can be slow at this underground hideaway, but the unusual and highly edible food is worth the wait. Look for innovative combinations that produce a delicious effect: mostly European fare with some international flare. The menu offers rich homemade soups, hearty salads that double as main courses, traditional pasta dishes and some excellent, unusual vegetarian options. The interior is almost as eclectic as the menu, but it's inviting and a bit arty and – again – the overall result is appealing.

TESTO Map p97 Italian \$\$

☎ 310 8270; per Gritvsova 5/29; meals R300-500;
📍 Sennaya Pl

Take your pick from a wide range of homemade pastas and top them with your favourite sauce, whether tomato-based bolognese or a rich, creamy salmon sauce. A few options for soup, salad and pizza round out the menu, but the pasta is the main drawcard. The modern space is not too fancy, but low light and Italian accents provide just enough ambience that you could bring a date here.

FASOL Map p97 Russian-European \$\$

☎ 571 0907; www.fasolcafe.ru; Gorokhovaya ul 17; meals R300-500; 📍 Sennaya Pl

A few of the modern dishes at this chic minimalist café feature the namesake beans (fasol), but that is not actually the

reason to come here. (The name is actually supposed to be a play on the name of the street, which means 'Pea Street.') Whatever it's called, the updated Russian cuisine is creative and cost-effective. Try the herring salad with freshly fried potato pancakes.

SUMETA Map p97 Caucasian \$\$
☎ 310 2411; ul Yefimova 5; meals R200-300;
📍 Sadovaya

Even if you've never had Dagestani food, you'll see plenty of familiar Caucasian dishes in this quiet but friendly place, from Lula kebab (minced-meat kebab) to fried eggplant with garlic and walnuts in sour cream. Try the pumpkin *chudu* (large pancake) or the selection of Caucasian wines for something new.

MARIINSKY

Decidedly quiet, the Mariinsky district does nevertheless have a few excellent restaurants clustered around the theatre. Look out for the expatriate mainstay The Idiot and the Mariinsky's fashionable restaurant, Backstage (Za Stsenoy).

NOBLE NEST Map p102 Russian-French \$\$\$
Dvoryanskoye Gnezdo; ☎ 312 0911; ul Dekabristov 21; meals R1000-1500; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya
This is the doyenne of the St Petersburg *haute cuisine* world, housed in the Trianon of the **Yusupov Palace** (p102). It's exceptionally stuffy (men shouldn't even think of entering without a tie), but – as previous diners such as Bill Clinton will no doubt tell you – the Russian-French cuisine is exceptional. Reservations recommended.

LE PARIS Map p102 French \$\$\$
☎ 571 9545; www.leparis.ru; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 63; meals R800-1200; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya
Sumptuous yet understated, this French restaurant sits just across the Moyka River from the Yusupov Palace. The three rooms include the main wood-panelled dining room and a smaller, simpler wine and cheese tasting room. No matter where you choose to indulge, you will not be disappointed by the excellent French fare and wine list. Apparently, this class act is a favourite with city governor Valentina Matvienko among other local dignitaries. Reservations recommended.

BACKSTAGE Map p102 Russian \$\$\$
Za Stsenoy; ☎ 327 0684; Teatralnaya pl 18/10; meals R600-1000; 🕒 noon-2am; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya

The Mariinsky's official restaurant is tucked away rather out of sight on one corner of Teatralnaya pl. The décor is stage-worthy, and the food is excellent. Service sometimes comes with a sniff, but that somehow benefits an institution so celebrated as the Mariinsky. Apparently, famous opera singers and ballet dancers are welcome to write all over the walls. Probably best to refrain unless you count yourself among the stars.

LECHAIM Map p102 Jewish \$\$
☎ 972 2774; www.lehaim-spb.ru; Lermontovskiy pr 2; meals R300-600; 🕒 noon-11pm Sun-Fri; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya

Hidden away beneath the **Grand Choral Synagogue** (p104), this classy kosher restaurant is the city's best place for traditional Jewish cooking. You'll probably have the place to yourself, which detracts a bit from the otherwise authentic atmosphere.

THE IDIOT Map p102 Vegetarian \$\$
☎ 315 1675; nab reki Moyki 82; meals R400-600; 🕒 11am-1am; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya; 📶 wi-fi
'Dostoevsky loved this place!' boasts an advertisement for this atmospheric expat institution. And why wouldn't he? The food is nothing to write novels about, but vegetarians are likely to disagree, as there is not a single animal on the menu. In any case, the cosy subterranean space, the antique furnishings and crowded bookshelves, plus the ever-amicable crowd, make it an extremely pleasant place to come to eat or drink.

CROCODILE Map p102 International \$\$
Krokodil; ☎ 314 9437; Galernaya ul 18; meals R300-500; 📍 Sennaya Pl/Sadovaya
The original (and perhaps more interesting) restaurant by this name, this bar and restaurant is a top choice for lunch or dinner, as long as you are not in a rush. Enjoy a dimly lit but artsy interior and an interesting, eclectic menu. See p171 for a full review.

LYA RUS Map p102 Russian \$\$
☎ 571 2946; Konnogvardeyskiy bul 15; meals R300-400; 📍 Sennaya Pl
Another kitschy Russian country house, this is a sweet place to sample hearty peasant

top picks

BREAKFAST

- **City Bar** (p179) For late nights and early mornings.
- **Stolle** (p167) Get your pie for the big pie fight.
- **Face Café** (p166) Real Russian breakfast, featuring bliny, *kasha* and more.
- **Bistrot Garçon** (p170) Hearty omelettes and rich, dark coffee.
- **Marius Pub** (p208) Inside the Helvetia Hotel & Suites.

soups and sip vodka while you watch traditional Russian song and dance. Typical for this type of place, the décor is folksy and the food is filling.

STOLLE Map p102 Bakery \$
☎ 714 2571; www.stolle.ru; ul Dekabristov 33; meals R100-300; 🕒 9am-11pm; 📍 Sadovaya; 📶 wi-fi

One of several outlets throughout the city, Stolle is a great place to come for coffee or dessert after an evening at the theatre. Black-and-white photos adorn the light-coloured walls, while jazz music wafts in the air. There is another outlet further up **ul Dekabristov** (☎ 315 2383; ul Dekabristov 19; 🕒 9am-9pm), although its basement setting is not quite as inviting. See p167 for a full review.

VASILEVSKY ISLAND

One of the city's most interesting areas for dining, Vasilevsky Island offers river cruises, ethnic cuisine, and some of the classiest and most innovative Russian restaurants in town. Look around the metro station at **M Vasileostrovskaya** and near the Strelka.

OLD CUSTOMS HOUSE
Map pp108-9 Russian \$\$\$

Staraya Tamozhnya; ☎ 327 8980; www.concord-catering.ru; Tamozhenny per 1; meals R800-1200; 🕒 1pm-1am; 📍 Nevsky Pr

This restaurant is not actually set in the old customs house, although it is around the corner in the historic building that houses St Petersburg's first museum (Kunstkamera). Costume-clad doormen and mannequins posing as customs officials ensure that you don't mistake the theme of this

otherwise classy restaurant. Famous for its wine list and excellent food, this restaurant is where you will see St Petersburg's uppermost classes partaking of filet mignon and caviar crepes.

OYSTER BAR Map pp108-9 French \$\$\$

Ustrichny Bar; ☎ 323 2279; www.oysters.spb.ru; Bolshoy pr 8; oysters per half-dozen R800-1000, meals R600-1000; 📍 Vasileostrovskaya
Four kinds of oysters are on the menu at this rather unlikely basement bar, along with complementary wines (which your knowledgeable server will recommend) and other seafood specialities. If you are yearning for a truly decadent and ostensibly aphrodisiac experience, look no further.

NEW ISLAND Map pp108-9 International \$\$\$

☎ 320 2120; www.concord-catering.ru; Universitetskaya nab 13; meals R800-1200; 🕒 2pm, 6pm, 8pm & 10.30pm late Apr-Oct; 📍 Vasileostrovskaya
The list of diners on this smartest of boat restaurants is dizzying – George W Bush, Jacques Chirac and the Queen of Spain have all dined here, while Putin is a regular. These heavies come for the sumptuous décor and beautifully presented international menu, not to mention the fantastic city views from the two-hour cruise. Reservations required.

RESTORAN Map pp108-9 Russian \$

☎ 327 8979; Tamozhenny per 2; meals R400-600; 📍 Nevsky Pr

Natural light filters in through large street-level windows, filling the spacious hall. Cream-coloured linens and hardwood floors make for a chic, contemporary décor. It's an interesting contrast to the name of the restaurant (the old-fashioned Russian spelling harks back to the days of Romanov splendour). The menu manages to combine the best of *haute russe* cuisine with enough modern flare to keep things interesting.

RUSSKY KITSCH Map pp108-9 Russian \$

☎ 325 1122; www.concord-catering.ru; Universitetskaya nab 25; meals R400-600; 📍 Vasileostrovskaya
The centrepiece of this crazy café is a ceiling fresco featuring a shameless Fidel Castro and Leonid Brezhnev entwined in a passionate embrace. It's the biggest and best example of a venue laden with kitsch, just as the name promises. The walls and ceilings are plastered with funny photo collages,

featuring scenes from Soviet socialist realism alongside other anachronisms; mismatched tapestries cover Victorian furniture; and menus are fashioned from butchered copies of Lenin's selected works. Whether or not this is your style, you're sure to find something that pleases in the diverse (and delicious) menu, and the glass-enclosed porch overlooking the Neva River is an absolutely delightful place to sip a coffee.

BIERGARTEN Map pp108–9 German \$\$

☎ 329 0895; 6-ya liniya i 7-ya liniya 15; meals R400-600; ☎ 24hr; **M** Vasileostrovskaya

Dark wood furnishings and beamed ceilings enhance the Bavarian atmosphere at this German beer hall. Select a table in the dark, inviting interior or on the porch overlooking Vasilevsky Island's main thoroughfare. Both are ideal spots to enjoy traditional German biergarten fare and a nice selection of beers.

MAMA ROMA Map pp108–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 328 0639; www.mamarama.ru; Sredny pr 6; meals R300-500; ☎ 8am-11pm; **M** Vasileostrovskaya
Reliable Italian fare from decent pizza to risotto and pasta, not to mention an excellent breakfast. See [p166](#) for a full review.

BYBLOS Map pp108–9 Lebanese \$\$

☎ 325 8564; Maly pr 5; meals R300-500; **M** Vasileostrovskaya

The only Lebanese place in town, this Vasilevsky Island hideaway attracts a large crowd for its excellent-value lunch, as well as a more relaxed evening clientele. Here you'll find delicious mezze, hummus, *kibbeh* (minced meat with bulgur wheat), *tabbouleh*, *kofta* (spicy meatballs of lamb or beef) and of course hookahs and Lebanese wine.

STOLLE Map pp108–9 Russian \$

☎ 328 7860; www.stolle.ru; Syezdovskaya & 1-ya liniya 50; meals R100-300; **M** Vasileostrovskaya
This cosy café is the original Stolle – apt, as this is the historic location of the city's Saxon quarter. See [p167](#) for a full review.

CHEBURECHNAYA Map pp108–9 Cafeteria \$

☎ 323 8028; 6-ya liniya i 7-ya liniya 19; meals R100-200; **M** Vasileostrovskaya

This is not one of the many restaurants trying to be 'retro'; this *stolovaya* (cafeteria) just

continues to do what it has been doing for decades. Bypass the sit-down restaurant and head straight into the nondescript cafeteria (on the right), where you can place your order at the cash register. Nowadays, there are a few other items on the menu, but you'll want to order the namesake *cheburechka*, a delicious Georgian meat-stuffed pastry. Take your receipt and pick up your food at the window. It may be the tastiest – and surely the cheapest – meal you will eat in St Pete.

PETROGRAD SIDE

The excellent restaurants on the Petrograd Side are not so easy to find if you don't know they are there, but it's worth seeking them out for the city's best Chinese and Georgian fare, not to mention a few interesting Russian restaurants. Look also for branches of some of the better Russian chains.

AQUAREL Map pp114–15 Fusion \$\$\$

☎ 320 8600; moored off Birzhevoy most; meals R800-1200; **M** Sportivnaya

Aquarel combines a wonderful setting with fantastic fusion cuisine. Indeed, this is the place that pioneered fusion cuisine in the city, and the kitchen continues to artfully combine Russian, Mediterranean and Asian elements into some uniquely delicious dishes. This food fest takes place on a slickly decked-out boat, moored on the Neva River, offering amazing views of the façade of the Hermitage and the lights of Birzhevoy most. Unfortunately, service can be snooty and – even worse – slow, which is unacceptable for an otherwise high-class (and high-price) joint. There is a cheaper café on the top floor serving pasta and pizza and other simple fare.

RUSSIAN FISHING

Map pp114–15 Seafood \$\$\$

Russkaya Rybalka; ☎ 323 9813; www.russian-fishing.ru; Yuzhnaya Doroga 11, Krestovsky Island; meals R800-1200; ☎ noon-9pm; **M** Krestovsky Ostrov
History has it that this was Prince Menshikov's favourite fishing ground. The folks at Russian Fishing want you to be able to experience the same joy as the prince, so when you arrive you will be given a rod and some bait and you can (hopefully) catch your own dinner. The pond is stocked with trout, sterlet and other types of sturgeon (but only expert fishers can be picky about their choice); the

chef will bake, smoke or grill your catch to order. If you are not up for the fishing adventure, you can order from the menu (and there are some nonfish options).

AKVARIUM

Map pp114–15 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 326 8286; Kamennooostrovsky pr 10; meals R600-800; **M** Gorkovskaya

Tucked into a funny location behind Lenfilm, Akvarium maintains the serene aura of a Chinese garden, complete with swimming fish and flowing fountains. It's a perfect atmosphere to indulge in St Petersburg's most authentic Chinese fare, including – appropriately for a place called 'Aquarium' – an excellent range of seafood.

LES AMIS DE JEAN-JACQUES

Map pp114–15 French \$\$

☎ 232 9981; Bolshoy pr 54/2; meals R400-600; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 24hr Fri & Sat; **M** Petrogradskaya

You can't beat this delightful wine bar for eating and drinking like they do in Paris. The menu boasts excellent, affordable bistro fare, including breakfast (served all day on weekends), as well as a huge selection of French wines. The cosy, comfortable interior and the sidewalk seating are equally inviting, so take a seat and pour yourself a glass of Bordeaux.

TBILISI Map pp114–15 Georgian \$\$

☎ 232 9391; Sytninskaya ul 10; meals R400-600; **M** Gorkovskaya

Decidedly upscale as far as Georgian restaurants go, Tbilisi has a great interior with tiled tables and big booths, made more private by intricate latticework between them. This place is a beloved St Petersburg institution, thanks to its top-notch cooking 'prepared by real Georgian chefs'. Classics such as *khachapuri* (cheese bread) receive rave reviews. It's also an excellent place to sample some nice Georgian wines.

NA ZDOROVYE Map pp114–15 Russian \$\$

☎ 232 4039; www.concord-catering.ru; Bolshoy pr 13; meals R400-600; **M** Sportivnaya

Na Zdorovye means 'To your health', the generic Russian toast that is emitted before clinking glasses and throwing back a shot. Indeed, this playful restaurant is as good a place as any to indulge in that long-standing tradition. Drawing on both pre- and post-revolutionary folklore, Na

Zdorovye promises that you can still eat like 'the tsars and the Soviet dictators'. But it is mostly old Russian recipes that have been recreated here, including veal stuffed with cherries and trout in almond sauce. It's definitely a place to try some more unusual Russian dishes in a very Russian setting.

SALKHINO Map pp114–15 Georgian \$\$

☎ 232 7891; Kronverksky pr 25; meals R300-500; **M** Gorkovskaya

Another justly popular Georgian restaurant, Salkhino serves big portions of delicious food in a convivial, arty setting. Pastel-coloured walls are adorned with paintings by local artists, which is not your typical Georgian décor. But the overall atmosphere is typically Georgian, which means dotting service and warm hospitality.

YAKITORIYA Map pp114–15 Japanese \$\$

☎ 970 4858; www.yakitoriya.spb.ru; Petrogradskaya nab 4; meals R300-500; **M** Gorkovskaya

A second branch of Moscow's favourite sushi chain is on Petrogradsky Island. See [p166](#) for a full review.

TROITSKY MOST Map pp114–15 Vegetarian \$

☎ 232 6693; Kamennooostrovsky pr 9/2; meals R200-300; ☎ 9am-11pm; **M** Gorkovskaya

The original branch of the vegetarian chain is located on Petrogradsky Island, just a few blocks north of the bridge for which it is named. See [p171](#) for a full review.

BALTIC BREAD Map pp114–15 Bakery \$

☎ 498 0440; www.baltic-bread.ru; Bolshoy pr 80; meals R100-300; ☎ 9am-10pm; **M** Petrogradskaya

For a great breakfast option or maybe a late-afternoon pick-me-up, head to the Petrograd outlet of this St Petersburg favourite. See [p169](#) for a full review.

VYBORG SIDE

The restaurants on the Vyborg Side are few and far between. We have included a handful that are heartily recommended for their filling fare and unique atmosphere.

OLD COUNTRYSIDE Map pp122–3 Russian \$\$

Staraya Derevnaya; ☎ 431 0000; ul Savushkina 72; meals R400-600; ☎ 1-10pm; **M** Chyornaya Rechka

This tiny, family-run hideaway is well off the beaten track, but its intimate atmosphere

and delectable food are one-of-a-kind. Try old Russian recipes such as beef in plum and nut sauce or ham in oranges. The small size of the restaurant guarantees personal service, but reservations are a must. From the metro station, take any tram down ul Savushkina and get off at the third stop.

SEVEN-FORTY Map p65 Jewish \$\$

Sem-Sorok; ☎ 492 3444; www.740spb.ru; Bolshoy Sampsonievsky pr 108; meals R400-600; 📍 Chyornaya Rechka

For traditional Jewish home cooking in a delightful, folksy setting, Seven-Forty is worth the trip out of the city centre. Set on two levels, the warm, welcoming interior is scattered with artefacts that may have been scavenged from your Jewish grandmother's basement. The menu is not

kosher, but its carefully crafted cuisine is delicious and different. Seven-Forty can be tricky to reach: take tram 40 or catch a cab from the metro station.

AIVA Map pp122-3 International \$\$

☎ 320 4929; Pirogovskaya nab 17; meals R400-600; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Vyborgskaya

Aiva may seem out of the way, but all the cool kids come here to sit on the covered terrace and sip sophisticated cocktails. Rag-rug pillows accent the rustic décor, giving the place an exotic Eastern ambience. The menu is a mixed bag, with dishes from Europe and Asia, as well as Russian and Georgian standards. The service at this trendy café gets decidedly mixed reviews, but everyone agrees that the setting is super fine.