

Russia Россия

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The Hermitage and Palace Square** The imperial splendour of St Petersburg's Winter Palace and the incredible art collection in the Hermitage are unmissable (p964)
- **The Kremlin and Red Square** The spires of the Kremlin (p955), Lenin's embalmed body (p955) and fabulous St Basil's Cathedral (p954) are the ultimate Russian experience
- **Best Journey** Enjoy the overnight train journey from Moscow to St Petersburg – meet strangers and drink the night away in time-honoured Russian fashion (p953)
- **Off-the-beaten track** The fabulous and remote spit of the Kurshkaya Kosa boasts some of Europe's highest dunes and is home to much of its amber (p970)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 16,995,800 sq km (twice the size of the continental USA)
- **ATMs** Common in Moscow, St Petersburg and Kaliningrad
- **Budget** R1300 to R2000 per day
- **Famous for** Vodka, communism, Chelsea Football Club–owning billionaires
- **Head of State** Vladimir Putin
- **Language** Russian
- **Money** rouble (R); \$A1 = R20; CA\$1 = R24, €1 = R34; ¥100 = R23; NZ\$1 = R17; UK£1 = R50; US\$1 = R26
- **Phrases** *privyet* (hi), *do svidaniya* (good-bye), *spasiba* (thanks), *izvinyite* (excuse me)
- **Population** 147 million
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 7;



international access code ☎ 8 (wait for second tone) 10

- **Time** GMT/UTC +3 (Moscow & St Petersburg); GMT +2 (Kaliningrad)
- **Visas** Everyone needs one and they need to be obtained well in advance of travel (€50-100).

TRAVEL HINTS

Don't lose your immigration card. Keep a photocopy of your visa and passport on you at all times.

ROAMING RUSSIA

Begin in exciting Moscow for a couple of days, then head north to St Petersburg for a taste of tsarist splendour.

Looming over the rest of Europe with its immense, inhuman size and dark, brutal history, Russia is an essential and fascinating destination, the flipside of modern Europe and still an unknown quantity to most travellers. Somehow Russia manages to pull off the truly impressive feat of being both a really exciting place to travel while never relenting on its tediously bureaucratic approach to life. Stay in the EU if you want things easy and hassle-free, but venture east for one of the last truly adventurous and unpredictable destinations on the continent.

Moscow's rich history, amazing Kremlin, startling architecture and frenzied pace of development makes it a must on any trip to Eastern Europe, while with its colourful, crumbling Italianate mansions, beautifully wending canals and mind-blowing cultural treasures, St Petersburg is one of the incontestable highlights of the continent. For something totally different, drop into ignored little Kaliningrad, an enclave of Russia wedged between Poland and Lithuania, and probably the least visited area in this book.

SNAPSHOTS

Since Yeltsin's dramatic resignation on New Year's Eve 1999, Vladimir Putin has been the public face of the new Russia. A former KGB officer, Putin is as controversial in the West as he is popular at home among those who argue that Russia needs 'a firm hand'. While tackling the power of the oligarchs whose vast wealth was acquired dubiously during the 1990s and slowly progressing in economic and social reform, Putin has increasingly centralised the Russian government, silenced media critics and brutally fought a dirty war in Chechnya against the independence movement. Critics note the deeply authoritarian tendencies of the Russian state, while supporters point to huge economic growth (propelled mainly by the oil and gas energies) and the gradual metamorphosis from bureaucratic chaos and tax evasion to a well-run country. Things are likely to take another interesting turn when Putin steps down as president in 2008.

HISTORY

Russia has its cultural origins in Kyivan Rus, the kingdom located in what is today Ukraine and Belarus. From here the Slavs expanded into modern European Russia. The birth of the Russian state is usually identified with the founding of Novgorod in AD 862, although until 1480 Russia was overrun by the Mongols.

It was not until the Romanov dynasty (1613–1917) that Russia became the vast nation it is today – territorial expansion from the 17th to 19th centuries saw the country increase in size exponentially to include Siberia, the Arctic, the Russian Far East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Peter the Great dragged the country kicking and screaming out of the Dark Ages, setting up a navy and building a new capital, St Petersburg, in 1703. Catherine the Great continued Peter's progressive policies to create a world power by the mid-18th century.

The 19th century saw feverish capitalist development undermined by successively autocratic and backwards tsars. The most prominent example was Nicholas II, whose

refusal to countenance serious change precipitated the 1917 revolution. What began as a liberal revolution was hijacked later the same year in a coup led by the Bolsheviks under Lenin, which resulted in the setting up of the world's first communist state.

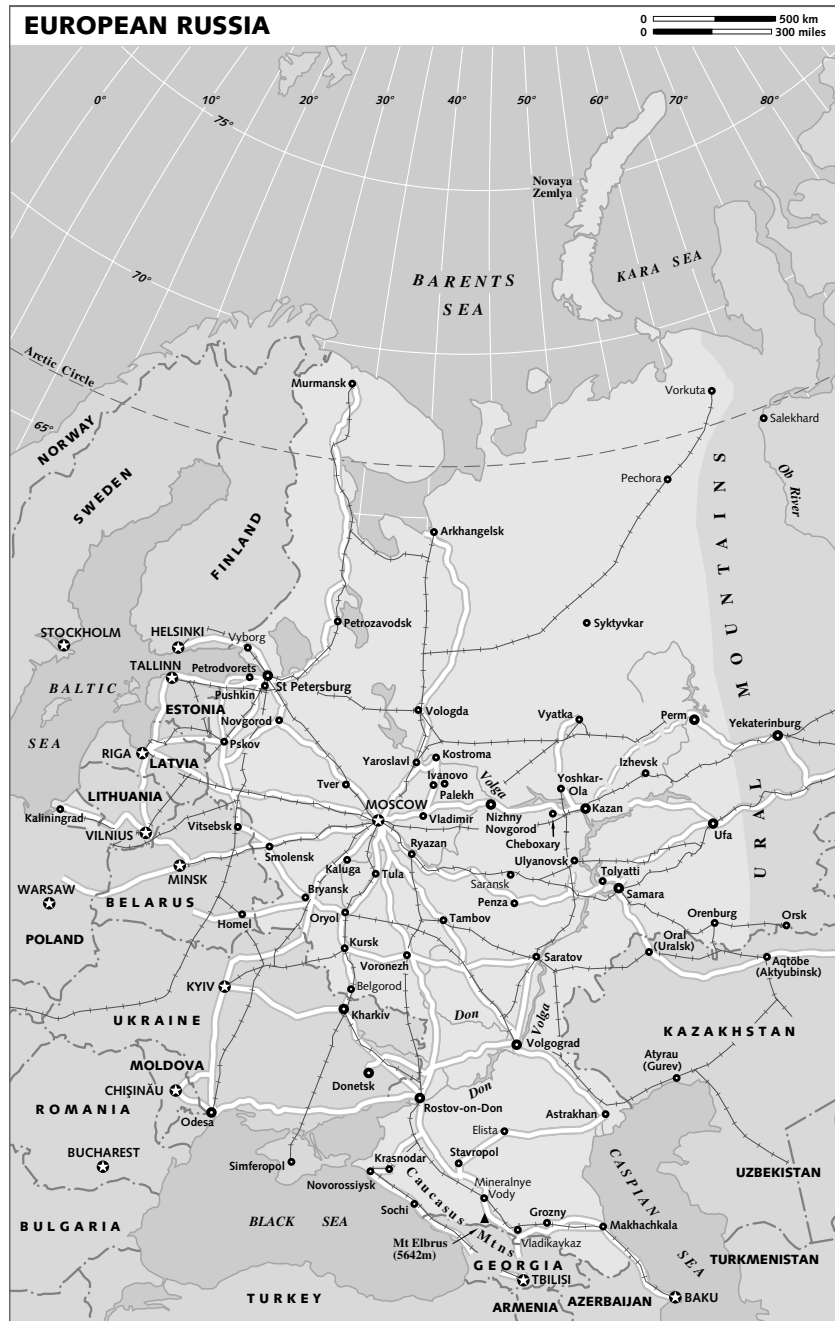
The Communist Party held power from 1917 until 1991, during which time Russia became a superpower, having created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and absorbing some 14 neighbouring states between 1922 and 1945. The terror of Stalin, the reforms of Khrushchev and the stagnation during the Brezhnev era finally led to Mikhail Gorbachev's period of reform known as *perestroika* in 1985. Within six years the USSR had collapsed alongside communism and reformer Boris Yeltsin led Russia into a new world of cutthroat capitalism.

ARTS

Russian literature is one of the world's greatest – Alexander Pushkin is the national bard, whose most accessible writing in English can be found in his short stories. Other 19th-century greats include Mikhail Lermontov, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Second only to its contribution to literature comes Russia's musical heritage: Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich have all had huge influence on the development of modern classical music.

READING UP

Try *The Clay Machine Gun* by Viktor Pelevin for a post-modern take on Russia's 20th-century history, musings on the soul and the nature of Russia. More universal is *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, an existentialist masterpiece that is superbly atmospheric of 19th-century St Petersburg. One of the most popular writers of the 20th century is Mikhail Bulgakov, whose fantastical satirical masterpiece *The Master and Margarita* makes a brilliant companion to any trip to Russia.



TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Moscow's three international airports are modern **Domodedovo airport** (code DME; ☎ 495-933 6666; www.domodedovo.ru), crappy Soviet-era relic **Sheremetyevo airport** (code SVO; ☎ 495-232 6565; www.sheremetyevo-airport.ru) and recently done up **Vnukovo airport** (code VKO; ☎ 495-436 2813; www.vnukovo.ru). Between them Moscow is connected to nearly all European capitals, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Beijing, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and Delhi.

St Petersburg's recently renovated **Pulkovo-2 airport** (code LED; ☎ 812-704 3444; www.pulkovo.ru) is the city's international gateway. It's not nearly as well connected as Moscow, but still has regular connections throughout Europe, including regular flights to London, Paris, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Rome, Prague and Vienna.

Kaliningrad's **Khrabrovo International Airport** (code KGD; ☎ 401-2-355 083) has daily flights to Warsaw.

The following list of Russian carriers fly to/from Russia.

Aeroflot (code SU; ☎ 495-223 5555; 812-327 3872, 401-2-916 455; www.aeroflot.com)

Kaliningrad Airlines (code K8; ☎ in Kaliningrad 401-2-355 095)

Pulkovo Airlines (code FV; ☎ 495-299 1940, 812-303 9268, 401-2-716 663; www.pulkovo.ru)

Siberia Airlines (code S7; ☎ 495-777 9999, 812-718 8676; www.s7.ru)

Transaero Airlines (code UN; ☎ 495-788 8080; www.transaero.ru)

For budget airlines check out **Germania** (www.gexx.de) and **Air Berlin** (www.airberlin.com).

Bus

From Baltiiskaya metro station in St Petersburg, **Eurolines** (☎ 449 8370; ul Shkapina 10; M Baltiiskaya) runs buses to Tallinn (R550, five per day) and Riga (R500, daily). From Moscow – considering distances – it's far better to take the train to neighbouring countries.

Car & Motorcycle

We do not recommend driving in Russia. Public transport is very good, and Russian driving is aggressive and road rules complex in both Moscow and St Petersburg. How-

ever, if you do drive in Russia, you must have a valid International Driving Permit, your passport and insurance documentation for your vehicle.

Train

Moscow is connected very regularly with Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Minsk, Kyiv, Chişinău and Budapest. It is the centre of the Russian rail network, and trains also serve the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mongolia and China from here. The overnight trains between St Petersburg and Moscow run daily and tickets start at around R500.

From St Petersburg, trains serve Helsinki, Riga, Vilnius, Kaliningrad, Kyiv, Berlin, Warsaw, Prague and Budapest. There is currently no train service to Tallinn. For up-to-date schedules, see **Your Train – CIS Railway Table** (www.poezda.net).

GETTING AROUND

Bus

The cheapest way to get around Russia is by bus. The enormous size of the country makes it rather unappealing, but for short trips from major cities it can be faster than the train and there are more regular connections. A sample cost is R515 (Moscow–St Petersburg). There's almost no need to reserve a seat and, in most places, it's impossible anyway. Just arrive a good 30 minutes to one hour before the departure is scheduled and buy a ticket.

Train

Long-distance services need to be booked in advance. *Platskartny* compartments, while cheaper, have open bunk accommodation and are not great for those who value privacy. *Kupeny* (coupé) class simply has four fold-down beds per compartment. Prices between Moscow and St Petersburg in 2nd class begin at R500, going up to R1500 for the fast day trains.

You are advised to reserve at least 24 hours in advance. Bring your passport (or a photocopy), as without it you'll be unable to buy

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

The operator will speak Russian only.

- Ambulance ☎ 03
- Fire ☎ 01
- Police ☎ 02

tickets. The queues can be very long and move with interminable slowness. If you're in a hurry, go to the service centres that exist in most big train stations. Here you pay a R100 surcharge; thus, there are no queues. Hostels can usually book tickets for you and have them delivered for a small fee.

MOSCOW МОСКВА

☎ 495 / pop 10 million

Moscow's sheer size is something most people aren't prepared for – while many come knowing this is the biggest city in Europe by far, this fact alone does not prepare most people for the inhuman scale of the Russian capital. Brazen, ugly, intimidating, exciting and unforgettable, Moscow is many things to many people, and most visitors find their memories are a combination of positive and negative. History, power and wild capitalism hang in the air, beautiful buildings are demolished to build casinos, people go about their never-easy lives as they have done here since time immemorial and the city continues its maddening whirl.

ORIENTATION

The medieval centre of the city, the Kremlin, is a triangle on the northern bank of the Moscow River. The modern city centre radiates around it – the main streets being Tverskaya ul and ul Novy Arbat. The very centre of the city is defined by the 'garden ring' – a vast eight-lane highway that encloses Moscow's central district.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Café Max (☎ 741 7571; www.cafemax.ru, in Russian; ul Novoslobodskaya 3; per hr R50-100; ☎ 24hr; 📶 Novoslobodskaya) This chain has several branches throughout the city, but its most central location is here on the 3rd fl of the shopping centre opposite the metro.

NetCity (☎ 962 0111; www.netcitycafe.ru, in Russian; Kamergersky per 6; per hr R60; ☎ 24hr; 📶 Okhotny Ryad) An excellent spot right in the city centre.

Medical Services

American Medical Centre (☎ 933 7700; www.amcenter.ru/en; Grokholsky per 1; ☎ 24hr; 📶 Prospekt Mira) Features an English-speaking pharmacy (open 8am

to 8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday).

Botkin Hospital (☎ 945 0045; 2-y Botkinsky proezd 5; ☎ 24hr; 📶 Dinamo) A recommended Russian facility; English is spoken.

Money

ATMs and reliable money-changing facilities are on every corner in Moscow. Russian banks include Alfa Bank, Bank Moskvyy and Sberbank (core opening hours are 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday). Most big hotels have a 24-hour bank or money-changing facility. **Amex** (☎ 933-6636; fax 933 6635; ul Usacheva 33; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri; 📶 Sportivnaya) can cash Amex travellers cheques.

Post & Telephone

Central Telegraph (Tsentralny Telegraf; Tverskaya ul 7; ☎ postal counters 8am-10pm; 📶 Okhotny Ryad) Offers post, telephone, fax and internet services.

Travel Agencies

Avantix (☎ 787 7272; www.avantix.ru, in Russian; ul Shchipok 11; 📶 Serpukhovskaya) is one of the leading online ticket agencies. Avantix's office in Moscow sells air and train tickets, and can deliver them free of charge to you anywhere in Moscow.

For air and train tickets, including delivery to your hotel, try **Infinity** (☎ 234 6555; www.infinity.ru; Komsomolsky pr 13; 📶 Frunzenskaya) or **STAR Travel** (☎ 797 9555; www.startravel.ru; 3rd fl, ul Baltiskaya 9; 📶 Sokol).

SIGHTS Red Square

Palpably the centre of Moscow and even Russia as a whole, Red Sq is a massively impressive sight that brings back the full force of the Cold War, despite the two decades that have passed since *perestroika*. Something of a misnomer for this grey and rectangular strip to the east side of the Kremlin, Red Sq is surrounded by Lenin's Mausoleum to the west, the State History Museum to the north, GUM shopping centre to the east and fabulous St Basil's Cathedral to the south. Begin your visit to Moscow by coming here – there's nothing else like it. All sights listed in this section can be accessed via 📶 Pl Revolyutsii.

Entering Red Sq through the Voskressensky Gates, you'll emerge with a superb view of the magnificently flamboyant **St Basil's Cathedral** (Sobor Vasilia Blazhennogo; ☎ 298 3304; admission R100;

☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Mon) on the far side. Ivan the Terrible was so keen to immortalise his victory over the Tatars at Kazan that he took the measure of blinding the architects after they completed the cathedral's dazzlingly bright onion domes in 1561 to ensure that nothing of comparable beauty could ever be built. Its design is the culmination of a wholly Russian style that had been developed through the building of wooden churches. The cathedral owes its name to the barefoot holy fool Vasily (Basil) the Blessed, who predicted Ivan's damnation (as yet unconfirmed) and added (correctly) that Ivan would murder his son.

Lenin's Mausoleum (Mavzoley V I Lenina; ☎ 923 5527; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun) is global ground zero for nostalgic communists. Before joining the queue at the northwestern corner of Red Sq, drop your camera either at the left-luggage office inside the State History Museum (below) or at the **left-luggage office** (R60 per bag; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) beneath Kutafya Tower, as you will not be allowed to take it with you. The hilariously sombre visit takes you into the very dark crypt under Red Sq where Lenin lies swathed in red velvet. Any talking will provoke angry shushing from the soldiers who line the route. Bear in mind that Stalin had Lenin's brain removed in a rather fanciful attempt to study the 'pure communist' brain, leaving Vladimir Ilych looking decidedly green around the (probably wax) gills. Following the trip underground, you'll emerge beside the route along the Kremlin wall, where other greats, such as Stalin, Gagarin and Brezhnev, are buried.

The **State History Museum** (Gosudarstvenny Istorichesky Muzei; ☎ 292 4019; www.shm.ru, in Russian; adult/student R150/75; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Wed-Sat, 11am-

7pm Sun) is the stunningly ornate red building at the northern end of the square. It has an enormous collection covering the whole of Russian history from the Stone Age on, and has been continually refurbishing its galleries since the 1990s. A joint ticket for the museum and St Basil's Cathedral saves a few roubles at R230.

Finally, drop into **GUM** (☎ 10am-10pm) to see the showpiece Soviet shopping centre turned designer mall for the new rich. It has a stunning glass roof and centrepiece fountains.

The Kremlin

Kremlin simply means 'citadel' in Russian and any medieval Russian town had one. Moscow's is huge – in effect a walled city, the best views of which can be got from across the Moscow River; try standing on either the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky or the Bolshoy Kameny Bridges for a superb view of the complex. The Kremlin (first built in the 1150s) grew with the importance of Moscow's princes and in the 1320s it became the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, which shifted here from Vladimir. Between 1475 and 1516 Ivan the Great brought master builders from Pskov and Italy to supervise the construction of new walls and towers, three great cathedrals and more. All sights listed in this section can be accessed via 📶 Aleksandrovsy Sad.

Before entering the **Kremlin** (☎ 203 0349; www.kreml.ru; adult/student R300/150, photography R50; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed) deposit your bags at the **left-luggage office** (R60 per bag; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) beneath the Kutafya Tower, just north of the main ticket office. The Kremlin ticket office, in the Aleksandrovsy Garden, closes at 4.30pm. The ticket covers admission to all buildings, except the Armoury and Diamond Fund Exhibition.

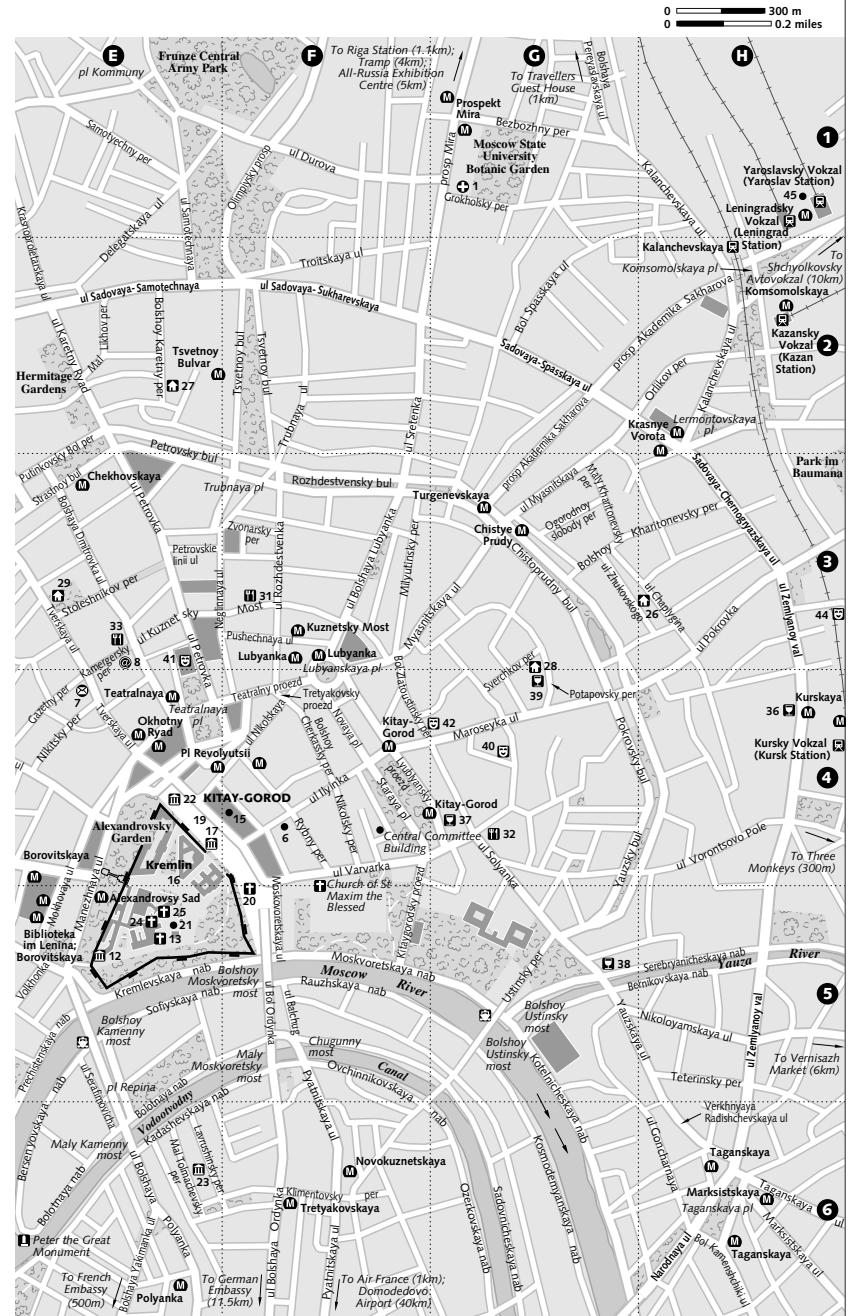
SOUTHWEST BUILDINGS

From the Kutafya Tower, which forms the main visitors' entrance, walk up the ramp and pass through the Kremlin walls beneath the **Troitskaya Bashnya** (Trinity Gate Tower). The lane to the right (south) passes the 17th-century **Poteschny Dvoretz** (Poteschny Palace), where Stalin lived. The horribly old of place glass and concrete **Kremlyovskiy Dvoretz Syezdov** (Kremlin Palace of Congresses) houses a concert and ballet auditorium, where incongruously enough lots of Western pop stars play when they are in town.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Sheremetyevo airport, minibuses (48 and 49) and bus 851 go from outside both of its terminals to the nearest metro station, Rechnoy Vokzal. From Domodedovo airport, there is an express train to the Paveletsky Station (R130, 40 minutes, every half-hour). From Vnukovo airport, there's an express train to the Kievsky Station (R76, 35 minutes, hourly). All of Moscow's many train stations are in the city centre and have their own metro stations with direct access from the concourse.

CENTRAL MOSCOW



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Australian Embassy.....2 C6	Red Square.....19 E4	Pyat Zvyozd.....(see 8)	Zhiguli.....35 D4
Botkin Hospital.....3 A1	St Basil's Cathedral.....20 F5	DRINKING ☑	
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Central Telegraph.....7 E4	Tserkov Rizopolozheniya (Church of the Disposition of the Robe).....24 E5	Projekt OGI.....39 G4	
NetCity.....8 E3	Uspensky Sobor (Assumption Cathedral).....25 E5	ENTERTAINMENT ☑	
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Blagoveshchensky Sobor (Annunciation Cathedral).....13 E5	Godzilla's.....27 E2		
Church of Christ the Saviour.....14 D6	Hotel Sverchkov.....28 G3		
GUM.....15 F4	Hotel Tsentralnaya.....29 E3		
Kremlin.....16 E4	Sweet Moscow.....30 C5		
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ARMOURY & DIAMOND FUND

In the southwest corner of the Kremlin, the **Armoury** (Oruzheynaya Palata; adult/student R350/175) is a numbingly opulent collection of treasures acquired over centuries by the Russian State and Church. Your ticket will specify an entry time. Don't miss the Faberge eggs in room 2, and the realms of royal regalia in rooms 6 and 9.

If the Armoury hasn't sated your diamond lust, there are more in the separate **Vystavka Almaznogo Fonda** (Diamond Fund Exhibition; adult/student R350/175; ☹ closed for lunch 1-2pm) in the same building.

SOBORNAYA PLOSHCHAD

On the northern side of Sobornaya pl is the 15th-century **Uspensky Sobor** (Assumption Cathedral), focal church of prerevolutionary Russia and the most impressive of the Kremlin ensemble. It's the burial place of the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church from the 1320s to 1700. The tombs are against the north, west and south walls.

The iconostasis dates from 1652, but its lowest level contains some older icons, including the *Virgin of Vladimir* (Vladimirskaya Bogomater), an early 15th-century Rublev School copy of Russia's most revered image. The 12th-century original, now in the State Tretyakov Gallery (opposite), stood in the Assumption Cathedral from the 1480s to 1930. The oldest icon on display is the magnificent 12th-century red-clothed *St George*, brought here from Novgorod; it is positioned behind glass by the north wall.

The **Tserkov Rizopolozheniya** (Church of the Disposition of the Robe), opposite the As-

sumption Cathedral, was built between 1484 and 1485 and includes a delightful wooden sculpture exhibition and some lovely frescoes. The domes and façades of the cathedrals are being progressively restored.

With its two golden domes rising above the eastern side of Sobornaya pl, the 16th-century **Kokolnolnya Ivana Velikogo** (Ivan the Great Bell Tower) is the Kremlin's tallest structure. Beside the bell tower stands the world's biggest bell, the **Tsar-kokolok** (Tsar Bell), a 202-tonne monster that cracked before it ever rang. North of the bell tower is the mammoth **Tsar-pushka** (Tsar Cannon), cast in 1586, but never shot.

Back on Sobornaya pl, the 1508 **Arkhangelsky Sobor** (Archangel Cathedral), at the square's southeastern corner, was for centuries the coronation, wedding and burial church of tsars. The tombs of all of Russia's rulers from the 1320s to the 1690s are here bar one (Boris Godunov, who was buried at Sergiev Posad).

Dating from 1489 the **Blagoveshchensky Sobor** (Annunciation Cathedral), at the southwest corner of Sobornaya pl, contains the celebrated icons of master painter Theophanes the Greek. He probably painted the six icons at the right-hand end of the diasis row, the biggest of the six tiers of the iconostasis. *Archangel Michael* (the third icon from the left on the diasis row) and the adjacent *St Peter* are ascribed to Russian master Andrei Rublev.

Pushkin Museum & Church of Christ the Saviour

Moscow's premier foreign art museum is a short distance from the southwestern corner of the Kremlin. The **Pushkin Fine Arts Museum**

(☎ 203 7958; ul Volkhonka 12; adult/student R300/100, audio tour R200; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; ☑ Kropotkinskaya) is famous for its impressionist and postimpressionist paintings, but also has a broad selection of European works from the Renaissance onward, mostly appropriated from private collections after the revolution. There are also interesting temporary exhibits on regular display.

Nearby is the gigantic **Church of Christ the Saviour** (Khram Khrista Spasatelya; ☎ 201 3847; Prechistsenskaya nab; ☹ 10am-5pm; ☑ Kropotkinskaya), rebuilt at an estimated cost of US\$360 million by Mayor Luzhkov on the site of the original cathedral, which was destroyed by Stalin, and replacing what was once the world's largest swimming pool. It's massively impressive with its vast golden dome, although the Tsereteli-designed interiors wouldn't look out of place in the equally gaudy Okhotny Ryad Shopping Mall (also Tsereteli designed).

State Tretyakov Gallery

The world's best collection of Russian icons is found in the **State Tretyakov Gallery** (Gosudarstvennaya Tretyakovskaya Galereya; ☎ 951 1362; www.tretyakov.ru; Lavrushinsky per 10; adult/student R240/140, audio tour R140; ☹ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun; ☑ Tretyakovskaya), along with an outstanding collection of other prerevolutionary Russian art, particularly the 19th-century *peredvizhniki* (wanderers) and some incredible landscapes. A second building of the museum is the **New Tretyakov Gallery** (☎ 230 7788; Krymsky Val 10; adult/student R240/140, audio tour R140; ☹ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun; ☑ Park Kultury), which houses a similarly brilliant collection of 20th-century art.

TOURS

Capital Tours (☎ 232 2442; www.capitaltours.ru; ul Ilyinka 4; ☑ Pl Revolyutsii) offers both a city tour (US\$25, 11am and 2.30pm daily) and a Kremlin Cathedrals and Armoury tour (US\$46, 10.30am and 3pm Friday to Wednesday) departing from its office off Red Sq. Both options are highly recommended.

SLEEPING

Galina's Flat (☎ 621 6038; galinas.flat@mtu-net.ru; Flat 35, ul Chaplygina 8; dm/s/d R350/800/1000; ☑; ☑ Chistiye Prudy) Still the cheapest bed in the city despite a recent price hike, Galina's central apartment functions as a homestay and is a wonderful way to see 'real' Russian life. Galina herself is friendly and speaks passable English. There's

internet access and a kitchen that guests can use, as well as breakfast for an extra R50. Transfers to/from any Moscow airport are available for R1000.

Travellers Guest House (☎ 631 4059; www.tgh.ru; 10th fl, Bolshaya Pereyaslavskaya ul 50; dm/r R950/2100; ☑ Prospekt Mira) Once a real boon for budget travellers, the TGH is no longer such a great deal, but it's one of the few hostels available. Resting on its laurels for over a decade now, the rooms, never great, are now fairly crappy and slowly disintegrating. It's in a depressing block a fair way from the metro, and frankly until it refurbishes there are better options.

Sweet Moscow (☎ 241 1446; www.sweetmoscow.com; 8th fl, flat 31, ul Arbat 51; dm R900; ☑ Smolenskaya) One of Moscow's new breed of small, central hostels located in residential buildings, Sweet was forced to move to new premises on the old Arbat – a superb location where it offers only dorm beds (six beds in three rooms). There's a basic kitchen and laundry facilities, but it's friendly and well run, with clean, smart little rooms.

Godzilla's (☎ 629 8957; fax 692 1221; Bolshoy Karetny per 6; dm/s/d R900/2000/2000; ☑ Tsvetnoy Bulvar) At last Moscow has a real hostel! Centrally located, run by a friendly Englishman and with a suitably eccentric name, this is the answer to many people's prayers. At present there are 49 beds, split into dorms, singles and doubles. There are laundry facilities, a common room and kitchens, although the shower provision is tight and will hopefully expand soon. Grand plans to take over the whole building are afoot, which will be the best news for backpackers since the end of Intourist. Until then book way in advance as it's always fully booked in summer.

Hotel Tsentralnaya (☎ 629 8957; fax 692 1221; Tverskaya ul 10; s/d R1400/2100; ☑ Chekhovskaya) One of the city's best bargains – the Tsentralnaya is on Moscow's main street and offers great value, even if its rooms are far more simple than the grand entrance suggests. While accommodation is basic and all facilities shared, this is a clean, safe option and highly recommended.

Hotel Sverchkov (☎ 625 4978; Sverchkov per 8; s/d R2300/2600; ☑ Chistiye Prudy) This small hotel is really good value for money, set in an 18th-century Moscow residential building in the city centre. Rooms are fairly plain, but are comfortable and secure.

Hotel Warsaw (☎ 238 7701; warsaw@sovintel.ru; Leninsky pr 2; s/d R3200/3950; ☑ Oktyabrskaya) Despite

sounding like the worst Intourist horror hotel imaginable, the Warsaw is in fact brand new. It's in a ghastly building just off Oktyabrskaya Sq, but it's actually modern, clean and well run inside, and good value at these prices.

EATING

Check out ultracool Kamergersky per for a huge range of cafés and restaurants. For snacks on the run, there are plenty of street stands selling hot dogs, *chebureki* (Caucasian meat pasties) and blini around metro stations and on many central avenues. For self-catering, supermarkets are your best bet – they're all over central Moscow and carry a decent range of pasta and other easy-to-prepare dishes.

Pyat Zvyozd (☎ 737 5545; Kamergersky per 6; sandwiches R75-95; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) The Russian franchise version of the UK sandwich chain Prêt à Manger. Here you'll find a frighteningly similar setup, with a range of sandwiches, wraps and sushi perfect for having on the run between sights.

Prime (☎ 737 5545; sandwiches R75-95; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Arbat (ul Arbat 9; M Arbatskaya); Kamergersky per (Kamergersky per 5/7; M Teatralnaya) The original Moscow sandwich shop, also a none-too-subtle rip off of Prêt à Manger, has two main locations both near major tourist sights, making them perfect for a takeaway sandwich.

Zhiguli (☎ 291 4144; ul Novy Arbat 11; mains from R50; ☎ noon-2am; M Arbatskaya) Smart self-service canteen with a Brezhnevian theme. Good Russian food and low prices just off the Arbat.

Lyudi kak Lyudi (☎ 921 1201; Solyansky tup 1/4; mains R150; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6am Sat & Sun; M Kitay Gorod) 'Everyday people' is a tiny but great little refuge popular with after-hours clubbers, as well as young workers who swear by the excellent R120 business lunch.

Jagannath (☎ 928 3580; ul Kuznetsky Most 11; mains R50-250; ☎ 8am-11pm; M Kuznetsky) A saviour for vegetarians, this excellent health-food place with a strong Indian theme has both a self-service buffet and a sit-down restaurant. The vegetable curries, samosas and salads are superb, although perhaps the lack of alcohol takes the concept of health food a little far.

DRINKING

Head to the **Hermitage Gardens** (M Pushkinskaya) or **Aleksandrovsy Garden** (M Okhotny Ryad) in summer for relaxed beer drinking amid the greenery. Some great places include the following, all of which are open until the early hours:

Doug & Marty's Boar House (☎ 917 9986; ul Zemlyanoy val 26; admission R60-100; ☎ noon-6am; M Kurskaya) Run by Doug, the creator of the legendary Hungry Duck (once the wildest bar in Europe due to its famously hedonistic ladies' night), the Boar House is busy throughout the week, and attracts an expat and local crowd devoted to serious debauchery.

Kitaysky Lyotchik (☎ 924 5611; Lyublyansky proezd; admission R150; ☎ 10am-8am; M Kitay Gorod) The 'Chinese Pilot' is a long-standing favourite with the boho crowd, who come here for the live music and lack of aggressive door policy.

Kult (☎ 917 5709; Yauzskaya ul 5; M Kitay Gorod) A pretty laid-back club/bar with good DJs playing a wide range of music for a young, up-for-it crowd.

Proekt OGI (☎ 627 5366; www.proektogi.ru, in Russian; Potapovsky per 8/12; M Chistiye Prudy) OGI is the acronym of a publishing house that diversified into bars and cafés and has become a phenomenon – the OGI bar/cafés (all with their own in-house bookshop) can be found all over central Moscow.

CLUBBING

Negotiating Moscow's clubland is a challenge. 'Face control' (the term for haphazard door policy operated by spiteful thugs) rules the night. **The Exile** (www.exile.ru) has an up-to-date and thoroughly un-PC club guide.

While many clubs disappear overnight, some enduringly hip venues include **Propaganda** (☎ 924 5732; Bol Zlatoustinsky per 7; admission R50-200; ☎ noon-7am; M Kitay Gorod) and **Art Garbage** (☎ 928-8745; Starosadsky per 5/6; M Kitay Gorod).

Moscow's main gay club is **Three Monkeys** (☎ 951 1563; Sadovnicheskaya nab 71; admission free-R250; ☎ 9pm-9am; M Paveletskaya). Check **Gay.Ru** (www.gay.ru/english) for listings.

ENTERTAINMENT

Check the *Moscow Times* on Friday for an excellent guide to gigs, clubs, theatre, films and other events.

Bolshoi Theatre (☎ 250 7317; www.bolshoi.ru; Teatralnaya pl 1; tickets R200-1500; M Teatralnaya) Sadly the main Bolshoi Theatre is closed for renovation until the end of 2008. In the meantime performances are held in the building next door. Unless you specifically want to see the Bolshoi troupe, consider going to the ballet in St Petersburg instead.

You can often see good Russian and foreign bands at **Sixteen Tons** (☎ 253 5300; www.16tons.ru;

1 ul Presnensky val; admission for gigs only R200-800; ☎ 6pm-late; M Ulitsa 1905 Goda), **Tabula Rasa** (☎ 508 4019; 8A ul Kazakova; admission for gigs only R100-400; ☎ 9pm-6am; M Kurskaya), as well as **Kitaysky Lyotchik** (☎ 924 5611; Lyublyansky proezd; admission R150; ☎ 10am-8am; M Kitay Gorod) and **Art Garbage** (☎ 928-8745; Starosadsky per 5/6; M Kitay Gorod).

SHOPPING

Ulitsa Arbat (Old Arbat; M Arbatskaya) is the historic, pedestrian street famous in Moscow for its proliferation of souvenir sellers. It's extremely naff and usually overpriced, but if you want souvenirs – from nesting dolls to Soviet flags and engraved hip flasks – this is the place.

Vernisazh Market (Izmailovsky Park; ☎ 7am-6pm Sat & Sun; M Izmailovsky Park) Far better value, but rather far-flung, this market has a huge collection of handicrafts, knick-knacks, souvenirs, clothing and art.

GETTING AROUND

Metro

The Moscow metro is among the best in the world. More than 150 stations in all parts of the city, and a train every two minutes makes it the best way to get around. The flat fare is R15, although buying in bulk saves a lot of money (10 rides cost R125).

Taxi

The standard way to hail a 'taxi' is simply to hold out your hand – when a car stops, state your destination, wait for the driver to give you a price, and then either shut the door, negotiate or get in. The system seems perfectly safe. The standard rate for very short trips is R50, while longer ones will cost R100 to R150. Official taxis are yellow, have taxi written on them and cost more.

ST PETERSBURG

САКТ ПЕТЕРБУРГ

☎ 812 / pop 5 million

As elegant as Prague and as enchanting as Budapest but with just a smattering of the tourists due to Russia's intransigent visa regime, St Petersburg really will be the next big thing once visa-free travel arrives. Although with that likelihood to be at least a decade away, you still have

St Petersburg pretty much to yourself by the standards of other tourist-filled cities in the Baltics and central Europe. Come to St Petersburg and enjoy the superb cultural attractions, the omnipresent beauty and a far more European sensibility than you'll ever find in Moscow.

ORIENTATION

St Petersburg is spread across many different islands, some real and some created through the construction of canals. The central street is Nevsky pr, which extends for 4km from the Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo (Alexandr Nevsky Monastery) to the Hermitage.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Nevsky pr boasts two large and excellent internet cafés:

Café Max (☎ 273 6655; Nevsky pr 90/92; per hr R60; ☎ 24hr; M Mayakovskaya)

Quo Vadis (☎ 333 0708; Nevsky pr 76; per hr R60; ☎ 9am-11pm; M Mayakovskaya) Enter from Liteiny pr.

Medical Services

Apteka Petrofarm (☎ 314 5401; Nevsky pr 22; M Nevsky Pr) Open 24 hours.

International Clinic (☎ 336 3333; www.icspb.com; 6 ul Marata; M Mayakovskaya) Pricey treatment and 24hr emergency care. Direct billing to insurance companies.

Poliklinika No 2 (☎ 316 6272; Moskovsky pr 22; ☎ 24hr; M Technologicheskyy Institut) Cheaper than the International Clinic.

Money

There are currency-exchange offices throughout the city. ATMs are inside every metro station, in hotels and department stores, in main post offices and along major streets.

Post & Telephone

You can call direct from any of the card-operated phone booths all over the city; cards can be purchased from metro stations and telephone offices.

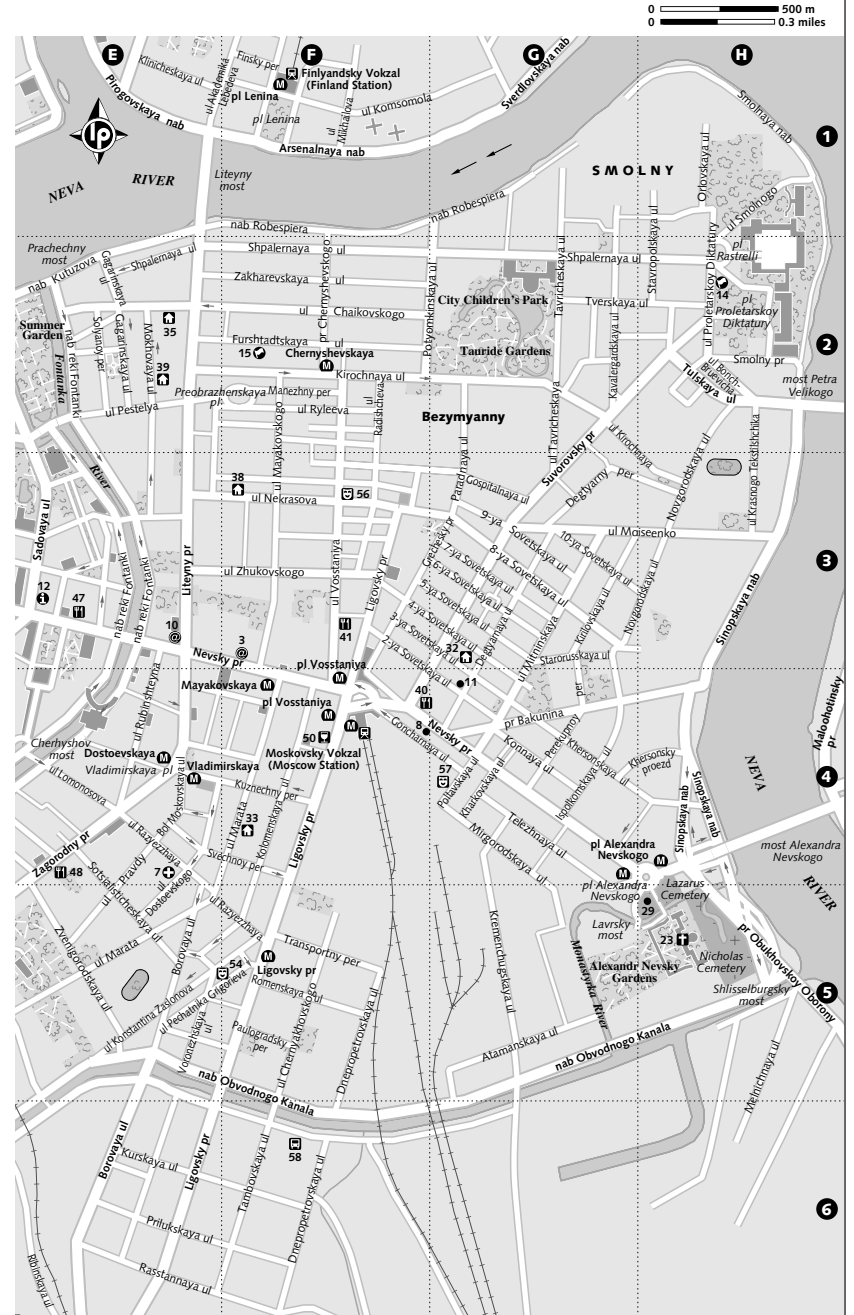
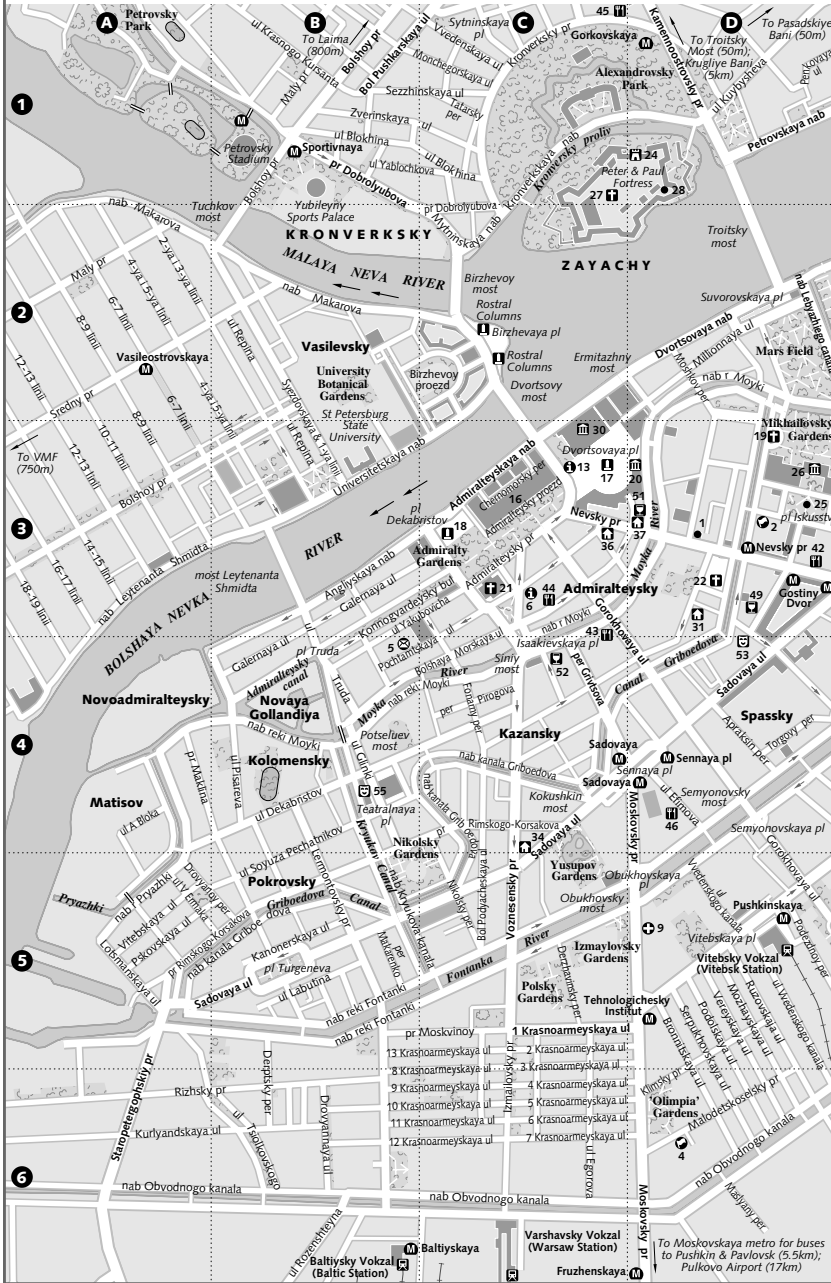
Central post office (Glavpochtamt; ☎ 312 8302; Pochtamskaya ul 9; ☎ 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5.45pm Sun; M Sadovaya)

Tourist Information

The city boasts two tourist information centres. If you don't speak Russian, these offices can help you file a crime report with the police.

Tourist Kiosk (☎ 310 2822; Dvortsovaya pl 12; ☎ 9am-6pm; M Nevsky pr)

CENTRAL ST PETERSBURG



INFORMATION		EATING	
Apteka Petrofarm	1 D3	Isaakiyevsky Sobor (St Isaac's Cathedral)	21 C3
Australian Consulate	2 D3	Kazansky Sobor (Kazan Cathedral)	22 D3
Café Max	3 F3	Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo (Alexandr Nevsky Monastery)	23 H5
Canadian Consulate	4 D6	Peter & Paul Fortress	24 D1
Central Post Office	5 B4	Ploshchad Iskusstv (Arts Square)	25 D3
Infinity Travel	6 C3	Russian Museum	26 D3
International Clinic	7 E4	SS Peter & Paul Cathedral	27 C1
Ost-West Kontaktsservice	8 F4	Start of Battlements Walk	28 D1
Poliklinika No 2	9 D5	Tikhvin Cemetery	29 H5
Quo Vadis	10 E3	Winter Palace	30 C3
Sindbad Travel International	11 G4	SLEEPING	
Tourist Information Centre	12 E3	Herzen University Hotel	31 D3
Tourist Kiosk	13 C3	HI St Petersburg Hostel	32 G3
UK Consulate	14 H2	Hotel California	33 F4
US Consulate	15 F2	Hotel Na Sadovoy	34 C4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Hotel Neva	35 E2
Admiralty	16 C3	Nevsky Inn	36 C3
Alexander Column	17 C3	Nord Hostel	37 D3
Bronze Horseman	18 C3	St Petersburg Puppet Hostel	38 F3
Church on Spilled Blood	19 D3	Sleep Cheap	39 E2
General Staff Building	20 D3	ENTERTAINMENT	
Hermitage	(see 30)	Central Station	53 D4
		Griboedov	54 F5
		Mariinsky Theatre	55 B4
		Platforma	56 F3
		Red Club	57 G4
		TRANSPORT	
		Avtovokzal No 2	58 F6

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 310 8262; Sadovaya ul 14; ☹ 9am-6pm; **M** Sadovaya/Nevsky pr)

Travel Agencies

Infinity Travel (☎ 313 5085; www.infinity.ru; Hotel Anglettere, ul Bolshaya Morskaya 29; **M** Nevsky Pr) Friendly and efficient booking and visa-support services.
Ost-West Kontaktsservice (☎ 327 3023; www.ostwest.com; 105 Nevsky pr; **M** Pl Vosstaniya) Visa support.
Sindbad Travel International (☎ 332 2020; www.sindbad.ru, in Russian; 2-ya Sovetskaya ul 12; **M** Pl Vosstaniya) Discount travel for students and under 26s.

SIGHTS

The Historic Heart

Unquestionably your first stop should be the **Palace Square** (Dvortsovaya ploshchad; **M** Nevsky Pr), where the baroque/rococo **Winter Palace** (Zimny dvorets; **M** Nevsky Pr) appears like a mirage under the archway at the start of Bolshaya Morskaya ul. Empress Elizabeth commissioned the palace from Bartolomeo Rastrelli in 1754. Along with a number of neighbouring buildings, some of the Winter Palace's 1057 rooms now house part of the astonishing **Hermitage** (☎ 571 3465; www.hermitage.ru; adult R350, students & children free, photo (no flash)/video ticket R100/350, audio guides R250; ☹ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun, free for all individuals on the first Thu of every month; **M** Nevsky Pr), which is one of the world's great art museums. Enter through the courtyard from Palace Sq. To avoid queues in summer, you can book tickets online very easily. The collection is vast and

can be overwhelming for a first-time visitor. Get an English map at the information desk in the ticket hall. For more attractions within the Hermitage, see the boxed text (opposite).

Unless otherwise indicated, all of the following sights can be accessed from **M** Nevsky Pr. Across the square from the winter palace is the fabulous **General Staff Building**, and in the middle of the square, the 47.5m **Alexander Column** commemorates the 1812 victory over Napoleon.

To the west across the road is the gilded spire of the **Admiralty**, which used to be the headquarters of the Russian navy. West of the Admiralty is **ploshchad Dekabristov** (Decembrists' Sq), named after the Decembrists' Uprising of 14 December 1825.

Falconet's famous statue of Peter the Great, the **Bronze Horseman**, stands at the end of the square towards the river. Behind looms the

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Pulkovo airport, numerous *marshrutkas* (minibuses) go from outside both terminals to the Moskovskaya metro station. City buses K-3 and 13 (30 minutes, every 15 to 20 minutes) run to Moskovskaya from 6am to midnight, too, although the K-3 goes all the way to Sennaya pl. A taxi should cost around R500 to R600, but it's best to order one via your hotel in advance.

splendid golden dome of **Isaakiyevsky Sobor** (St Isaac's Cathedral; ☎ 315 9732; Isaakiyevskaya pl; admission to cathedral adult/student R300/170, to colonnade R150/100; ☹ 10am-7pm Thu-Tue; **M** Sadovaya/Nevsky Pr), built between 1818 and 1858. At this price think twice before going into the cathedral unless you like the ornate baroque style. The colonnade is far better value for money, however, giving superb views over the city.

Nevsky Prospekt

The inner part of vast Nevsky pr runs from the Admiralty to Moskovsky Vokzal (Moscow Station) and is St Petersburg's main shopping thoroughfare. The most impressive sight along it is the great colonnaded arms of the **Kazansky Sobor** (Kazan Cathedral; Kazanskaya pl 2; admission free; ☹ 9am-6pm; **M** Nevsky Pr), built between 1801 and 1811.

At the end of Nevsky pr is the working **Lavra Alexandra Nevskogo** (Alexander Nevsky Monastery; ☎ 274 0409; adult/student R60/40; ☹ dawn-8pm in summer, dawn-dusk rest of year; **M** pl Alexandra Nevskogo), where you'll find the **Tikhvin Cemetery** (adult/student R60/40; ☹ 11am-dusk Fri-Wed; **M** pl Alexandra Nevskogo), the last resting place of some of Russia's most famous artistic figures, including Tchaikovsky and Dostoyevsky.

Between Nevsky & the Neva

A block north of Nevsky Pr metro station is lovely **ploshchad Iskusstv** (Arts Sq; **M** Nevsky Pr), with a statue to national bard Alexander Pushkin at its centre. The yellow Mikhailovsky Palace, now the **Russian Museum** (Gosudarstvenny Russky muzey; ☎ 311 1465; www.rusmuseum.ru; adult/stu-

dent R300/150; ☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon; **M** Nevsky Pr), housing one of the country's finest collections of Russian art, makes up the far side of the square. This is the perfect complement to the Hermitage, presenting a wonderful and easily navigable collection of Russian art throughout the ages in the palace's lovely halls. Behind it are the pleasant **Mikhailovsky Gardens** (**M** Nevsky Pr), which are popular year-round for walking and relaxing.

The polychromatic domes of the **Church on Spilled Blood** (☎ 315 1636; Konyushennaya pl; adult/student R300/170; ☹ 10am-8pm Thu-Tue; **M** Gostiny Dvor) are close by and have become a symbol of the city despite being a total stylistic anomaly for St Petersburg with its giddy baroque overstatement. Also known as the Church of the Resurrection of Christ, it was built from 1887 to 1907 on the spot where Alexander II had been assassinated in 1881. The interior is incredible and somewhat overwhelming – having been restored from Soviet times when the church was used as a potato warehouse – it's well worth visiting.

The Petrograd Side

The Petrograd Side refers to the cluster of delta islands between the Malaya Neva and Bolshaya Nevka channels. The principal attraction here is the **Peter & Paul Fortress** (Petropavlovskaya Krepost; ☎ 230 0340; admission to grounds free, to all buildings adult/student R120/60; ☹ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon, 10am-4pm Tue; **M** Gorkovskaya). Founded in 1703 as the original military fortress for the new city, it was mainly used as a political prison up to 1917: famous residents

HERMITAGE HIGHLIGHTS

The Hermitage is immense – unless you have a whole day or even several, you'll need to be ruthless with what you see. Of course it all comes down to personal taste and interest, but the following are some of the undoubted highlights. Disabled access is now very good – call ☎ 110 9079 if you require any assistance. All sights can be accessed from **M** Nevsky Pr.

- Jordan Staircase (directly ahead of you when you enter)
- Room 100 (Ancient Egypt)
- Rooms 178–97 (the State rooms for the apartments of the last imperial family)
- Room 204 (the Pavilion Hall)
- Rooms 228–38 (Italian Art, 16th to 18th centuries)
- Room 271 (the imperial family's cathedral)
- Concentrate most of your time on the fabulous 3rd floor, particularly rooms 333–50 for late-19th-century and early-20th-century European art, including a huge array of Matisse, Picasso, Monet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, Pissaro, Rodin and Kandinsky artworks.

include Peter's own son Alexei, as well as Dostoyevsky, Gorky and Trotsky. At noon every day a cannon is fired from the **Naryshkin Bastion**, scaring the daylighters out of tourists. It's fun to walk along the **battlements**. Most spectacular of all is the **SS Peter & Paul Cathedral**, with its landmark needle-thin spire and magnificent baroque interior. All Russia's tsars since Peter the Great have been buried here. The latest addition was Nicholas II and his family, finally buried here by Yeltsin in 1998 – you'll find them in an anteroom to your right as you enter.

SLEEPING

Hotel California (☎ 901 301 6061; www.hotelcalifornia.ru; Apt 36, ul Marata 67/17; dm R600; ☑; ☎; ☎ Vladimirskaya) The cheapest bed in town, not to mention the place you're most likely to meet cool Russian musicians as well as foreign backpackers. Run by local rock legends Dva Samaliota, this hostel is great, although it can be quite lively at night. Dorms sleep eight people.

St Petersburg Puppet Hostel (☎ 272 5401; www.hostelling-russia.ru; ul Nekrasova 12; dm/d R672/1664; ☑; ☎; ☎ Mayakovskaya) A popular and reliable place in central St Petersburg, next to the city's puppet theatre. The rooms are very simple but perfectly clean, and rates include breakfast. Visa support is offered, and all visas are registered for free.

HI St Petersburg Hostel (☎ 329 8018; www.ryh.ru; 3-ya Sovetskaya ul 28; dm/d R690/1680; ☑; ☎; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya) A 300m walk from Moscow station, this hostel is popular and rates include breakfast. Spotless dorms have three to six beds and there's one double; all are slightly cheaper in winter and for holders of ISIC and HI cards.

Sleep Cheap (☎ 715 1304; www.sleepcheap.spb.ru; Mokhovaya ul 18/32; dm R700; ☑; ☎; ☎ Chernyshevskaya) A rather crowded place, Sleep Cheap is still waiting to expand, and hopefully once it does the dorms won't be so full. Despite this, everything is modern and clean, with washing facilities and a good location. The hostel is unmarked from the street – go through into the courtyard of No 18 and the hostel is on the left.

Hotel Na Sadovoy (☎ 314 4510; www.nasadovoy.spb.ru, in Russian; Sadovaya ul 53; s/d/tr R1000/1300/1500; ☎; ☎ Sadovaya) Very Soviet, but great value, particularly for the triple rooms. New management is making big efforts here. Rooms are comfy, all have a TV, sink and fridge, and there are clean shared bathrooms.

our pick Nord Hostel (☎ 517 0342; www.nord.hostel.com; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 10; dm/d R825/2250; ☑; ☎; ☎ Nevsky Pr) Run by friendly Russian staff along the lines of a traditional travellers hostel, the Nord is a real winner, with by far the best location of any of the city's hostels next to the Hermitage, and huge, beautiful dorm rooms (one has its own piano) and a few doubles as well. Book ahead – this is our hostel of choice.

Herzen University Hotel (☎ 314 7472; fax 315 5716; Kazanskaya ul 6; s/d/t R1950/2600/2800; ☎; ☎ Nevsky Pr) A well-run Russian hostel with a brilliant location, this place is used to foreigners, although it's very much a university hall of residence, so don't expect your usual hostel vibe. It's mainly popular with groups, but its clean and simple rooms (nearly all with en suite facilities) are a great deal.

Hotel Neva (☎ 578 0500; fax 273 2593; ul Chaikovskogo 17; s/d unmodernised R1700/2200, modernised R2500/3500; ☑; ☎; ☎ Chernyshevskaya) One of the city's oldest functioning hotels, the Neva opened its doors in 1913 and has a spectacular staircase to show for it. Unfortunately the rooms are not quite as grand, but they're still comfortable and clean. The location is also good, it is just a short walk from the Fontanka and Neva Rivers.

Nevsky Inn (☎ 924 9805; www.nevskynn.ru; Flat 19, Kirpichny per 2; s/d R2250/2750; ☎; ☎ Nevsky Pr) Run by a joint British-Russian management, the Nevsky is one of the best places to stay in the city. Rooms are clean and comfortable, and there's a modern kitchen that guests can use, perfectly combining comfort and economy. Highly recommended.

EATING

Look out for blini (Russian pancakes) kiosks throughout the city. Their delicious blinis are superb value (R20 to R30) and a great place to snack. As in Moscow, very cheap street food is sold around metro stations.

Chaynaya Lozhka (Nevsky pr 44; mains R100; ☎ 9am-10pm; ☎; ☎ Gostiny Dvor) This excellent chain serves delicious blinis and a wide range of salads. Orange-clad staff members are extremely helpful and the fare is very cheap. Bear in mind that it's extremely busy at lunchtime. There are other branches at Nevsky pr 136 (☎ Pl Vosstaniya) and ul Vosstaniya 13 (☎ Pl Vosstaniya).

Teremok (Nevsky 60; mains R60; ☎; ☎ Nevsky Pr) Already firmly established as the city's premier

fast-food blini kiosk, Teremok now has its own sit-down restaurant on Nevsky pr – great for a quick and filling lunch.

Troitsky Most (mains R100-200) Kamenostrovsky (☎ 232 6693; Kamenostrovsky pr 9/2; ☎; ☎ Gorkovskaya); Zagorodny (☎ 115-1998; Zagorodny pr 38; ☎; ☎ Dostoyevskaya) Superb vegetarian chain operating in four locations across the city. The mushroom lasagne is legendary.

Sumeto (☎ 310 2411; ul Yefimova 5; mains R150; ☎; ☎ noon-11pm; ☎; ☎ Sadovaya) A brilliant find – this quiet little restaurant off Sennaya pl serves delicious Dagestani food at rock-bottom prices. Dishes include shashlik and *chudu* – a large savoury pancake with pumpkin filling.

Oliva (☎ 314 6563; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 31; mains R160-300; ☎; ☎ 10am-midnight; ☎; ☎ Nevsky Pr) An authentic Greek addition to the St Petersburg dining scene, though there is nothing taverna-like about this cavernous place, subtly painted and decorated in an array of Greek styles. The menu is traditional, and the food is both excellent value and extremely good.

Fasol (☎ 571 9695; ul Gorokhovaya 17; mains R150; ☎; ☎ Sennaya pl) Delightful respite from the norms of the Russian eating experience, Fasol combines friendly and efficient service with good food at low prices. It's a cool place to come any time of day, although it's particularly busy in the evening. There's an English menu.

Salkhino (☎ 232 7891; Kronverksy pr 25; mains R300-500; ☎; ☎ Gorkovskaya) This place is our favourite Georgian in town, serving unfussy, delicious Georgian fare and a great selection of wines. Try the Adjaran *khachapuri* (cheese pie cooked with runny egg and butter in the middle) and the aubergines in walnut paste.

DRINKING

Novus (☎ 569 3818; Bolshaya Morskaya ul 8; ☎; ☎ 6pm-6am; ☎; ☎ Nevsky pr) The current favourite for young expats and travellers, Novus is named after a highly eccentric Latvian hybrid of backgammon and pool. Packed nightly, this is a great place to meet a young and beautiful international crowd. Enter through the takeaway section downstairs.

Dacha (Dumskaya ul 9; ☎; ☎ 6pm-6am; ☎; ☎ Nevsky pr) A real institution since it opened in 2005, indie bar Dacha is still a place frequented by the coolest residents of the city, who spill out all over the pavement on weekends. The R100 admission charge includes two free beers.

Tsynik (☎ 312 9526; per Antonenko 4; ☎; ☎ 1pm-3am Mon-Fri, 1pm-7am Sat & Sun; ☎; ☎ Sennaya pl) Famous for its rowdy crowd and *grenki* (fried garlic black bread), Tsynik is the place to be seen misbehaving. Vodka is served in teapots and the toilets are scrawled with intellectual graffiti.

Fish Fabrik (☎ 164 4857; Ligovsky pr 53; ☎; ☎ 3pm-6am; ☎; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya) An institution everyone should visit, Fish Fabrik is a dive bar for drunken artists and student slackers. Come here for beer, foosball (table football), cult movies and decent bar food.

ENTERTAINMENT

A visit to the **Mariinsky Theatre** (☎ 326 4141; www.mariinsky.ru; Teatralnaya pl 1; ☎; ☎ Sennaya Pl) should not be missed. However, it's not all about high culture – hedonism is engrained in St Petersburg, and consequently clubbing and gigs are two much-loved pastimes. Check out the *St Petersburg Times* on Friday for the latest listings.

There's a lively rock and electro scene in St Petersburg. **Griboedov** (☎ 764 4355; Voronezhskaya ul 2A; admission R100-200; ☎; ☎ Ligovsky Pr) is run by local ska band Dva Samaritan, and is a favourite venue. Other good places to check out local bands include **Platforma** (☎ 314 1104; ul Nekrasova 40; ☎; ☎ 24hr; ☎; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya) and **Red Club** (☎ 717 0000; www.clubred.ru; Poltavskaya ul 7; ☎; ☎ 6pm-6am; ☎; ☎ Pl Vosstaniya).

St Petersburg has four gay clubs, as well as Russia's first lesbian club. The most popular is slick new venue **Central Station** (☎ 312 3600; www.centralstation.ru; ul Lomonosova 1; ☎; ☎ Nevsky pr). Check out **Excess** (www.xs.gay.ru) for the latest city-specific information.

GETTING AROUND

The metro (R12 flat fare) is the best option for covering large distances across the city. The four lines cross over in the city centre and then travel out to the suburbs. Around the city centre, *marshrutkas* (minibuses) are a very quick alternative to the slow trolleybuses. Costs vary on each route, but the average fare is R18, and is displayed prominently inside each van. To stop a *marshrutka*, simply hold out your hand and it will stop. Jump in, sit down, pass your cash to the driver (a human chain operates if you are not seated nearby), and then call out '*ostanovityes pozhalusta!*' when you want to get out and the driver will pull over.

KALININGRAD REGION

КАЛИНИНГРАДСКАЯ ОБЛАСТЬ

pop 955,000

One part German, two parts Russian and wedged between a Europe-thirsty Lithuanian rock and a proud Polish hard place, Kaliningrad is a region with an identity problem. Should it be resurrecting its German past, flaunting its undeniable Russianness, or forging ahead on a brave new path? Brashly, this Russian exclave does all three. The result is one of Eastern Europe's most exotic – and least travelled – locales, highlighted by its quirky capital – formerly the legendary German city of Königsberg.

KALININGRAD CITY

☞ within the region 2, from elsewhere 4012 /
pop 425,600

At first glance Kaliningrad looks like your typical post-Soviet metropolis – an expanse of Khrushchev-era apartment blocks and neon-lit slot machine parlours. Yet hidden behind the brooding concrete façades lies a vibrant, fun-loving city with some actual tourist appeal.

Much of that appeal lies in its Prussian past life. From the 13th century until 1945 the area was part of the core territory of the Teutonic Knights and their successors, the dukes and kings of Prussia. Königsberg was East Prussia's liberal and academically advanced capital.

While allied bombing raids destroyed much of the city in WWII, some gems from old Prussia remain – a few attractive residential neighbourhoods with rows of old German houses, the remains of the old wall that once surrounded the city and a network of 19th-century red-brick gates that provided access through that wall. The city is now hard at

work installing a modern business and tourism Mecca – curiously named Fish Village – on the banks of the Pregolya River.

Orientation

Leninsky pr, a broad north-south avenue, is Kaliningrad's main artery, running more than 3km from the main South (Yuzhny) train station to central ploshchad Pobedy (Victory Sq). You'll find many currency-exchange kiosks and ATMs all along Leninsky pr.

Information

Baltma Tours (☎ 916 416; www.baltma.ru; pr Mira 94) Efficient and multilingual, it's by far the best source of regional information and staff can arrange interesting local excursions.

Post office (ul Chernyakhovskogo 58; per hr R30; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Internet access and postal services.

Telekom (ul Teatralnaya 13 & Leninsky pr 2-4; per hr R30; ☎ 8am-10pm) Long-distance calls and internet access.

Sights

Striking Gothic **Kaliningrad Cathedral** (adult/student R70/30; ☎ 9am-5pm) was the geographical and spiritual heart of old Königsberg. Founded in 1333, it was almost destroyed during WWII, but has been undergoing restoration since 1992. The showpiece main hall, with fabulous vaulted ceilings, opened in late 2006 and serves as a concert hall. Upstairs a museum has displays of old Königsberg, objects from archaeological digs and a shrine to Immanuel Kant, who was born, studied and died in Königsberg.

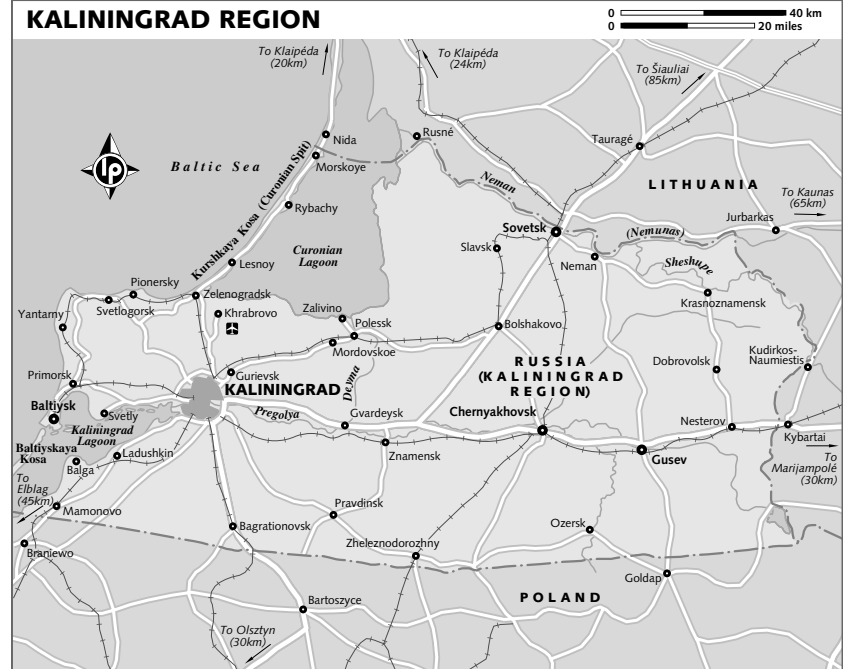
Along the river west of the cathedral is the **World Ocean Museum** (☎ 340 244; www.vitiaz.ru; nab Petra Velikogo 1; each of its 3 sections adult/student R80/40; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar), where you can learn about sea and space exploration aboard a B-413 submarine and two giant Soviet research ships

Just north of the cathedral is Tsentralnaya ploshchad (Central Sq), on which sits one of the ugliest of Soviet creations, **Dom Sovetov** (House of Soviets). Kaliningrad's magnificent castle (1255) stood here before it was damaged in WWII then dynamited out of existence by narrow-minded Soviet planners in 1967-68.

At the northern terminus of Leninsky pr lies ploshchad Pobedy (Victory Sq), dominated by the newly built **Church of Christ the Saviour**. Extending west of the square is pr Mira, a pleasant, shop-lined artery leading to bustling Central Park. Walks through the linden-scented, tree-lined old German neigh-

GETTING INTO TOWN

Take bus 128 from Kaliningrad's Khrabrovo airport to the bus station (R50, one hour, hourly). The bus station is next to the South train station. Taxis ask at least R400 for the ride from the airport.



bourhoods around here are the best way to experience old Königsberg.

Heading east from pl Pobedy, the fascinating **Amber Museum** (☎ 466 888; pl Vasilevskogo 1; admission R80; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is located within **Dohna Tower**, which served as a fortress to protect adjacent **Rossgarten Gate** (pl Vasilevskogo 3), one of the old city gates. Beyond that another one of the gates, **Korolevskie Vorota** (King's Gate; ☎ 581 272; ul Frunze 112; student/adult R80/40; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun), houses a history museum.

Sleeping

Kaliningrad is not blessed with good budget lodging options.

Komnaty Otdykha (☎ 586 447; pl Kalinina; s/d/tr per person from R490/435/350) This small hostel-like place above the train station has surprisingly clean rooms, but it's slightly dodgy so watch your neighbour.

Deima (☎ 710 814; www.deima-tour.com; economy d/tr with shared bathroom R600/990, business class s/d R1400/1800) The cramped dorm-style economy rooms are the city's best budget option. The location is poor, though – it's a 10-minute taxi ride (R50) south from the train station.

Chaika (☎ 210 729; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; ul Pugacheva 13; s/d from R1100/1300) The 24 rooms in this rustic converted townhouse are worth the splurge.

Eating & Drinking

Kaliningrad State Technical University caféteria (KGTU stolovaya; Basement, Sovetsky pr 1; mains R40-75; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Every visitor to Russia should visit an authentic *stolovaya* (caféteria) like this to fill up on cheap, hearty Russian food.

Planeta (☎ 465 235; ul Chernyakhovskogo 26; mains R25-75, pizza R50-165, nightclub admission Mon-Fri R150, Sat & Sun R400; ☎ noon-6am) The creative pizzas here are great, or order the even cheaper cafeteria-style grub to go with your beer – just R25 for 500ml! The two nightclubs – one upstairs and one in the Diky Diuk restaurant downstairs – are where Kaliningrad's midweek party action happens.

Vatan (ul Chernyakhovskogo 12a-16a; mains R100-200; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎) Become familiar with *plov* (Central Asian pilaf consisting of rice and fried vegetables) and *manty* (spicy dumplings), and other Central Asian specialties at this fun, affordable basement eatery.

Vagonka (☎ 956 677; Stanoch'naya ul 12; admission from R150) Located west of Kalinin Park, this is the best option for the under-21 crowd and drinks are cheap (60R pints and 40R vodka shots).

Amsterdam (38/11 Litovskiy Val; ☎ 8am-2am Sun-Thu, 8am-6am Fri & Sat) Kaliningrad's only gay club is hidden 200m down an unnamed sidestreet off Litovskiy Val.

Getting There & Away

You can get to Kaliningrad by direct bus from Klaipėda (R183, three hours, four daily), Kaunas/Vilnius (R300/450, six/eight hours, twice daily), Riga (R500, nine hours, twice daily), Tallinn (R800, 14 hours, daily), Olsh'tyn/Gdansk (R270/320, four/five hours, twice daily) and Warsaw (R450, nine hours, daily). In addition, **König Auto** (☎ 460 304) has several buses weekly to Berlin and other German cities.

There are at least three daily trains to Vilnius (R550, six hours), at least one daily to Moscow (R950, 23 hours) and one train daily to Berlin (R2600, 15 hours).

KURSHKAYA KOSA

КУРШКАЯ КОСА

☎ within the region 50, from elsewhere 40150

The Kurshkaya Kosa (Curonian Spit) is a dramatic landscape of high sand dunes and pine forests shared by Russia and Lithuania. A Unesco World Heritage Site, it's a paradise for elk, birds, and backpackers who like to get away off the beaten track.

You're not allowed to walk on the dunes, so access to the coast is mainly from the spit's three main towns – Lesnoy, Rybachy and, furthest north, Morskoye. The **Kurshkaya Kosa National Park** (☎ 41346; www.kurshkayakosa.ru; Lesnaya ul 7; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri), which encompasses the whole spit, is headquartered in Rybachy and runs a fascinating **bird-ringing centre**, 7km north of Lesnoy.

To get to Kurshkaya Kosa take a bus from Kaliningrad to Zelenogradsk (R35, 40 minutes, frequent), then grab a northbound bus (about seven daily) or hire a taxi (R300/500/600 to Lesnoy/Rybachy/Morskoye).

RUSSIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Both Moscow and St Petersburg have a number of well-established and reliable youth hostels, although they are significantly

more expensive than in most other countries (budget €25 per night). Hotels start from about €35, although these are mainly fairly shabby Intourist relics. Slowly more and more independent and even boutique hotels are opening up and things are gradually improving. During the white nights in St Petersburg in late June, booking early is an absolute essential. Camping is not possible in either Moscow or St Petersburg.

ACTIVITIES

Checking out a traditional Russian *banya* is a must. These wet saunas are a social hub and a fantastic experience for any visitor to Russia. Leave your inhibitions at home and be prepared for a beating with birch twigs (far more pleasant than it sounds). Russians swear there's no better way of getting clean – ask at your hostel or hotel for the nearest public *banya*.

BUSINESS HOURS

Usual business hours in Russia:

Banks ☎ 8am or 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri

Offices ☎ 8am or 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri

Restaurants ☎ noon-11am, many are in fact virtually 24hr establishments

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Travellers need to be very careful of pick-pockets in Moscow and St Petersburg. Most foreigners stand out a mile in Russia and there's an increased chance you'll be targeted. Bear in mind that, while things have improved slowly, many police officers and other uniformed officials are on the take – some of them are not much better than the people they are employed to protect the public from. Never allow them to go through your wallet or pockets.

Never drink tap water in St Petersburg as it contains *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite that can cause horrific stomach cramps and nausea. Bottled water is available to purchase everywhere.

Sadly racist attacks have become a frequent reality in both Moscow and St Petersburg in recent years, particularly so in St Petersburg, where skinhead gangs have killed an unprecedented number of mainly Caucasian and Central Asians in the past few years. There now exists a climate of fear among ethnic minorities. Perhaps worst of all, the city Governor, Valentina Matvienko, had not

at the time of research ever publicly decried these attacks.

We still encourage nonwhite travellers to visit, but suggest exercising far more caution here than anywhere else in the region. Avoid the suburbs whenever possible and try not to go out after dark alone.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Russian Embassies & Consulates

Check **Russian Federation Embassy & Consulate Locator** (www.russianembassy.net) for more listings of Russian embassies abroad. The following addresses are of consular sections where visas can be obtained.

Australia (☎ 02-9326 1188; www.australia.mid.ru; 7 Fullerton St, Woollahra, NSW 2025)

Canada (☎ 613-236 7220; www.rusembcanada.mid.ru; 52 Range Rd, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J5)

UK (☎ 020-7229 8027, visa information message 0891-171 271; www.rusemblon.org; 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QS)

USA (☎ 202-939 8907; www.russianembassy.org; 2641 Tunlaw Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Embassies in Moscow

Australia (☎ 956 6070; www.australianembassy.ru; Kropotkinsky per 2; ☎ Kropotkinskaya)

Canada (☎ 105 6000; fax 105 6025; Starokonyushenny per 23; ☎ Kropotkinskaya)

France (☎ 937 1500; www.ambafrance.ru; ul Bolshaya Yakimanka 45; ☎ Oktyabrskaya)

New Zealand (☎ 956 3579; www.nzembassy.msk.ru; ul Povarskaya 44; ☎ Barrikadnaya)

UK (☎ 956 7200; fax 956 7201; Smolenskaya nab 10; ☎ Smolenskaya)

USA (☎ 728 5000; www.moscow.usembassy.com; Bolshoy Devyatinsky per 8; ☎ Barrikadnaya)

Consulates in St Petersburg

Australia (☎ 325 7333; www.australianembassy.ru; Italyanskaya ul 1; ☎ Nevsky Pr)

Canada (☎ 325 8448; fax 325 8393; Malodetskoslensky pr 32B; ☎ Tekhnologichesky Institut)

UK (☎ 320 3200; www.britain.spb.ru; pl Proletarsky Diktatury 5; ☎ Chernyshevskaya)

USA (☎ 331 2600; www.stpetersburg-usconsulate.ru; ul Furshadt'skaya 15; ☎ Chernyshevskaya)

HOLIDAYS

Following are Russia's main public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Russian Orthodox Christmas Day 7 January

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day/Spring Festival

1 & 2 May

Victory (1945) Day 9 May
Russian Independence Day 12 June
Day of Reconciliation and Accord (the rebranded Revolution Day) 7 November

Other days that are widely celebrated are **Defenders of the Motherland Day** (23 February), **Easter Monday** and **Constitution Day** (12 December). Much of Russia shuts down during the first half of May.

MONEY

The currency in Russia is the rouble, which is made up of 100 kopeks. Notes come in denominations of 5000, 1000, 500, 100, 50 and 10 roubles. You can use all major credit and debit cards (including Cirrus and Maestro) in ATMs and in good restaurants and hotels. Travellers cheques are possible to exchange, although at a price. Euro or US dollar cash is the best to bring, and in general should be in pristine condition – crumpled or old notes are often refused. Most major currencies can be exchanged at change booths all over any town in Russia. Look for the sign *obmen valyut*. You may be asked for your passport.

POST

The Russian postal service gets an unfair rap. Postcards, letters and parcels sent abroad usually arrive within a couple of weeks. A postcard to anywhere in the world costs R17 and a letter R20.

VISAS

Everyone needs a visa to visit Russia, and it's likely to be your biggest single headache. Your visa is an exit permit, too, so if you lose it (or overstay), leaving the country can be harder than getting in. Your visa process has three stages – invitation, application and registration.

To obtain a visa, you need an invitation. For a small fee (and increasingly for free) most hostels and hotels will issue an invitation (or 'visa support') to anyone staying with them. The invitation then allows you to apply for a visa at any Russian embassy. Costs can vary enormously, from €25 to €160 for same day service, so try to plan as far ahead as possible. If you're not staying in a hotel or hostel, you will need to buy an invitation. This can be done through almost any travel agency. Some hostels will issue invites for the same cost of one night's accommodation.

Although a commercial website, **Way to Russia** (www.waytorussia.net) is a very reliable source of visa information.

On arrival you must fill out an immigration card. This is very important – you surrender the first half on entering the country and the second on leaving. If you lose your immigration card, expect a hefty fine on leaving the country.

Finally, once arriving in Russia, you are – officially at least – obliged to register your visa within three working days. This can nearly always be done by your hotel or hostel, but if you're not staying in one, you will need to

pay a travel agency (usually €24) to register it for you. Many people have had no problems leaving the country without registration, but others have been detained and levied very big fines. In the light of the recent tightening of security, it's safest to play by the rules.

Anyone visiting Kaliningrad from Russia proper will require a double-entry visa unless they fly into the exclave. Leaving Russia proper by boat, bus or train entails getting an exit stamp, thus you won't be able to enter Kaliningrad without a double- or multi-entry visa.