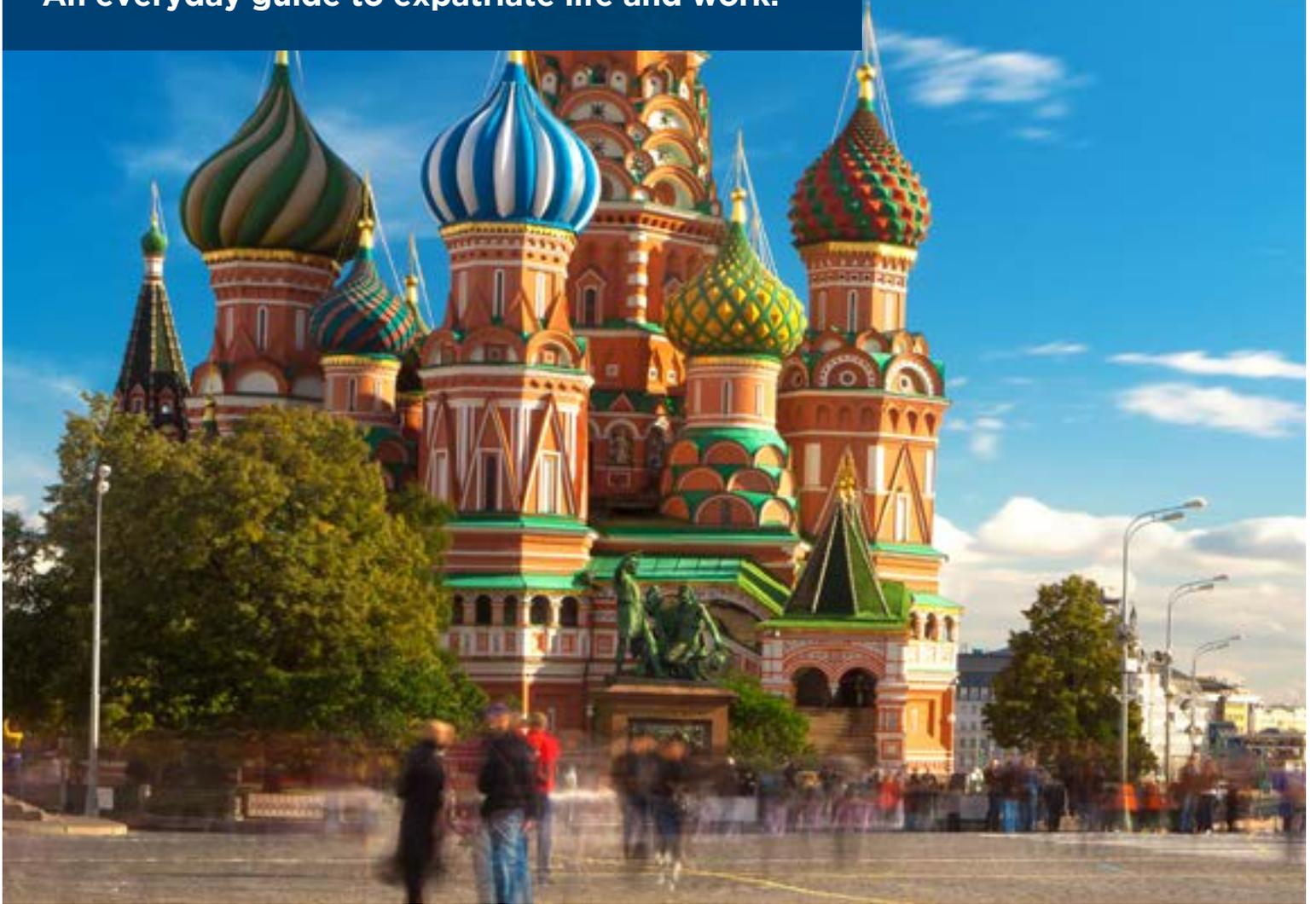


# RUSSIA

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.



Together, all the way.™



# RUSSIA COUNTRY GUIDE

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### Quick facts<sup>1</sup>

**Capital:** Moscow

**Population:** 144.3 million

**Major language:** Russian

**Major religion:** Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism

**Currency:** Russian Ruble (RUB)

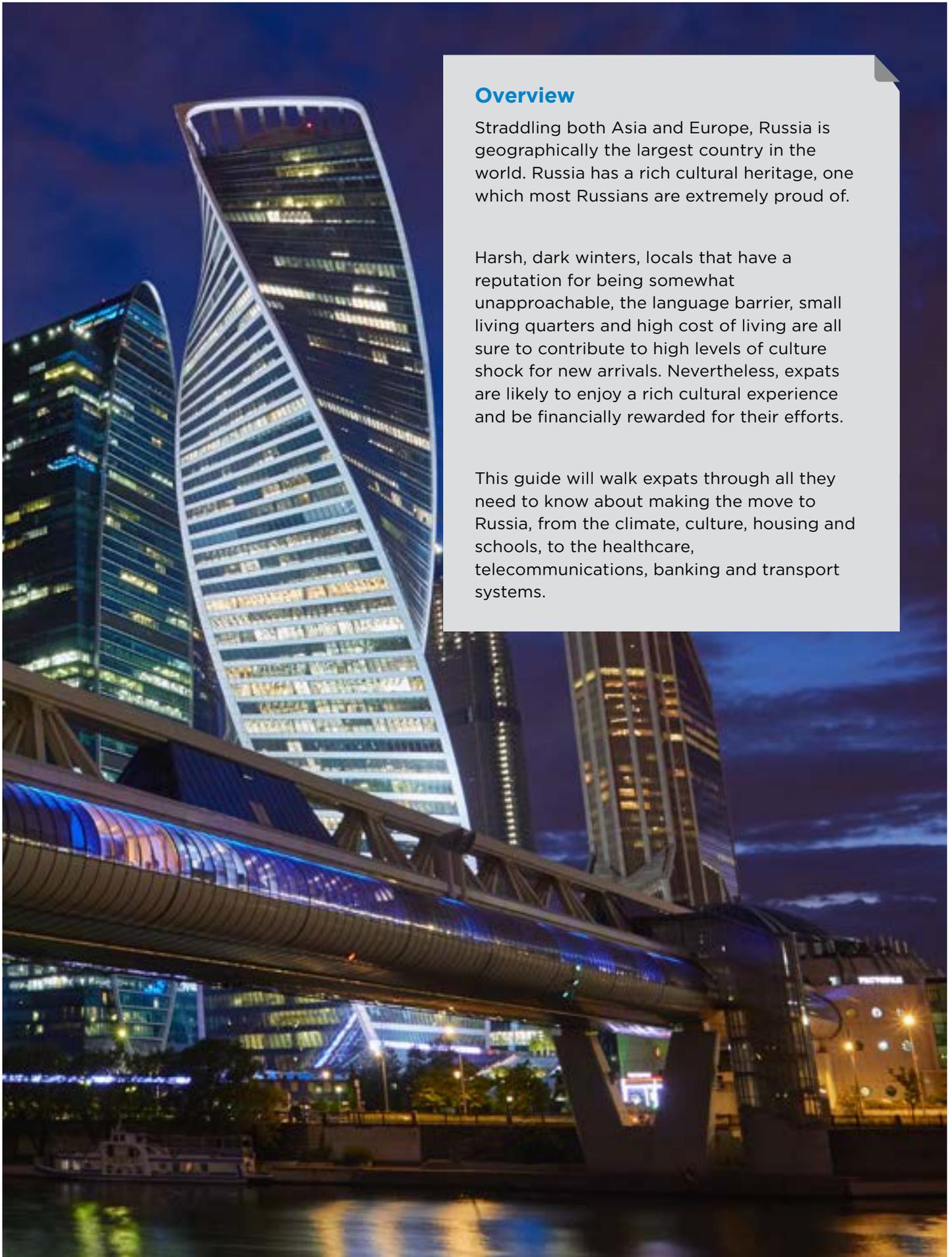
**Time zone:** GMT+3 to GMT+12 (omitting GMT+5) moving from west to east. Moscow and St Petersburg are GMT +4.

**Emergency number:** 112

**Electricity:** 220 volts, 50 Hz. Round, two-pin plugs are used.

**Drive on the:** Right

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/essential-info-for-russia>



## Overview

Straddling both Asia and Europe, Russia is geographically the largest country in the world. Russia has a rich cultural heritage, one which most Russians are extremely proud of.

Harsh, dark winters, locals that have a reputation for being somewhat unapproachable, the language barrier, small living quarters and high cost of living are all sure to contribute to high levels of culture shock for new arrivals. Nevertheless, expats are likely to enjoy a rich cultural experience and be financially rewarded for their efforts.

This guide will walk expats through all they need to know about making the move to Russia, from the climate, culture, housing and schools, to the healthcare, telecommunications, banking and transport systems.

## Getting Started

### Climate and weather

Climatic conditions vary across Russia's vast landmass. In general, the country has a continental climate consisting of warm, dry summers and very cold winters. Heavy snowfall is experienced across most parts of the country in the winter months. The European parts of Russia have the most varied climate, with the mildest areas located along the Baltic coast. The climate gets more severe the farther one moves east, and as expat oil workers may discover, Siberia has harsh, long, bitterly cold winters. Autumn (October to November) and spring (April to May), though pleasant, are fleeting.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weatheronline.co.uk/reports/climate/Russia.htm>

### Visas

Nationals of countries that form part of Russia's visa-free regime don't require a visa to enter Russia for short stays.<sup>1</sup> Travelers who are not part of this regime will require a visa, which should be arranged via the relevant Russian embassy or consulate before arrival. When entering Russia, tourists will also need to fill out a migration card. One half of the completed card is given to authorities when entering the country, and the other half foreigners must keep and return when exiting the country.

Once arriving in Russia, it's mandatory that foreigners register their visa within seven working days of their arrival. Most of the time, a visitor's accommodation (hotel, guest house or hostel) will assume this responsibility; however, if staying with friends or renting a holiday apartment, then it's necessary to have the landlord register the visa at the local police or post office.<sup>2</sup>

Expats wanting to work in Russia are required to have a work permit, which is usually valid for one year. There are strict quotas in place with regards to the number of foreigners granted the right to work in Russia. Employers, both Russian and foreign, who wish to hire expats must apply for their own employment permit before they can legally employ non-locals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.visitrussia.org.uk/visaform/not-need>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/visas-for-russia>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/work-permits-for-russia>

### Accommodations

There is a surprising variety of accommodation on offer in Russia, although apartment living is the norm in the major cities. Options range from pre-revolutionary style apartments that tend to be spacious, with high ceilings and parquet floors, to Soviet-era blocks that are small and sparse. There are also Western-style apartments that have been renovated to remove the former Soviet-style décor and fittings, and these tend to be the favored option for expats. Detached houses are usually only available on the outskirts of cities and rural areas, some in the form of gated compounds.

Expats should utilize the services of a reputable real estate agent to help them find accommodation, especially if unable to speak Russian. Leases typically last between one and three years but may be negotiable depending on the landlord. The lease is written in both English and Russian and expats should insist that a translation is available before signing. The equivalent of a month's rent is normally required as a security deposit.<sup>4</sup>

### Schools

Despite having one of the highest literacy rates in the world,<sup>5</sup> the Russian public education system still suffers from the effects of the former Soviet period, with many schools underfunded and overcrowded. This, accompanied by the fact that lessons are mostly taught in Russian, leads most expats to send their children to private international schools.

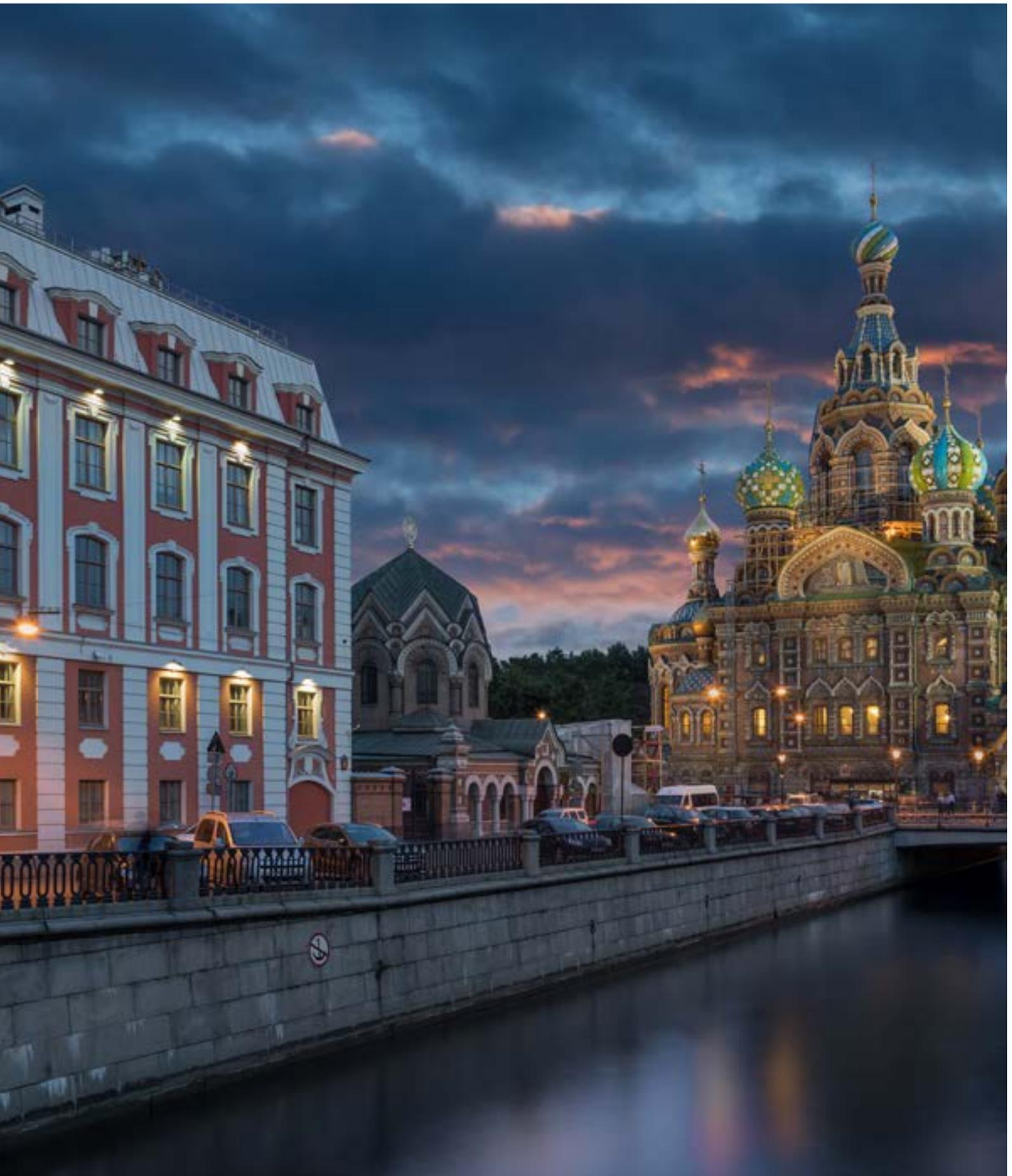
Many of Russia's major cities have a healthy selection of international schools, including American, British, French, Japanese and German schools. Some of these schools also offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum alongside their home country curriculum. Expats moving to Russia should plan well ahead for their children's education as fees at international schools can be high and many of the best schools have long waiting lists. Admissions are sometimes based on priority, with the children of diplomats and certain larger companies given the first available spots, while children of a certain nationality may also be given preference.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/accommodation-in-russia>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-highest-literacy-rates-in-the-world.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/education-and-schools-in-russia>



## Culture

From classical music to ballet, literature and philosophy, Russia has a rich cultural history that most locals are extremely proud of. Despite a somewhat negative image portrayed in the Western media of Russians being unfriendly and suspicious of foreigners, they are in fact welcoming to most newcomers and eager to share information about their country and culture.

## Language

Russian is the official language, but there are also numerous minor dialects and languages spoken across the country, including Tartar, Ukrainian, Chuvash, Bashir, Mordvin and Chechen. English is not widely spoken in Russia, although it's increasingly understood, and sometimes spoken among young professionals in the larger cities.<sup>1</sup>

## Social etiquette and cultural faux pas

Familiarizing oneself with Russian cultural nuances can go a long way to settling into life in the country. Here are a few tips to avoid making any social blunders.

- With a turbulent political history, when in conversation with Russian acquaintances, it's best to avoid topics of politics or Russia's Soviet past. Although many Russians will happily discuss these topics and are enthusiastic to share their knowledge about their country, expats should refrain from saying anything negative or critical of the Federation.
- Russians may initially come across as stern and unfriendly. This is not necessarily a true reflection of their personality, but rather due to the fact that they view formal behavior in public as a sign of respect, especially when interacting with strangers. Behind closed doors, however, and once they've gotten to know a person, they are likely to be more open and relaxed. Expats should take the time to get to know their new Russian associates on a personal level in order

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guides/guide-to-russia-etiquette-customs-culture-business/>

to gain their trust and eventually make friends.<sup>2</sup>

- When entering a Russian home, it's polite to remove one's shoes at the door – sometimes the host will even provide slippers for their guests to wear in the house.
- Women should cover their heads when entering a place of worship.<sup>3</sup>
- The family is the central focus of Russian society and elders are respected. When dealing with an older person, it's important to show deference and to adopt a more formal demeanor.<sup>4</sup>
- It's considered impolite to not take a small gift if invited to a Russian home. A box of chocolates or bottle of wine is a good choice; if taking flowers, avoid giving them in even numbers.<sup>5</sup>
- Russians communicate directly and are generally honest and forthright in their opinions; this can often be misinterpreted as rude by Westerners, so an open mind and sense of humor is sometimes needed when interacting with Russian friends and colleagues.<sup>6</sup>

## Eating

Russia's harsh climate means that colorful and fresh produce is sometimes hard to come by locally, especially in the winter months. Russian cuisine has developed around the need to use what one has available – often designed more for comfort than flavor. As such, the food tends to be quite simple and blander than what many expats may be used to.

<sup>2</sup> <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/russian-culture/core-concepts-7069df74-0c53-411e-b39b-306aaf51f1eb#core-concepts-7069df74-0c53-411e-b39b-306aaf51f1eb>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guides/guide-to-russia-etiquette-customs-culture-business/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/russian-culture/etiquette-1f962645-fc82-4fef-9995-aa049e2ab68d#etiquette-1f962645-fc82-4fef-9995-aa049e2ab68d>

<sup>5</sup> [http://masterrussian.com/russianculture/russian\\_hospitality.htm](http://masterrussian.com/russianculture/russian_hospitality.htm)

<sup>6</sup> <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/russian-culture/communication-21c6ee37-f0ae-46af-9abb-36c6d3069893#communication-21c6ee37-f0ae-46af-9abb-36c6d3069893>



Soups and stews are popular, with borsch being the most well-known Russian dish. It's a beetroot soup made with meat and vegetables, typically served with a dollop of sour cream and can be eaten hot or cold. Pirozhkis, which are small baked buns that can be filled with potatoes, meat, cabbage or cheese, are another popular food.<sup>7</sup>

Shchi, made from cabbages, and solyanka, made from meat and vegetables, are two more popular soup dishes, while beef stroganoff, a rich stew made from strips of beef in a creamy mushroom sauce, also hails from Russia. Caviar, or ikra, is another well-known ingredient from Russia and is usually served on dark, crusty bread or with blini, a pancake-type bread.<sup>8</sup>

Those wanting a taste of home will likely find it in one of the international shops or restaurants scattered around Russian cities, but these tend to be expensive.

## Drinking

There is no doubt about the fact that Russia has a casual drinking culture. Public drunkenness is not as taboo in Russia as in many other countries and locals aren't hard-pressed to find a reason to celebrate any occasion with a drink. Vodka is one of the most popular drinks, while wine and beer are also heavily consumed. Russians enjoy making toasts and often the more solemn the occasion, the lengthier the toast. It's customary to only lower one's glass and take a sip once the toast is finished, with a clinking of glasses and everyone saying "Zdorvive" (to your health).<sup>9</sup>

## Holidays

Russia has a healthy distribution of public holidays throughout the year, which mostly commemorate significant dates in the nation's history.<sup>10</sup>

New Year's Break – 1-5 January

Russian Orthodox Christmas Day – 7 January

Day of the Defenders of the Motherland – 23 February

International Women's Day – 8 March

Spring/Labor Day – 1 May

Victory Day – 9 May

Russia Day (Independence Day) – 12 June

National Unity Day – 5 November

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/44154-russian-culture.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tripsavvy.com/russian-traditional-foods-1502211>

<sup>9</sup> <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/russian-culture/etiquette-1f962645-fc82-4fef-9995-aa049e2ab68d#etiquette-1f962645-fc82-4fef-9995-aa049e2ab68d>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.officeholidays.com/countries/russia/index.php>

## Transport

Russia has an extensive transport system which makes getting around the country easy and affordable. It's not necessary for expats living in Russian cities to own a car, although those living in more remote locations may find one useful.

A number of cities, including Moscow, St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, have metro systems, which offer the best means of getting around. Entry to the metro is by token inserted into a ticket barrier; those who will be using the metro regularly should consider a monthly pass. Buses, trams and trolleybuses provide an alternative way of getting around many Russian cities, albeit slightly less comfortably than via the metro. A number of different taxis also operate across Russian towns and cities. Private cabs can be hailed in the street, booked via the telephone or hailed at a taxi rank, while minibus shuttle taxis, known as marshrutka, travel set routes.

Russia has the second largest rail network in the world. Long-distance trains connect Russian towns and cities, and Moscow and St Petersburg are linked by a high-speed train. The country is also home to the Trans-Siberian Express, a network of railways linking Russia to China, Mongolia and North Korea.

Air travel is often the most convenient means to get between cities. Regular flights in and out of Russia are operated by Aeroflot, Russia's national airline, as well as a number of other international airlines.<sup>11</sup>

## Getting in Touch

With the largest telecoms market in Europe and continuously improving infrastructure, expats will find keeping in touch with family and friends in the Federation and back home fairly easy and affordable.

## Telephone

Russia has a competitive mobile market dominated by Beeline, MegaFon and MTS, among others. There isn't really much variation between the three providers, as they all offer fairly similar reception and prices. Expats have the option of prepaid and contract packages.

## Internet

Most apartment buildings are already wired for internet, so expats simply need to contact a service provider to connect them. As with mobile, the main internet service providers include Beeline, MegaFon and MTS. Connecting to the internet outside of home is also easy as most restaurants

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.expattarrivals.com/russia/transport-and-driving-in-russia>

and cafes have free WiFi available. Most social media sites and messaging services are available in Russia, but the government occasionally blocks access to certain sites for political or security reasons.

## Postal Services

The Russian postal service is operated by Pochta Rossii. However, there are many global courier services that operate efficiently for both in-country and international post.<sup>12</sup>

## Employment

### The job market

Russia's economy is heavily based on natural resources, specifically oil and natural gas, and expats working in the fields of technology, science and education will likely find a market for their skills. The majority of expats working in Russia have moved over as senior executives for multinational companies based in Russia. They are often afforded high salaries and a high quality of life. Others have moved over to teach English or as part of the diplomatic corps.<sup>13</sup>

### Income tax

A tax resident is a person who is living in Russia for 183 days in a rolling 12-month period. Tax residents in Russia are taxed at a flat rate of 13% on their locally earned and worldwide income, while non-resident tax payers are charged at 30% of their income earned in Russia.<sup>14</sup>

### Business etiquette

Relationship-building is essential to doing business successfully in Russia and expats should take the time to befriend the right people through face-to-face interaction. Russians, as with most businesspeople, like to do business with those they know and trust, and it's not unusual for business meetings to extend into long social lunches where they have an opportunity to get to know new associates.<sup>15</sup> Russian business structures are hierarchical and center on a strong – usually male – figure, who retains nearly absolute decision-making power. While some consideration is given to the views and inputs of middle managers, to accomplish anything it's usually necessary to 'go straight to the top'.

Russian is the official language, but English is spoken by younger businesspeople in the main city centers. The option of hiring a translator is also always available. Dress is viewed as a sign of prestige in Russia and business attire is formal and conservative, with dark suits for men and suits or skirts and blouses for women.

Titles are important in Russia and although some people may only introduce themselves with their surnames, it's always courteous to address businessmen as "Gaspadin" (equivalent to Mr) and businesswomen as "Gaspadja" (similar to Mrs or Miss) plus their surname. When greeting a Russian associate, a firm handshake and direct eye contact should be maintained.<sup>16</sup>

## Retirement

Due to the harsh climate, high cost of living and ailing health infrastructure, Russia is not a popular destination for international retirees, unless they have close family ties in the country.

## Finance

### Currency

The official currency in Russia is the Ruble, which is abbreviated as RUB. Each ruble is divided into 100 kopecks. Money is available in the following denominations:

- Notes: 5, 10, 50, 100, 500, 1,000 and 5,000 RUB
- Coins: 10 and 50 kopecks, and 1, 2, 5 and 10 RUB

### Cost of living

The cost of living in Russia is high, with Moscow featuring amongst the most expensive cities in the world for expats.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, for those arriving as part of a corporate transfer, employment packages often include added allowances for accommodation, health insurance, a car or driver, and even schooling.

Accommodation is particularly expensive in Russia, especially in relation to the low quality found in most cities. Groceries are also pricey, especially in the winter months, when much of the fresh produce is imported. Expats with children will also have to factor in high tuition costs at international schools.<sup>18</sup>

### Banking

Russia's banking sector remains somewhat small and fragmented. Although service provision has become more comprehensive in recent years, there are still reports that banking policies are outdated. Foreign banks in Russia have fared poorly and, in recent years, some European and US banks have announced plans to close their doors or scale down their operations in the country.

Many expats choose to send their savings abroad, while maintaining a small Russian account for daily living purposes. In order to open a bank account, expats will usually need a copy of their passport and visa, a minimum cash deposit, and some banks also require a letter from an employer and proof of residence.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/keeping-in-touch-in-russia>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/working-in-russia>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ru/Documents/tax/foreign-nationals-coming-to-russia.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/doing-business-in-russia>

<sup>17</sup> <https://mobilityexchange.mercer.com/Portals/0/Content/Rankings/rankings/col2017a986532/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/cost-of-living-in-russia>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/russia/banking-money-and-taxes-in-russia>

## Health

Once home to one of the best healthcare systems in the world, the state of Russia's public healthcare has been steadily declining in recent years.

Russian citizens and residents are entitled to free universal healthcare. Employers and employees contribute a percentage of the employee's salary to a social tax which then goes into the national healthcare fund. However, in addition, employees are required to take out compulsory private health insurance. It's also an unfortunate reality of the Russian healthcare system that enticements are often paid to doctors in exchange for adequate treatment.

Private healthcare is the preferred option for many expats in Russia. Moscow and St Petersburg have numerous private health centers and polyclinics, many of which have English-speaking staff. These facilities are of a much higher standard than their public counterparts, but are also comparably more expensive.

### Private Medical Insurance

It is vital that expats have comprehensive private health insurance, either organized through their employer or organized independently. It's important to ensure that insurance covers the specific facility one is most likely to visit, as many policies will only cover certain hospitals and clinics.

### Emergencies

In case of emergency, expats can dial 112. State ambulance services are available in the main Russian cities, although services are often limited, especially outside of the main centers.<sup>21</sup>

### Pharmacies

Pharmacies (aptekas) in are widely available in Russia. Some operate out of larger supermarkets, some exist as stand-alone bodies and others provide services online as ePharmacies. The larger cities will have a few 24-hour pharmacies. Be sure to learn the generic name of medications; although the big brand names may not be available, the generic usually will be.

### Health Risks

There are no major health risks associated with relocation to Russia.

### Vaccinations

Expats should ensure that they have all their routine vaccinations up to date, and should also consider vaccinations for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis and rabies.<sup>22</sup>

20 <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/12/02/dire-russia-health-care-523380.html>

21 <http://www.expatarivals.com/russia/healthcare-in-russia>

22 <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/russia>

