A Brief Guide & Overview of Traveling to Russia
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A Brief History of Russia

In the early years, the empire was comprised of many different tribes that needed strong leadership to fight off attacks from Tatar and Mongolian invaders. Strong leadership came in the form of Ivan IV (the Terrible), who was the first ruler to claim the title "Tsar of all the Russias" in 1547. Ivan left no heir to the throne after his death. He had killed his eldest son in a rage, lost another to an epileptic seizure, and his only legitimate heir was not mentally competent to rule. Boyar, Boris Godunov, was elected to rule, and after his death a defrocked monk claiming to be Dmitri (Ivan IV’s son who died from the seizure) amassed support from neighboring Poland and claimed the throne. After the murder of this false Dmitri less than a year later, another prince stepped forward to reign for a short while. Civil war, Cossack rebellions, and invasions from other countries plagued Russia as princes and boyars attempted to unite the country and claim power. Russia’s "Time of Troubles" finally ended in 1613, when representatives of princes, boyars, churchmen, and merchants agreed to the election of 16-year-old Mikhail Romanov, a distant nephew of Ivan’s first wife, Anastasia Romanova.

The ruling Romanov dynasty included a long line of Tsars and Tsaristas, including the incomparable Peter the Great. He dragged Russia "kicking and screaming" into its future by adopting western industrialized ways, moving the capitol from Moscow to the newly-founded western city of St. Petersburg, creating the Russian Navy, as well as hundreds of other reforms. Another imposing ruler was Catherine the Great, who was born a minor German princess. As a teen, she came to Russia to marry a grandson of Peter the Great, and soon found favor with the Russian people when her husband came to power. Lauded by her adopted country for bringing cultural and educational reform to the country, Catherine founded the famous Hermitage Museum as well as various academies, journals, and libraries. Her great grandson, Alexander II, known as the "Tsar Liberator," freed the Russian serfs (slaves) two years before Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves in the United States.
Alexander II’s grandson was the last Tsar of Russia. Nicholas II, his wife (granddaughter of England’s Queen Victoria), and their five children, ranging in age from 13 to 22, were the victims of a bloody massacre in 1918 by a Bolshevik execution squad. Rumors of the survival of the Tsar’s youngest daughter, Anastasia, have been the center of much controversy in the twentieth century; the mystery even spurred a popular fictional animated movie in 1997 in the United States. Clearly, yesterday’s Russian mysteries are still prevalent in today’s western world.

With the rise of Vladimir Lenin’s Communist Bolshevik Party in the 1920s, Russia became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and underwent serious changes. Communist leaders dropped the infamous “Iron Curtain” to keep out western ideas. Religious leaders, along with the aristocracy, were arrested, murdered, or escaped to foreign shores. Although Russia fought with the allies in World War II, it was more from a dislike of the invading fascist Nazi regime on Russian soil rather than a result of solidarity with the global community. Known in Russia as the "Great Patriotic War," World War II left the country ravaged; nearly every family lost sons, fathers, brothers, and uncles. To add to the catastrophic loss of Russian life, then Communist leader Joseph Stalin declared returning prisoners of war spies and traitors to their own country and had them imprisoned or killed. Russians of today remember the Great Patriotic War and gather at large monuments erected in memory of the millions who gave their lives to rid Russia of a menacing Germany once and for all.

In spite of the Cold War heating up in the 1950s, The Soviet Union went head-to-head with the United States in the space race and put the first man, Yuri Gagarin, in space in 1961.

The collapse of the Soviet Union came after a series of non-violent events in 1989 and 1990, which brought about Russia’s independence from Soviet rule on June 12, 1990.
Modern Day Government of the Russian Federation

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has declared herself a Federation with four branches of government: The Legislative, the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Central Bank.

Branches of Power of the Russian Federation (www.russianembassy.org)

The current President of the Russian Federation is Vladimir Putin. As President, his role is the head of state and the guarantor of the Constitution and of civil and human rights and liberties.

The New Civil Code of the Russian Federation

The new Civil Code (first and second parts) became law in 1995. It is based on certain fundamental principles including:

- Equality of all participants guaranteed by civil law; inviolability of private property
- Freedom of contract
- Free exercise of civil rights
- Juridical protection of civil rights

So you see, Russia has many new freedoms and input into their government that their ancestors only dreamed of.
**Geography and Natural Features**

At the time of the last Tsar in Russia in 1917, Russia spanned 1/6 the globe! It is the largest country in the world in terms of area but unfavorably located in relation to major sea lanes of the world; despite its size, much of the country lacks proper soils and climates (either too cold or too dry) for agriculture.

Russia is located in Northern Asia (that part west of the Urals is sometimes included with Europe), bordering the Arctic Ocean, between Europe and the North Pacific Ocean with a total area of 17,075,200 sq km (and area alone is 16,995,800 sq km) and is slightly more than 1.8 times the size of the US.

**Land boundaries:** total 20,139 km, Azerbaijan 284 km, Belarus 959 km, China (southeast) 3,605 km, China (south) 40 km, Estonia 290 km, Finland 1,313 km, Georgia 723 km, Kazakhstan 6,846 km, North Korea 19 km, Latvia 217 km, Lithuania (Kaliningrad Oblast) 227 km, Mongolia 3,441 km, Norway 167 km, Poland (Kaliningrad Oblast) 432 km, Ukraine 1,576 km

**Coastline:** 37,653 km

**Climate:** ranges from steppes in the south through humid continental in much of European Russia; sub arctic in Siberia to tundra climate in the polar north; winters vary from cool along Black Sea coast to frigid in Siberia; summers vary from warm in the steppes to cool along Arctic coast

**Terrain:** broad plain with low hills west of Urals; vast coniferous forest and tundra in Siberia; uplands and mountains along southern border regions

**Natural resources:** wide natural resource base including major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, and many strategic minerals, timber however, formidable obstacles of climate, terrain, and distance hinder exploitation of natural resources.

**Current issues:** air pollution from heavy industry, emissions of coal-fired electric plants, and transportation in major cities; industrial and agricultural pollution of inland waterways and sea coasts; deforestation; soil erosion; soil contamination from improper application of agricultural chemicals; scattered areas of sometimes intense radioactive contamination

**Natural hazards:** permafrost over much of Siberia is a major impediment to development; volcanic activity in the Kuril Islands; volcanoes and earthquakes on the Kamchatka Peninsula, but none around western Russia.

(www.theodora.com)
The Russian Alphabet

The Russian alphabet is written with Cyrillic letters. There are 31 letters and 2 hard and soft sound signs. Each letter has a sound.

Many of the letters are similar to the western alphabet. Once you familiarize yourself with the letters, reading signs in Russia is easier.

| **Russian Letters** and how to pronounce them |
|---|---|
| б | b as in bank |
| в | v as in yote |
| г | g as in go |
| д | d as in dog |
| ж | zh as in azure |
| з | z as in zoo |
| и | y as in boy |
| к | k as in kayak |
| л | l as in lot |
| м | M as in mall |
| н | N as in note |
| п | P as in papa |
| р | R as in rabbit |
| с | S as in sun |
| т | T as in toe |
| ф | F as in found |
| х | ch or h as in Bach or hockey |
| ц | ts as in tsar |
| ч | ch as in chicken |
| щ | shch as in fresh cheese |
| ш | sh as in sheep |

**Hard vowels**

| å | a as in amen |
| э | e as in echo |
| у | y as in hairy |
| о | o as in hello |
| у | u as in rule |

**Soft vowels**

| Я | ya as in yahoo |
| е | e as in yes |
| и | ee as in bees |
| ё | yo as in yo-yo |
| ю | u as in union |
| ъ | Hard sign (not pronounced) |
| ъ | Soft sign (not pronounced) |
Most Frequently Used Expressions in Russian

Hello
My name is
What is your name?
Do you speak English?
I don’t understand.
I understand.
Do you understand?
Yes
No
Maybe
Please
Thank you
Thank you very much
Excuse me
It doesn’t matter
Good morning
Good afternoon
Good evening
Good night
Be careful! Watch out!
I am an American (f)
I am an American (m)
How do you say ____ in Russian?
ZDRASTvuuytye

MYNA zaVUT _______
KAK VAS zaVUT?
VY gavaRltye pa-anGLIYski?
YA NYE paniMAyu
YA paniMAyu
VV paniMAyitye
DA
NYET
Mozhit BYT
paZHAlusta
spaSIba
bal’SHOye spaSIba
izviNitye
nichiVO
DObry Utra
DObry DYEN
DObry VYEchir
spaKOYnay NOchi
astaROZHna
YA amiriKANka
YA amiriKAnits
KAK ___________ paRUSki
Questions

Who? KTO
What? SHTO
Where? GYDE
Where to? kuDA
Why? pachiMU
How? KAK
How much? SKOL’ka
When? kagDA

Helpful Phrases When Working with Kids

Sit down pasiDYET
Quiet! TIshe
That’s enough KHVAtit
Stop! STOP
Listen SLUshatye
Your super! malaDYETS
How beautiful! KAK kraSlva
Great! Wonderful! ZamiCHAtil’na
Ugh! FU
My goodness! Bozhe MOY
Lets go paSHLI
Of course! KaNYESHna
Never mind nichiVo
**Russian Orthodoxy**

The Russian Orthodox Church was the official religion of Russia before the Revolution in 1917. Communism outlawed religion. However, with the fall of Communism in 1991, Russian Orthodoxy can now be openly practiced by millions of Russian citizens.

The glittering gold domes of the Russian Churches are designed so that God could look down from heaven and see His churches.

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**National Holidays of the Russian Federation**

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<td>January, 7</td>
<td>Orthodox Christmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>February, 23</td>
<td>Day of Fatherland Defender</td>
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<tr>
<td>March, 8</td>
<td>International Women’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>May, 1</td>
<td>International Labor Day</td>
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<td>May, 2</td>
<td>Spring Day</td>
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<td>May, 9</td>
<td>Victory Day</td>
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<td>June, 12</td>
<td>Russian Independence Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>November, 7</td>
<td>Day of Consent &amp; Reconciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>December, 12</td>
<td>Constitution Day</td>
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**Currency**

Russian currency is the Ruble. Currently, the exchange rate is $1 American dollar to 25r Russian rubles. Therefore, when you exchange money, it will seem as though you have much more money than you think. For example, a 20 ounce bottle of coke will cost you about 30 rubles. Sounds like a lot more than it really is. Keep this in mind when merchants tell you something costs, say 300 rubles.
Russian Cultural Perspectives

It is important that as ambassadors for American 4-H in Russia, that we observe and respect the local customs. Some of them include:

- Russians remove shoes when entering someone’s home.
- Russians don’t call each other comrade (tavarish) and neither should you.
- Russians will hug and kiss friends of any sex when saying hello or goodbye.
- Gifts are a sign of friendship and are VERY important to Russians. So much so one runs the risk of insulting hosts if a small gift is not given.

4-H In Russia

There is no formal 4-H program in Russia – yet! We are the ambassadors for 4-H while we are there. Your behavior will reflect on America as well as American 4-H. It is expected that team members respect Russian customs while visiting their country.

The Russian words for Head, Hands, Health, and Heart are:
Golova (Голова) – Head
Ruki (Руки) – Hands
Zdarovye (Здравие) – Health
Serdse (Сердце) – Heart
The Russian 4-H Clover would look like this:
What 4-H will do in Russia?

We will program experiential activities in the outdoors and sometimes indoors for Russian students ranging in ages from eight to sixteen. The idea is since these children have been taking English now is the time to use it. What better way to acquire a language than to use it in activities where everyone has to speak to accomplish a task and then review what happened after the activity? Of course, we teach much more than English; we are teaching leadership, communication, problem solving, acceptance, trust, and all the things that new games and initiatives activities give us the opportunity to teach. Remember they will also have after class programs that include discos, shows, and sports, games and excursions that the other teachers will have for them.

We will work 5 days a week, for 10 days total. The teaching schedule will include four hours of classroom/hallways/outdoors instructions in the morning, then in the afternoon for 1 hour (M-F generally) where we will set up fun stations where different students will come to either to learn baseball, to work on a play, to read books, play chess, learn to draw, or producing a newspaper, etc. It could be any activity they can use to further their English.

The blocks of teaching time are roughly 8:30-10:30, 10:30-12:30, or 1:30-3:30 and that is Monday to Friday. This mean we could have four hours of continuous sessions or split up in some different session pattern. Afternoons/Nights include planning sessions, tour opportunities, and free time for us. Daily team meetings usually take place before dinner and are a requirement of the program and are used to check in a scheduled way of how people are doing and planning/sharing of activities for the next day. Of course, we will be weaving the concepts of Head, Hands, Heart and Health into the activities.

T.R.A.I.L.

TRAIL stands for Teen Russian/American International Leadership Program. It was conceived by the Warren County 4-H Teen Council when we received a Rural Youth Development grant from National 4-H Council. The program’s goals are:

To create an opportunity for Russian youth to visit the U.S and American youth to visit Russia
To establish 4-H clubs in Russia that meets the needs of Russian youth
To increase awareness and understanding of the two cultures and societies
To develop lasting relationships among American and Russian youth
To increase leadership skills among teens
Preparing for a Trip to Russia

Learn About Russia
The more you know about Russia, the more you will get out of your visit. Here are some suggestions:

- Read books about Russia.
- Talk to people who have been to Russia, or Russian people in your community.
- Watch TV shows and go to movies about Russia.
- Go to eat at an area Russian restaurant.
- Check out the information available on the internet.
- Russify your computer! Download the Cyrillic fonts for your computer.

Cameras
Take plenty of film with you and make sure you have fresh batteries as well as an extra set. Purchasing these items in Russia could be more costly than if you pack them.

Electrical Appliances
American electronic devices require the use of an adapter for use in Russia. Many electronic stores sell these inexpensive adapters.

Clothing
Russia in the summer is similar to a mild summer in the Northeast US. For a three week stay you will need to pack for 1.5 weeks. Rinsing of undergarments is desirable. A standard sink stopper turns any available sink into washing basin in a snap. We may have to wash our clothes by hand and hang them up to dry. Therefore, lighter clothes are much better than heavier ones. Remember that the Russians have far fewer clothes than Americans do. You do not need to be that stylish; it is O.K to wear the same outfit numerous times. You can wear jeans or shorts for teaching. Woman will need one or two dress-up outfits (not formal, just simple party clothes) for special events. Men should bring at least one pair of pants dressier (kaki) than jeans and one nice shirt, and a tie, though the tie is optional. A water-repellent windbreaker is a nice item to
have. Casual shoes or sandals are fine for teaching. One pair of casual
dress shoes would be good for everyone to bring. Be sure you have good
quality running or walking shoes/light weight boots for our walking
tours. **No spaghetti strap shirts; shorts must come to the tips of
your fingers, and shirts must cover your midriff.**

**BAGGAGE**

U.S. carriers usually limit you to two checked bags on international
flights and one carry-on (Check with your carrier). Additional weight is
subject to extremely high excess charges. So, keep that in mind as you
pack. Also, be aware that you will have to carry your own luggage most
of the time, so be sure you can handle your own baggage. Backpack type
luggage is recommended. Wheeled luggage type carriers (that only have
wheels for carrying) are good to use but with the rough pavements,
curbs, stairs, and railroad tracks that will need to be navigated in-
country, you might be carrying your wheeled luggage a lot. If this is a
concern, multi-purpose luggage can be found that has wheels and can
also be backpacked. Be sure and put travel locks on all your zippered
openings on your luggage. The more unpretentious your luggage looks,
the safer it will be from thieves because it doesn’t stand out. Put
identification tags inside and on your entire luggage.

**CARRY-ON LUGGAGE**

Be sure to pack essentials in your carry-on luggage: medications,
essential toiletries, camera, etc.

**FUNDS TO TAKE**

Once in Siberia everything will be paid for--food, our lodging, cultural
trips, sightseeing transportation, etc. The only thing you may need
money in Russia would be for anything extra (dining our on your own,
articles or food purchased in the stories for your own personal use,
souvenirs, etc). If you spent $50 a week on yourself, *you’d be partying
hard*. You cannot exchange money for Russia before you leave the States,
so plan to exchange some money before leaving the Moscow airport. After
that, it becomes very difficult to coordinate money exchange. You will
probably want to exchange about $150-$200 at the airport.
Also, In Siberia, Ira, who will go with us everywhere and do anything for
us, is being paid by the host organization. She is being paid a pittance of
what she is really worth. So if you take her off to do something special for
you, that is not organized by the school or is not planned for everyone,
please pay for her extra expenses (food, transportation, etc.).

**MONEY/PASSPORT**

Carry small amounts of money in your wallet or purse. Keep your passport and visa, handy, or close to you upon arrival and departure. Carry most of your money/credit cards in what you consider a secure place (a money pouch that is inside your clothing, a bra stash pouch, a front pocket of your Levi’s, etc.) when traveling or walking in areas with large crowds. Keep your passport, visa, and large amounts of money in a safe place/s or pouch whenever possible. Obtain crisp, new (after 1996) U.S. currency. The bills contain a strip you can see when held up to the light. Generally take only $20 bills and smaller denominations. Traveler’s checks and credit card can generally only be used in Moscow.

**WATER**

In most area’s drink only bottled or boiled water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes (although in Moscow, in some places they have purified water used for their ice cubes). Stores and sidewalk stores (kiosk) are plentiful and sell bottled water, Cokes, Pepsi, etc. Always ask if you are unsure about drinking the water.

**MEDICAL**

Review the checklist. Medical attention is minimal, so take with you whatever you think you may need. Take your medications in original prescription bottles whenever possible. If you have extra medication, either prescription or over the counter for a cold, flu, diarrhea, etc. take it. Your group leaders will bring medical supplies for open wounds, blisters, etc. but your can bring your own small personal medical supply for these items. Please, tell your group leader, if you have special medical needs and carry written instructions concerning these needs in an emergency situation. Let the adults in your team know where you will keep one and give a copy to them. If you wear glasses bring an extra pair.

**EXTRA EATS**

Food is wonderful and plentiful in Russia in the summer, but it might not be what you want all the time. You can pack your own favorite snack food but you can also buy most of what you want there. Since coffee is
not as preferred and plentiful as here, and your coffee drinker you might want to bring your own metal cup, electric heating coil, and coffee to make it yourself. If you like Ramen noodles or dried soup mixes you can also bring them and heat water with the coil and have them as your snack.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation from U.S. to Moscow and return is by air and within Moscow and Siberia region by private cars, metro, bus, boat or taxi. (The price of a metro [subway] ticket in Moscow is five Rubles, which is about twenty cents).

**COMFORT ITEMS**

Most dwellings in Russia don’t have screens on the windows and this hasn’t been a big deal in Russia. If you desire more protection at night you can get these small, portable mosquito netting (It hangs over the bed). Additionally, you can bring a small cheap fan and leave it there at the end of the trip. Usually, you can find an iron (for those of you who still iron) and there should be one at the camp. A large enamel or **stainless steel cup** and a **knife** and **spoon** can make your day at times. A **Swiss Army knife**, **parachute cord**, and **duct tape** (if you can’t duct it, chuck it) is considered survival items. In Russia, an **electrical plug adapter** (for the Socket) and voltage converter (220v-120v) for electric heating coil (you never know when you want hot water) is essential. **Insect repellant** has been a staple item for trips everywhere except the Sahara. A **universal fit rubber circular sink stopper** will allow you to stop up sinks anywhere to wash clothes and can be used as a friction device to open jars. **Do not take a Global Positioning System** (GPS) devise unless you apply for clearance from the Russian government communication department.

**TRAVEL ACCESSORIES PROVIDERS**

Magellans Travel Supplies at www.magellans.com/ (get on the web and notify them you want a free catalogue).

**TRAVELSMITH** call 1-800-950-1600 and ask them to send you a catalogue (great travel clothes).

Radio Shack has a variety of electronic devices for international and extended travel.
Wal-Mart and K Mart are great inexpensive places to search for various basic travel supplies, such as travel plastic zip lock bags for clothing that when rolled up, air leaves the bag and compact clothing very nicely without wrinkling.

**GIFTS**

Giving of small gifts is a cultural tradition in Russia. Everything is appreciated and we have so much more of materials items than most of the Russians. Bring small gifts for students and teachers. Individually, you will have up to 15 students each. There will be two or three people who work for the school where we teach. There will be some men who provide transportation or guide us on our vacation or possibly have us into their home for a meal or Banyu (sauna). The Youth/Adult Partnership Grant is allowing the TRAIL program to purchase pins, Frisbees, etc. for youth. However, if there is something that you feel would be a nice trinket for the teachers or other adults, please discuss this with the group before late July. American magazines are devoured by young adults so plan on leaving what you bring to read on the plane behind.

**Contact Information**

**Russian Consulate**

The Consulate General is located at:  
9 East 91st Street  
New York, NY 10128  
Phone:(212) 348-0926  
Fax:(212) 831-9162

**Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the US**

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