



RUSSIAN FEDERATION



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Eastern Europe/Asia.

Ministry of Physical Culture, Sport & Tourism
18 ul. Kazakova, 103064 Moscow, Russian Federation
Tel: (095) 263 0840. Fax: (095) 263 0761 or 261 9397.

Embassy of the Russian Federation
13 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QX
Tel: (020) 7229 2666. Fax: (020) 7727 8625. Opening hours: 0830-1230 and 1400-1800 Monday to Friday.
Consular section: 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QS
Tel: (020) 7229 8027. Fax: (020) 7229 3215. Opening hours: 1000-1230 Monday to Friday (closed Wednesday).

Intourist Travel Ltd.
219 Marsh Wall, Isle of Dogs, London E14 9PD
Tel: (020) 7538 8600 (general enquiries). Fax: (020) 7538 5967.
E-mail: info@intourist.co.uk
Web site: <http://www.intourist.co.uk>

British Embassy
Smolenskaya Naberezhnaya 10, Moscow 121099, Russian Federation
Tel: (095) 956 7200. Fax: (095) 956 7201 or 956 7441 (visa section) or 956 7430 (press and public affairs). E-mail: britembppas@glas.apc.org
Web site: <http://www.britemb.msk.ru>

British Consulate

2 GENERAL

Pl. Proletarskoy Diktatury 5, 193124 St Petersburg, Russian Federation
Tel: (812) 320 3200. Fax: (812) 320 3211. E-mail: bcdspb@peterlink.ru
Consulates in: Yekatarinburg. Honorary Consulates in Novorussiisk and Vladivostok.

Embassy of the Russian Federation
2650 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20007
Tel: (202) 298 5700. Fax: (202) 298 5735. E-mail: russ-amb@cerfnet.com
Web site: <http://www.russianembassy.org>
Consular section: 2641 Tunlaw Road, NW, Washington, DC 20007
Tel: (202) 939 8907. Fax: (202) 438 7579.
Consulates in: New York, San Francisco and Seattle.

Russian National Group
130 West 42nd Street, Suite 412, New York, NY 10036
Tel: (212) 575 3431. Fax: (212) 575 3434. E-mail: info@russia-travel.com
Web site: <http://www.russia-travel.com>
Represents the Russian National Tourist Office and Intourist Holding Company.

Embassy of the United States of America
Novinskiy Bulvar 19/23, 121099 Moscow, Russian Federation

Tel: (095) 252 2451-9. Fax: (095) 956 4261.
E-mail: consulmo@state.gov
Web site: <http://www.usia.gov/abtusia/posts/RS1/wwwmain.html>

US Consulate General
ul. Furshatskaya 15, 191028 St Petersburg, Russian Federation
Tel: (812) 275 1701. Fax: (812) 110 7022. E-mail: visa_stpete@state.gov
Other consulates in: Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg.

Embassy of the Russian Federation
285 Charlotte Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8L5
Tel: (613) 235 4341. Fax: (613) 236 6342. E-mail: rusemb@magma.ca
Consular section: 52 Range Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J5
Tel: (613) 236 7220 or 236 6215. Fax: (613) 238 6158.
Consulate in: Montréal.

Canadian Embassy
Starokonyushenny Pereulok 23, 121002 Moscow, Russian Federation
Tel: (095) 956 6666. Fax: (095) 232 9948.

Canadian Consulate General
32 Malodetskoselsky Prospect, 198013 St Petersburg, Russian Federation
Tel: (812) 325 8448. Fax: (812) 325 8393. E-mail: spurg@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

Country dialling code: 7. The 0 of the area code should not be omitted when dialling from abroad.

General

Area: 17,075,400 sq km (6,592,850 sq miles).

Population: 147,100,000 (1998).

Population Density: 8.6 per sq km.

Capital: Moscow. Population: 8,436,447 (1994).

Geography: The Russian Federation covers almost twice the area of the United States of America, and reaches from Moscow in the west over the Urals and the vast Siberian plains to the Sea of Okhotsk in the east. The border between European Russia and Siberia (Asia) is formed by the Ural Mountains, the Ural River and the Manych Depression. European Russia extends from the North Polar Sea across the Central Russian Uplands to the Black Sea, the Northern Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Siberia stretches from the West Siberian Plain across the Central Siberian Plateau between Yenisey and Lena, including the Sayan, Yablonovy and Stanovoy ranges in the south to the East Siberian mountains between Lena and the Pacific coast including the Chukotskiy and Kamchatka peninsulas.

The following republics are part of the Russian Federation. Population figures were drawn up in 1996.

Republic	Area (sq km)	Population (000's)	Capital	Adygheya	7600	450
Maikop	Altai	92,600	202 Gorno-Altaisk	Bashkortostan	143,600	4097 Ufa
Buryatia	351,300	1053	Ulan-Ude	Chechnyat*	n/a	921 Grozny Chuvashia
18,300	1361		Cheboksary	Daghestan	50,300	2042 Makhachkala Ingushetia*
n/a	300		Nazran	Kabardino-Balkariya	12,500	790 Nalchik Kalmykiya 75,900

319	Elista	Karachayevo-Cherkessiya	14,100	436	Cherkessk	Kareliya	172,400
785	Petrozavodsk	Khakassiya	61,900	586	Abakan	Komi	415,900
Syktiykar	Marii-El	23,200	766	Yoshkar-Ola	Mordoviya	26,200	956
Northern Osetiya (Alaniya)	8000	663	Vladikavkaz	Sakha (Yakutiya)	3,103,200	1023	
Yakutsk	Tatarstan	68,000	3760	Kazan	Tyva	170,500	309
42,100	1639	Izhevsk			Kyzyl	Udmurtiya	

Note: *Note: Until 1992, the territories of the Republic of Chechnya and the Ingush Republic were combined in the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic (area 19,300 sq km).

Government: Republic since 1991. Head of Government: President Vladimir Putin since 2000.

Language: Russian. English, French or German are spoken by some people.

Religion: Mainly Christian with the Russian Orthodox Church being the largest Christian community. Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish minorities also exist.

TIME: Kaliningrad: GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Moscow, St Petersburg, Astrakhan: GMT + 3 (GMT + 4 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Izhevsk and Samara: GMT + 4 (GMT + 5 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Perm - Nizhnevartovsk: GMT + 5 (GMT + 6 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Omsk and Novosibirsk: GMT + 6 (GMT + 7 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Norilsk, Kyzyl: GMT + 7 (GMT + 8 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Bratsk - Ulan Ude: GMT + 8 (GMT + 9 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Chita, Yakutsk: GMT + 9 (GMT + 10 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Khabarovsk, Vladivostok: GMT + 10 (GMT + 11 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Magadan, Yuzhno Sakhalinsk: GMT + 11 (GMT + 12 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Petropavlosk: GMT + 12 (GMT + 13 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz.

Communications:

Telephone: IDD is available. Country code: 7. When dialling the Russian Federation from abroad, the 0 of the area code must not be omitted. Outgoing international code: 810. Most international calls made from the cities of Moscow, St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod can be dialled directly, but in smaller cities and towns it may be necessary to go through the international operator and these should be booked well in advance. Telephone booths for international phone calls are available at main post offices. International calls can be booked by dialling 8194 or, if the call is booked from a hotel, 333 4101. Some Moscow hotels have telephone booths with IDD. For long distance calls within the CIS, dial 8 then wait for the dial tone before proceeding with the call. Collect calls, calls placed using credit cards and calls from direct dial telephones in hotels can be extremely expensive. The emergency services can be reached as follows: fire - 01; police - 02; ambulance - 03. For enquiries regarding Moscow private telephone numbers, dial 09; for businesses, 927 0009. For national directory enquiries regarding the Russian Federation and the CIS, dial 927 0009.

Mobile telephone: GSM 900/1800 networks. Network operators include KB Impuls (web site: <http://www.beeline.msk.ru>) and Mobile Telesystems (web site: <http://www.mts.ru>). All major cities are covered by at least one operator. Handsets can be hired from some companies.

Fax: Services are available in numerous business centres and hotels, although the latter option is more expensive.

Internet/E-mail: ISPs include Beeonline (web site: <http://www.beeonline.ru>) and Russiaonline (web site: <http://www.online.ru>). Public access is available in hotels in larger cities and in cybercafés.

Telegram: These may be sent from hotels.

Post: Airmail to Western Europe takes over ten days. There are postboxes and post offices in every hotel. Poste Restante facilities are available at the larger hotels. Inland surface mail is often slow. Post office hours: 0900-1900.

Press: The main dailies in the Russian Federation are Komsomolskaya Pravda and Izvestiya, both published in Moscow. Newspapers and magazines are published in some 25 languages. Multi-lingual editions of the Moscow News are available weekly. The Moscow Times and St Petersburg Times are published in English. There is also a daily internet newspaper, Russia Today (web site: <http://www.russiatoday.com>).

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC: MHz15.5712.109.4106.195

Voice of America: MHz19.7259.5207.2707.220

3 PASSPORT

	Passport Required?	Visa Required?	Return Ticket Required?
British	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian	Yes	Yes	Yes
Canadian	Yes	Yes	Yes

USA	Yes	Yes	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	Yes	Yes
Japanese	Yes	Yes	Yes

PASSPORTS: Valid passport required by all.

Note: Whilst in the country, visitors must carry ID at all times. Rather than carry original documents, it is advisable to carry photocopies of passports and visas, which will facilitate replacement should either be stolen.

VISAS: Required by all except the following, provided arriving from their country of origin:
 (a) nationals of CIS countries (except nationals of Turkmenistan and Georgia who do require visas);
 (b) nationals of Bulgaria, Korea (DPR), Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Vietnam for stays of up to 30 days;
 (c) nationals of Cyprus, Hungary and Mongolia, provided travelling as tourists and holding prepaid hotel vouchers.

Types of visa and cost: Tourist, Business, Private and Transit visas: £30, if visa is processed in 7 working days. (Processing within 3-5 days costs £50; same-day processing costs £80; processing within 1 hour costs £120.) Multiple-entry visa: £100 (£150 if processed within 1 hour).

Validity: Dependent on purpose of trip. Transit visas are valid for up to 3 days. Tourist visas are valid for 1 month. Private visas are valid for 90 days.

Note: Transit visas are required by all except passengers remaining in the transit zone of Moscow Sheremetievo airport for less than 24 hours, provided holding onward tickets and all documents for the next destination.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section.

Application requirements: (a) Completed application form. (b) 3 recent identical passport-size photos with applicant's name written clearly on the reverse. (c) Valid passport. (d) A voucher (exchange order) issued by an authorised travel company stating the reference number, passenger names, dates of entry and exit, itinerary and means of transportation. (e) Return air ticket (copy acceptable). (f) Fee (payable in cash or by postal order). (g) Postal applications must be accompanied by a large, stamped, self-addressed envelope. (h) Medical insurance.

Business visas: (a)-(g) and, (h) An introductory letter from the applicant's company or firm indicating the purpose of the visit, itinerary, organisation to be visited, period of stay and exact departure dates of flights. (i) An official invitation from the Russian Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Interior or any other authorised Russian Agency.

Private visas: (a)-(g) and, (h) A letter of invitation to be obtained on the applicant's behalf by friends or relatives in Russia from the local authorities. Valid for 1 year.

Multiple Entry visas: (a)-(g) and, (h) Written confirmation or telex from the Consular Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Note: (a) Those who are travelling in groups (standard package tours, coach tours, international competitions and cruises) should submit all documentation to the tour operator making the travel arrangements. For visits to relatives/friends in the CIS, enquire at the Consulate for details of application procedures. (b) All travellers staying in the Russian Federation for longer than 3 days must register their visas through their hotel or sponsor. Private visitors must register with local

police on arrival. An exit permit is required by all passengers who want to leave the country, and should be obtained from the hotel or sponsor at least 2 days before departure.

Working days required: Depending on type of visa, 1 to 14 days. Postal applications take at least 3 weeks to process. Applications for visas may not be made earlier than 3 months before departure.

4 MONEY

Currency: Rouble (Rbl) = 100 kopeks. Notes are in denominations of Rbl500, 100, 50 and 10. Coins are in denominations of Rbl5, 2 and 1. The Rouble was devalued by a factor of 1000 in January 1998. The old notes and coins remain legal tender until 2002, although their real value is 1000th of their face value.

Currency exchange: Foreign currency should only be exchanged at official bureaux and authorised banks, and all transactions must be recorded on the currency declaration form which is issued on arrival. It is wise to retain all exchange receipts. Bureaux de change are numerous and easy to locate. Large shops and hotels offer their own exchange facilities. US Dollars in pristine condition are the easiest currency to exchange. It is illegal to settle accounts in hard currency and to change money unofficially.

Credit cards: Major European and international credit cards, including American Express, Visa and Diners Club, are accepted in the larger hotels and at foreign currency shops and restaurants, but cash (in Roubles) is preferred.

Travellers cheques: Cash is preferred. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Rouble against Sterling and the US Dollar:

DateMay '00Aug '00Nov '00Feb '01£1.00=42.0741.8340.3341.92\$1.00=28.3427.8827.8628.70

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local currency is limited to Rbl40,000. The import of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration. The export of foreign currency is limited to the amount declared on arrival. Foreign banknotes and coins must be exported within two months of arrival.

Banking hours: 0930-1730 Monday to Friday.

5 DUTY FREE

Duty-free regulations are liable to change at short notice. The following should be used as a guide only, and travellers are advised to contact the Embassy or Consulate for up-to-date information. Goods that may be imported into the Russian Federation by persons over 16 years of age without incurring customs duty:

1000 cigarettes or 1kg of tobacco products; 1.5 litres of spirits and 2 litres of wine; a reasonable quantity of perfume for personal use; gifts up to the value of US\$10,000.

Note: On entering the country, tourists must complete a customs declaration form which must be retained until departure. This allows the import of articles intended for personal use, including currency and valuables which must be registered on the declaration form. Cameras, jewellery, computers and musical instruments should all be declared. Customs inspection can be long and detailed. It is advisable when shopping to ask for a certificate from the shop which states that goods have been paid for in hard currency. Presentation of such certificates should speed up customs formalities.

Prohibited imports: Photographs and printed matter directed against the Russian Federation, weapons and ammunition, narcotics, fruit and vegetables.

Prohibited exports: Arms, works of art and antiques (unless permission has been granted by the Ministry of Culture), precious metals and furs.

Note: Up to 280g of caviar per person may be exported, provided a receipt is shown proving that it was bought at a store licensed to sell it to foreigners.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Jan 7 Russian Christmas. Mar 8 International Women's Day. Apr 15 Russian Orthodox Easter. May 1-2 Spring and Labour Day. May 9 Victory in Europe Day. Jun 12 Independence Day. Nov 7 Day of Reconciliation and Consent. Dec 7 Constitution Day. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Jan 7 Russian Christmas. Mar 8 International Women's Day. May 1-2 Spring and Labour Day. May 5 Russian Orthodox Easter. May 9 Victory in Europe Day. Jun 12 Independence Day. Nov 7 Day of Reconciliation and Consent. Dec 7 Constitution Day.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	1	-
Malaria	No	-
Food and Drink	2	-

1: Poliomyelitis occurs. Immunisation is advisable.

2: All water should be regarded as being a potential health risk. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Rabies is present and increasing. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information consult the Health appendix.

Widespread outbreaks of diphtheria have been reported. Consult a doctor regarding inoculation before travelling to Russia. Tick-borne typhus has been reported from east and central Siberia. Tick-borne encephalitis and Lyme disease occur in forested areas throughout the Russian Federation. Vaccination is advisable. Hepatitis A occurs.

Note: Visitors staying for more than three months must produce a certificate proving they are HIV-negative.

Health care: The highly developed health service provides free medical treatment for all citizens. If a traveller becomes ill during a booked tour, emergency treatment is free, with small sums to be paid for medicines and hospital treatment. If a longer stay than originally planned becomes necessary because of the illness, the visitor has to pay for all further treatment. This can be very expensive; air evacuation can cost up to £80,000. All visitors are strongly advised to have full medical cover that includes medical evacuation. It is advisable to take a supply of medicines that are likely to be required (check first that they may be imported legally).

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline is Aeroflot Russian International Airlines (SU). Other airlines serving the Russian Federation include Air France, Austrian Airlines, British Airways, Czech Airlines, El Al, Finnair, Lufthansa, Swissair and SAS Scandinavian Airlines.

APPROXIMATE FLIGHT TIMES: From Moscow or St Petersburg to London is 3 hours 45 minutes. From Moscow to Almaty is 4 hours 15 minutes, to Baku is 3 hours, to Bukhara is 3 hours 45 minutes, to Kiyiv is 1 hour 30 minutes, to Minsk is 1 hour 30 minutes, to Odessa is 2 hours, to Samarkand is 3 hours 45 minutes and to Yerevan is 4 hours 30 minutes.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS: Moscow (SVO) (Sheremetyevo) (web site: <http://www.sheremetyevo-airport.ru>) is 35km (22 miles) northwest of the city. Taxis are available at the airport to the city centre for approximately US\$25-30 (travel time - 45 minutes). 'Autoline' fixed-route taxis and buses are also available. Express coaches depart for the city every 20 minutes (0545-0030). Coaches depart for the airport from the Central Air Terminal in Moscow, 37 Leningradsky Prospekt (travel time - 50 minutes for international flights). Airport facilities include outgoing duty-free shops, banks/bureaux de change, post office, car hire, restaurants and first aid. Moscow also has three primarily domestic airports: see the Travel - Internal section. St Petersburg (LED) (Pulkovo) is 17km (10.5 miles) south of the city. Buses are available to the city centre (travel time - 45 minutes). Taxis are available for roughly US\$30 (travel time - 30 minutes). Airport facilities include 24-hour banks/bureaux de change, 24-hour flight information, duty-free shops (0800-2000), restaurant, bar (1000-2000), snack bar (0800-2000), 24-hour left luggage and 24-hour first aid.

RAIL: There are various connections from London. The sleeper coach to Moscow takes about 53 hours. The main route is: London-Brussels-Berlin-Warsaw-Moscow. The journey from London to Brussels can be made by a variety of train and ferry services, or via the Channel Tunnel. Services from Brussels are daily. There are through trains or coaches from other Western and Eastern European cities, from CIS countries, and from Turkey, Iran, Mongolia and China. See also Trans-Siberian Express in Travel - Internal section.

ROAD: Foreign tourists may drive their own cars or may hire cars (see Travel - Internal section). The following crossing points between Finland and the Russian Federation are available: Vaalima-Torfianovska; Nuijamaa-Brusnichnoye and Rajajooseppi-Lotta. There are also crossing points between the Russian Federation and all neighbouring countries although, at present, there are restrictions on cross-border travel to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Those entering by car should have

their visas registered at the hotel, motel or campsite where they will stay for the first night, and must also ensure that the car registration number is recorded in the visa. Travellers should also insure their vehicle with Ingosstrakh, which has offices at all crossing points and in most major cities, and to purchase service coupons at the border. Although motorcyclists can enter Russia, cyclists wishing to cross the Russian border should find out whether this is permissible from the Russian Embassy or their travel agent before departure.

NOTE: A road tax is payable upon entry to the Russian Federation.

Travel - Internal

AIR: The internal network radiates from Moscow's four airports. Aeroflot runs services from Moscow to most major cities. All-inclusive tours are available from specialist tour operators.

DOMESTIC AIRPORTS: Vnukovo Airport (VKO) is 29.5km (18 miles) southwest of Moscow. Coaches go to the airport from the Central Air Terminal (travel time - 1 hour 15 minutes). Outgoing duty-free facilities are available at the airport. Taxis are available to the city. Domodedovo (DME) is 40km (25 miles) from Moscow. A coach goes from the Central Air Terminal to the airport (travel time - 1 hour 20 minutes). Bykovo Airport (BKA) is the smallest of Moscow's airports. Coaches go to the airport from the Central Air Terminal.

APPROXIMATE FLIGHT TIMES: From Moscow to Bratsk is 6 hours 45 minutes, to Donetsk is 1 hour 30 minutes, to Irkutsk is 7 hours, to Khabarovsk is 7 hours 30 minutes, to Kharkov is 1 hour 15 minutes, to St Petersburg is 1 hour, to Volgograd is 1 hour 30 minutes and to Yalta is 2 hours 15 minutes.

SEA: Owing to its geographical position, the Russian Federation has ports on its Pacific and Baltic shores and in the south on the Black Sea. The most important eastern ports are Vladivostok, Magadan, Nakhodka and Petropavlovsk; the most important western ports are St Petersburg and Kaliningrad on the Baltic. The only links to the Atlantic are the ports of Murmansk on the Kola peninsula, which never freezes over and Archangelisk. Major harbours on the Black Sea are Novorossiysk and Sochi. There are plans to build an extension to the St Petersburg harbour at Ust-Luga. Upgrading of facilities at Kaliningrad and Vyborg is also planned. Sea cruises on the Black Sea and the Baltic are popular.

RIVER: Cruises and excursions are available on the Volga, Lena, Irtysh, Ob, Yenisey, Don and Amur rivers. Many companies offer cruises on board comfortable, modern boats. The Volga towns, the Golden Ring and Moscow-St Petersburg are popular routes.

RAIL: The 87,079km (54,109 miles) of track are a vital part of the infrastructure because of the poor road system. The largest and busiest rail network in the world is predominantly for freight traffic. Only a few long-distance routes are open for travel by tourists, and reservations must be made on all journeys. Children under 5 travel free. Children aged 5-9 pay half fare. Rail travellers are advised to store valuables in the compartment under the bed or seat and not to leave the compartment unattended.

The Trans-Siberian Express, probably the most famous train in the world, is one of the best ways of seeing the interior of the country. It runs from Moscow to the Pacific coast of Siberia and on to Japan. There is a daily service, but the steamer from Nakhodka to Yokohama only sails approximately once a week. The through journey from Moscow to Yokohama takes ten days. It is the world's longest continuous train journey, crossing seven time zones and 9745km (5778 miles) from Europe to the Pacific, with 91 stops from Vladivostok to Moscow. Bed linen and towels are provided in the 'Soft Class' (first class) berths, and there is a toilet and washbasin at the end of

each carriage. Attendants serve tea from samovars for a small charge and there is a restaurant car on every train where meals can be purchased. (However, no alcohol is available on the train, so passengers are advised to bring their own if desired.) Another epic journey may be made on the Trans-Mongolian Railway. It runs from Moscow to Irkutsk (Siberia), skirting Lake Baikal and then entering Mongolia. The journey to the Mongolian capital, Ulaan Baatar, is remarkable for its dramatic scenery. The journey concludes in Beijing. For further information on both train journeys, contact Intourist Travel Ltd, 219 Marsh Wall, Isle of Dogs, London E14 9PD (tel: (020) 7538 8600; fax: (020) 7538 5967; e-mail: info@intourist.co.uk; web site: <http://www.intourist.co.uk>).

ROAD: The European part of the Russian Federation depends heavily on its road network, which totals 552,000km (343,000 miles) throughout the Federation. Generally, the few roads in Siberia and further east are impassable during the winter. It is a good idea to arrange motoring holidays through a reputable agency. It is also advisable to pre-plan the itinerary and accommodation requirements. On the majority of tourist routes, signposts are also written in the Latin alphabet. Travellers can take their own car (see Travel - International section) or hire a vehicle; tariffs include the cost of insurance. Chauffeured cars are available in major cities. Sample distances: Moscow to St Petersburg: 692km (432 miles); Moscow to Minsk: 690km (429 miles); Moscow to Rostov-on-Don: 1198km (744 miles); Moscow to Odessa: 1347km (837 miles). Bus: Long-distance coach services operate but they are generally not available for tourist travel. Traffic regulations: Traffic drives on the right. Speeds are limited to 60kph (37mph) in built-up areas and 90kph (55mph) elsewhere. Hooting the horn is forbidden except when to do so might prevent an accident. Motorists should avoid driving at night if possible. It is forbidden to carry unauthorised passengers or pick up hitch-hikers. Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol is forbidden. Every car must display registration plates and stickers denoting the country of registration and be fitted with seat belts, a first-aid kit, a fire extinguisher and an emergency sign (triangle) or red light. In case of an accident, contact the nearest traffic inspection officer and make sure all participants fill in written statements, to be witnessed by a militia inspector. All repairs will be at the foreign motorist's expense. Documentation: An International Driving Permit and a national licence with authorised translations are necessary. Visitors travelling in their own cars must also possess the following documents at all times: passport and visa; itinerary card bearing visitor's name and citizenship, car registration number and full details of itinerary presented upon entry to the Russian Federation relating to the route to be taken and the date and place of stopovers; form provided by Customs on arrival guaranteeing that the car will be taken out of the Russian Federation on departure; petrol vouchers purchased at the border; and insurance cover documents. A road tax is payable upon entry to the country (see end of Travel - International section). Motor insurance for travel within the Russian Federation should be arranged prior to departure, or upon entry to the Russian Federation at the offices of Ingosstrakh, the Russian Federation foreign insurance agency. Contact the Embassy or a specialist tour operator for further details.

URBAN: Public transport in the cities is comprehensive and cheap. Many services are electric traction (metro, tramway, trolleybus). Stations on the Moscow and St Petersburg metros are always elegant and often palatial. Entry to the underground is by tokens, which are inserted into the ticket barrier. Fares are standard for the various forms of transport. Taxis are also available; they can be hailed in the street, hired at a rank or booked by telephone. It is safer to use officially marked taxis, which should not be shared with strangers.

JOURNEY TIMES: The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Moscow to other major cities/towns in the Russian Federation.

AirRailSea
Khabarovsk7.30--

St Petersburg1.009.00-
Irkutsk7.0088.00-
Nakhodka--141.00
Volgograd1.45--

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: There are approximately 2500 hotels in the Russian Federation, of which about 100 specialise in accommodating foreign guests. Some hotels meet international standards, whereas others are very basic. Direct reservations by clients are on the increase. Several hotels opened in Moscow and St Petersburg, partly as joint ventures, eg the Aerostar (4-star), the Olympic-Penta (all rooms with bathroom, air-conditioning, radio, TV, IDD) and the Novotel at Moscow airport. The Pullman Iris also offers 4-star comfort. St Petersburg's Grand Hotel Europe is one of the first 5-star hotels in the Russian Federation. The Hotel Helen is a Russian-Finnish joint-venture, located 20km (12.5 miles) from St Petersburg airport.

BED & BREAKFAST: Several companies provide bed & breakfast accommodation with English-speaking families in Moscow, St Petersburg and other cities.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: Camping holidays are now offered by a number of independent companies.

YOUTH HOSTELS: There are currently two hostels in St Petersburg, two in Moscow and one in Novgorod. For further information, contact the Russian Youth Hostel Association, St Petersburg International Hostel, 3rd Sovietskaya Street, Building no 28, St Petersburg 193069 (tel: (812) 277 0569 or 329 8018; fax: (812) 277 5102 or 329 8019; e-mail: ryh@ryh.ru; web site: <http://www.hostelling-russia.ru> or <http://www.ryh.ru>).

9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

For ease of reference, this section has been divided into the following sections, which do not necessarily reflect administrative or cultural boundaries: Moscow, The Golden Ring, Karelia, Murmansk, Novgorod, St Petersburg, River Volga, Kaliningrad, Black Sea and The Urals, Siberia and the Far East.

Moscow

The capital was founded in 1147, but there is evidence that there has been a settlement here since Neolithic times. The focal point of the city is Red Square, on one side of which is the Kremlin surrounded by a thick red fortress wall containing 20 towers in all, at intervals. The Sobakina Tower, designed to withstand sieges, contains a secret escape passage. The Tainitskaya Tower translates as the 'Tower of Secrets', because it also had a secret subterranean passage leading to the river. The Trinity Gate is the tallest of the towers. The Water-Hoist Tower conveyed water to the Kremlin. The Nabatnaya Tower contained an alarm bell that was rung in times of danger. In the Kremlin grounds, the Uspensky Cathedral (1475-79), designed by the Italian architect Aristotle Fioravanti, contains three of the oldest Russian icons. The tsars were crowned here; Ivan the Terrible's throne is situated near the entrance. Also within the Kremlin stand the 14th-century Grand Kremlin Palace and the golden-domed Belfry of Ivan the Great. St Basil's Cathedral (built 1555-60), at another end of the square, is famous for its brightly-coloured

domes. As the story goes, Ivan the Terrible was so overwhelmed by its beauty that he blinded the architect so that he could never create another building as impressive as this. Opposite St Basil's, the Spassky (Redeemer's) Gate is the main entrance to the Kremlin, built in 1491 by Pietro Antonio Solario. The Blagoveshchensky (Annunciation) Cathedral was built for Ivan III. It is extravagantly decorated, from its copper domes to its agate- and jasper-tiled floors. It contains 16th-century frescoes and a precious collection of icons. Our Lady of Kazan Cathedral has recently been reconstructed and rededicated. The superb murals in the Faceted Chamber date from the late 15th century. Sadly the Chamber is not open to the public. The State Historical Museum is also located in Red Square. Although there is talk of finally burying Lenin's embalmed body, Lenin's Mausoleum is still open to the public on certain days. However, the changing of the guards in front of the Mausoleum, a ritual which used to attract many sightseers, was discontinued in 1993. Tverskaya Street near Red Square is one of the main shopping streets. Arbat Street is the main thoroughfare of a traditionally bohemian quarter. Today it is a pedestrian zone with crafts and artists' stalls and street performers. The area known as Kitai-Gorod lies east of the Kremlin, and is notable for its 16th- and 17th-century churches, especially the five-domed Cathedral of the Sign, with its amazing acoustic properties. The splendid English Estate dates from the same period, a remnant of the area's former importance as a diplomatic and commercial centre. The nearby Romanov Apartments are now a museum. Zayauzie is a quiet, attractive district, with its handsome merchants' mansions. The world-famous Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre at Teatralnaya Square dates from 1824 and has an interior colour scheme of red and gold. Moscow University is situated on the southwestern periphery of the city in the Vorobyevi Hills. The lookout tower in the park in front of the University complex offers excellent views over the city and the vast Luzhniki Stadium. Novodevichy Convent near Sportivnaya metro station houses a museum of rare and ancient Russian art, and is one of the finest examples of 16th- and 17th-century architecture in the city. The neighbouring Ostozhenka and Prechistenka Streets feature urban mansions and estates associated with many classic Russian authors including Tolstoy. The dancer Isadora Duncan shared her studio with her husband, the poet Sergei Yesenin, in the classically-designed estate of the millionaire Ushkov in Prechistenka Street. Herzen Street is one of the oldest in Moscow. It contains the Moscow State University, the grand Tchaikovsky Conservatoire and the ornate Mayakovsky Academic Theatre. The area around Kuznetzky Most and Petrovka Street is a hub of social and cultural activity, with its popular theatres, fashion shops and business community. One of the most popular new, but macabre attractions is the KGB Museum housed in the sinister Lubyanka building. The well-preserved Zamoskvorechye district was originally a mercantile and artisans' quarter. Many of its churches, warehouses, shops and houses survive. The area is home to the Tretyakov Gallery, containing the work of Russian artists and an extensive collection of icons, among them the 'Trinity' by **Andrei Rublyov**. Other places of interest are: the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts with its cosmopolitan collection; the Moscow Circus, the original with animal acts and clowns and the newer with more technical wonders; Izmailovo Park, formerly the Tsar's estate and the elegant Tsaritsino landscaped park; the Exhibition of Economic Achievements, where on a large site in the northwest of the city all aspects of Russian life are displayed - such as agriculture, industry, culture and science. The site also contains a zoo and a circus and there is skating and skiing. The nearby Ostankino TV Tower is the tallest in Europe, with a revolving restaurant at the top. The Space Conquerors' Monument, representing the trajectory of a rocket launch, also dominates the area. The local Museum of Serf Art is a reminder of the past. The Metro system is a tourist attraction in itself, as well as a cheap and convenient means of travelling around the city. Many stations are sumptuously decorated with marble, glittering chandeliers and works of art. A boat tour on the Moskva River is a pleasant way of discovering the city. Excursions start at the Kutuzovskaya Pier, accessible from Kutuzovskaya Metro. The river is a superb vantage point to view the White House (the Parliament Building), scene of the dramatic siege of 1991, as well as many of the sights listed above.

EXCURSIONS: The State Museum of Ceramics in Kuskovo, 10km (6 miles) from the centre of Moscow, has a fascinating collection of Russian china, porcelain and glass. Arkhangelskoye Estate, a museum housed in a palace 16km (10 miles) from Moscow, exhibits European paintings and sculptures, but the main attraction is the grounds which are laid out in the French style. Zhostovo, 30km (19 miles) from Moscow, is a centre renowned for its lacquered trays, and Fedoskino, 35km (22 miles) from Moscow, produces lacquer miniatures, brooches and other handicrafts. Located near the town of Tula, 160km (100 miles) from the capital, Yasnaya Polyana is historically significant as the author Leo Tolstoy's estate. The author of War and Peace and Anna Karenina is buried here and his house, surrounded by landscaped parkland, is now a museum open to the public. Tchaikovsky's home at Klin, 90km (56 miles) from Moscow, and Boris Pasternak's home at Peredelkino (30 minutes' drive from the capital), are also museums.

Tver: Tver, situated 160km (100 miles) from Moscow on the upper Volga, is where Catherine II built a palace in order to take a rest en route from Moscow to St Petersburg. The Putyevoy Dvorets (Route Palace) was built by Kazakov in 1763-75. The palace overlooks the river, a convenient location for the tsarina to disembark. The town is also notable for its star-shaped square.

The Golden Ring

Several ancient towns of great historical, architectural and spiritual significance make up the 'Golden Ring', extending northeast from Moscow. They are a rich collection of kremlins (citadels), monasteries, cathedrals and fortresses. All are within easy reach of the capital. Since many were founded on river banks, a cruise is a pleasant way of discovering the region. Modern boats plying the Volga afford comfortable accommodation. As some major sites such as Vladimir and Suzdal are not located near the Volga, a minibus tour with hotel accommodation is a better option for visitors whose primary interest is the region's architectural heritage.

Sergiyev Posad: Sergiyev Posad (formerly Zagorsk), a small town situated on two rivers, is the centre of the handmade toy industry; the Toy Museum has a collection beginning in the Bronze Age. The Trinity Monastery of St Sergius dates from the Middle Ages and is a major pilgrimage centre. Its Cathedral of the Dormition has wonderful blue domes decorated with gold stars. The museum contains examples of Russian ecclesiastical art and crafts. In nearby Sofrin, the Icon Workshops produce ecclesiastical ware. Also near Sergiyev Posad, the literary and artistic museum of Abramtsevo houses paintings by Repin, Serov and Vrubel. The museum is surrounded by parkland and birch woods. Ornate traditional Russian huts are dotted around the estate. Rostov Veliky, founded in the 9th century, has a beautiful Kremlin and Cathedral of the Dormition. The town overlooks the shores of the Nero Lake, and is surrounded by ancient monasteries. Neighbouring Yaroslavl lies on the banks of the Volga, and contains a host of ancient churches, most notably the Transfiguration of the Saviour Cathedral, built in the early 16th century. Kostroma stands at the confluence of the Volga and the River Kostroma. It is a renowned cheese-making centre. Its most outstanding building is the Ipatievski Monastery-Fortress. Built during the first half of the 14th century, it became the Romanovs' residence three centuries later. The open-air museum features a collection of traditional Russian buildings, including wooden churches, log cabins and windmills brought from all over Russia. East of Moscow is Suzdal, perhaps the most important town in the Golden Ring. It boasts 50 well-preserved examples of ancient architecture contained within a relatively small area, providing a wonderfully coherent vision of its past. Historically it was a political and religious centre, and is now a major tourist attraction. The wives of tsars and boyars were exiled to the Blessed Virgin Convent. Less than 32km (20 miles) away is Vladimir, which played a prominent part in the rise of the Russian state. The city's two magnificent cathedrals date from the 12th century. Another notable monument is the Golden Gate, a unique example of old Russian engineering skills. The nearby village of Bogolyubovo features a 12th-century fortress and Church of the Protecting Veil.

Uglich, another beautiful town on the banks of the Volga, is notable for its Kremlin and the Chambers of Prince Dmitry. Prince Dmitry, son and heir of Ivan the Terrible drowned here, after accidentally being dropped in a river by his nurse.

Karelia

Bounded by Finland and the White Sea, Karelia's landscape is a patchwork of lakes, marshes and forests, whose canopies shade abundant mushrooms and berries. The region's capital, Petrozavodsk, is a staging post for a variety of holiday activities in the region. The small island of Kizhi within Lake Onega is easily accessible by hydrofoil from here. The island was an early pagan centre. Its surviving heritage features the 22-domed 18th-century Church of the Transfiguration, whose wooden structure was built without a single nail. The open-air museum is a collection of Russian and Karel wooden buildings from the 14th-19th centuries. The region is ideal for adventure holidays on the Shuya, Suna and Vama-Vodla rivers. Tranquil waters offering spectacular views of the countryside are suddenly interrupted by rapids cascading over glacial boulders. The white waters may be negotiated by kayak or cataraft. The Suna River is excellent for fishing. The Kivach Waterfall along its path is especially beautiful. Karel pies called kalitkas may be sampled in the local hamlets, often no more than a cluster of sturdy wooden cottages. A real sauna followed by a plunge into a river or lake is an ideal way to unwind at the end of an adventure-packed day.

Murmansk

Almost due north of St Petersburg, this is the largest city within the Arctic Circle. This important port on the shores of Kola Bay is warmed by the waters of the Gulf Stream and is free of ice throughout the year. It was built with British assistance during World War I. The Northern Lights are seen here in November and December and in March the Sports Festival of the Peoples of the North is held.

Arkhangelsk: Arkhangelsk, the largest city in the White Sea area, was only opened to tourists in 1990. Before the founding of St Petersburg it was the first and only seaport in Russia. From here, visitors may travel to the nearby village of Mali Kareli to view Russian white stone and wooden architecture.

Novgorod

South of St Petersburg, Novgorod was founded over 1100 years ago and was one of the most important towns of ancient Russia. Novgorod was the founding city of Rus, the nucleus of modern Russia, although Kiev later became the capital. Picturesquely located on the banks of the River Volkhov, the city is a treasure trove of ancient architecture, with 39 cathedrals and churches. Within the walls of the Kremlin, St Sophia's Cathedral (mid-11th century) is the oldest stone structure in Russia.

St Petersburg

The Federation's second-largest city, 715km (444 miles) northwest of Moscow, is known both as a cultural centre and for its elegant buildings. The city is spread over 42 islands in the delta of the River Neva. In comparison to Moscow, which tended to be more Eastern in character, St Petersburg has always retained a European flavour and was intended as a 'Window to the West'. It was built by Peter the Great in 1703 and remained the capital for 200 years of Tsarist Russia. Known as Petrograd after the civil war, and Leningrad during the Soviet period, the city reverted to its original name in 1991 by popular demand. Wide boulevards, tranquil canals, bridges and some of the best examples of tsarist architecture gave rise to the epithet the 'Venice of the

North'. Although badly damaged in World War II, much of it is now reconstructed. In June and July the city has famous White Nights, when darkness recedes to a brief twilight and the city is imbued with an unusual aura. Many of the most interesting sites, especially those on the left bank of the River Neva, can be explored on foot. The Palace Square and the Winter Palace are among the most popular attractions for followers of Russian history. Troops fired on demonstrators there in 1905 and the Palace witnessed the capitulation of the provisional government, allowing the Bolsheviks to take the country into eight decades of Communist rule. The Hermitage houses the vast private collection of the tsars. The Museum of the History of the City gives a comprehensive picture of St Petersburg's history. While exploring the city the visitor will inevitably see the Alexandrovskaya Column. St Isaac's Cathedral is one of the biggest dome buildings of the world and, like the Kazansky Cathedral, houses a museum. Also worth a visit is the St Peter and Paul Fortress, a former prison that is now a popular museum. Members of the Romanov Dynasty are buried in the Cathedral of the same name. The gorgeously-decorated Yusupov Mansion was built for the Romanovs. Its rooms are sumptuously decorated in mid-19th century style. The mansion's concert hall is now a venue for recitals, theatrical productions, opera and ballet. A waxwork exhibition commemorates Rasputin, who died in the building. The grand Nevsky Prospekt, dominated by the spire of the Admiralty Building, is one of the city's main thoroughfares and is lined by opulent buildings. These include the Kazan Cathedral and the Church of the Resurrection. The collection at the Russian Museum covers nearly a thousand years of Russian art history. Nevsky Prospect crosses the Fontanka River at Anichkov Bridge, and continues to Palace Square. Further sights are the Cathedral of St Nicholas (Russian Baroque), still a working church; the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, the main religious centre in St Petersburg; and the Museums of Ethnography and Russian Art. The homes of Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, Anna Akhmatova and Rimsky-Korsakov serve as museums dedicated to their former occupants. The cruiser Aurora is berthed on the Neva. A blank shot was fired from her bow to give a signal to start the assault on the Winter Palace in 1917. Lenin also announced the victory of the Revolution from here.

EXCURSIONS: The following palaces beyond the outskirts of St Petersburg are collectively known as the Summer Palaces. Petrodvorets is a former summer palace of Tsar Peter the Great and is known for its beautiful cascades and fountains. It is located 34km (21 miles) from St Petersburg on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland. The tsar designed the initial plans himself, and he appointed European and Russian architects to realise his grand project, which was intended to rival Versailles. Oranienbaum was built as the summer residence of Alexander Menshikov, Peter the Great's associate. From here, Alexander oversaw the construction of the Kronstadt naval fortress on the nearby Kotlin Island. Thankfully, the palace and its parkland escaped damage during World War II. Its Chinese and Sliding Hill Pavilions are exceptionally beautiful. The Grand Catherine Palace at Tsarskoye Selo was built for Peter the Great's wife. The Scottish architect Charles Cameron designed some of the interiors, although a greater number by Bartholomeo Rastrelli survive. Pushkin spent his formative years in the town. Cameron also designed the subtle buildings at nearby Pavlovsk, which were designed to complement the parkland's beauty. The park itself, designed by the Italian Gonzago, is one of the finest landscaped parks in Europe. The estate was originally part of Tsarskoye Selo, but Catherine II gave it to her son Paul. Although she commissioned Cameron to design the estate, Paul, whose relationship with his mother was strained, decided to redecorate the palace.

Lake Ladoga: Lake Ladoga, a vast and often turbulent lake, is linked to St Petersburg by the River Neva. Of the islands in the lake's northern archipelago, Valaam is the most significant because of its ancient monastery. Its golden domes suddenly rise from the mist that frequently shrouds visiting cruise ships. The founding religious community frequently suffered Swedish and Viking attacks during the Middle Ages. The present buildings date from the late 18th century. As well as being an important pilgrimage centre, the monastery was a noted centre for innovations in crafts and agriculture. Its missionaries brought Orthodox Christianity to the shores of Alaska. A

religious community was re-established on the island in 1989, and restoration of the monastery is already under way. Despite years of neglect, Valaam still retains a mysterious air.

River Volga

The mighty Volga provides an additional road into Russia. Travelling by river from Kazan to Rostov-on-Don makes a pleasant tour.

Kazan: Kazan: The cultural centre of the Tartars, this city boasts a Kremlin dating from the 16th century which, with its towers and churches, is fascinating to visit. The Tartar State Museum and the 18th-century Mosque are also of interest.

Ulyanovsk: Ulyanovsk: Lenin's birthplace; his parents' house situated here used to be a popular museum.

Samara: Samara: A major space centre, the city was founded in the 16th century around a fortress surveying the Volga and Samara rivers. The Old Town is notable for its fine turn-of-the-century buildings. The Volga shoreline and the nature reserves of the Zhiguli Hills are accessible from Samara.

Volgograd: Volgograd: Formerly Stalingrad, the Victory Museum celebrates the victory over the Nazis, and the whole city is a monument to the year-long battle that took place there. Tours to the battlefields are available. The town stands at the confluence of the Volga and Don rivers. Boat trips and fishing tours taking in both rivers are possible. Visits to outlying Cossack and Volga-German villages provide a glimpse of the region's history.

Kaliningrad

The tract of land sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland on the Baltic shoreline is an annexe of the Russian Federation. Its principal town is now called Kaliningrad, although it was known as Königsberg when it was the centre of German East Prussia. The area was ceded to the erstwhile Soviet Union following World War II. The territory's future prosperity depends on the Government's plans to give it special economic status. Architectural remnants which survived the war mark the city's German heritage, such as the Cathedral. The philosopher Immanuel Kant, the town's most famous son, is buried near here, and his memory is honoured by the Kant Museum. The Amber Museum, housed in a restored German fortress tower, celebrates this local precious stone. The town has many attractive parks and gardens, as well as a zoo. Nearby, Svetlogorsk is a verdant coastal spa resort which has lost none of its charm. The Kursche Spit is a beautiful sand peninsula extending nearly 100km (63 miles) along the coast, and is a rich habitat for plants and animals.

Black Sea

Rostov-on-Don: Rostov-on-Don: Once an Armenian town, its low buildings still show Armenian influences. Especially interesting is the Cathedral of the Resurrection. There are several parks, four theatres, an orchestra, a race-course and a beach. Rostov is the gateway to the Caucasus.

Sochi: Sochi: A popular resort with a subtropical climate and a famous health spa, it is situated on the Black Sea's eastern coast beneath the dramatic Caucasus Mountains. An observation tower on Mt Bolshoi Akhun, 23km (14 miles) from the town, provides a spectacular view of the town, almost all of the Caucasian Riviera and the surrounding mountains. There is a large Riviera Park with many tourist facilities and a Botanical Garden, founded during the last century, with

beautiful, interesting trees and shrubs from all over the world. Boat and hovercraft trips on the Black Sea are available from the town's port.

Dagomys: Dagomys: For those who want a resort-based holiday, this new holiday centre lying to the north of Sochi is ideal. Overlooking the Black Sea, it is beautifully located amongst thickly wooded hills and subtropical greenery. Nearby is the Dagomys State Tea Farm where visitors can sample the fragrant Krasnodar tea accompanied by the delicious local pastries, jams, fruits and nuts whilst enjoying the spectacular mountain scenery.

The Urals, Siberia and the Far East

Yekaterinburg: Yekaterinburg is the birthplace of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The city is also historically important as the last resting place of the Romanov royal family, murdered during the Bolshevik revolution.

Siberia: Siberia covers an area of over 12,800,000 sq km (4,000,000 sq miles) and contains unimaginably vast stretches of marshy forest (taiga). This 'sleeping land', the literal translation of its name, possesses a million lakes, 53,000 rivers and an enormous wealth of natural resources. Although the temperature in winter falls well below freezing point, the weather in summer can be very warm. Tourism is less well-developed than elsewhere in Russia and some parts are still not accessible. However, much of the region has been opened up, including Sakhalin Island and the Chukchi Peninsula just across the Bering Strait from Alaska. The taiga is within easy reach of many of the region's cities. Air-hopping is one way of discovering the wilderness. A famous alternative is the Trans-Siberian Railway, the longest continuous railway in the world, a journey which is one of the greatest travel adventures. The line cuts through an area bigger than Western Europe, crossing a landscape which includes arctic wastes, tundra and steppes. The most scenic part of the journey is between Khabarovsk and Irkutsk.

Khabarovsk: Khabarovsk on the Amur is the largest industrial centre of eastern Siberia and an important transport junction. The town (founded in 1858) was named after the scientist Khabarov. The red brick houses in the centre have curious roofs shaped like pine needles, and are intermingled with the constructivist architecture of the 1930s. Worth a visit is the regional museum, which offers an insight into the different cultures of the Amur people.

Irkutsk: Irkutsk is over 300 years old and owes much of its development to its location on the tradeways to Mongolia and China. At the end of the last century the city began to take on the aspect of a 'boom town' when trade in gold, fur and diamonds suddenly created new wealth. It was to Irkutsk that many 19th-century revolutionaries, such as the Decembrists, were exiled. The University of Irkutsk was the first establishment of higher education in eastern Siberia. Today, as in former times, this important Siberian city is one of the world's biggest suppliers of fur. The town lies on the banks of the Angara, the only outflowing river from Lake Baikal. The lake is accessible from Irkutsk by hydrofoil during the summer. Statistics about Baikal are astounding; with a depth of 1637m (5371ft) it is the world's deepest lake. Its surface area equals that of The Netherlands and Belgium put together. It is 25 million years old, and it would take three months to walk around its 2000km (1243-mile) shoreline. The purity of its water is maintained by millions of tiny crayfish, providing a habitat for a wide variety of fish, including sturgeon, loach, grayling and omul (a type of salmon), one of many species unique to Baikal. Its shores are a feeding ground for wildfowl and the occasional bear. Freshwater seal colonies are found around the Ushkan Islands in the centre of the lake. Olkhon Island is the site of primitive rock drawings and a unique necropolis of an ancient Siberian tribe whose members are thought to have been ancestors of indigenous North Americans. The local climate is often harsh; the surface of the entire lake often freezes over in winter (trains were moved across the ice during the Russo-Japanese war). The sarma wind can sink boats and rip the roofs off buildings. While the human

race now dominates the lake, it remains to be seen whether it will be a responsible custodian of the region's flora and fauna.

Many of the inhabitants of the Buryat Republic are Buddhists. Dozens of picturesque temples (datsans) sprang up round Lake Baikal after Empress Elizabeth, Peter the Great's daughter, recognised the Buddhist religion in Russia. Although most datsans were destroyed during the 1930s, many of their treasures were preserved in the Russian Orthodox church in Ulaan Ude, the capital. The Sandalwood Buddha, on display in the town's Exhibition Hall, is said to have been made with the Buddha himself sitting as a model.

Yakutsk: Yakutsk was founded as a garrison town, and is capital of the vast Sakha (Yakutia) Autonomous Republic. Today it is a major scientific centre for permafrost research. The republic's landscapes range from Alpine meadows to moss-covered tundra, with sandy deserts close to the Arctic zone. This is pioneer country, complete with gold-mining settlements.

Vladivostok: Vladivostok, a military and naval port, was opened to foreign visitors in 1990. As a gateway to the Pacific and the East, the town has enormous commercial potential. It is within easy reach of the Ussuriysk taiga, a unique habitat for plants of the pre-glacial period, as well as tigers, leopard, bison, boar and bears.

10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

The increase in tour operators offering Russia as a destination from Europe now means a wide choice for potential visitors. A bias towards tailor-made holidays has brought added activities and adventures to the traveller's scope. There is a large potential to develop independent adventure tourism and recent years have seen a considerable increase. There are a number of opportunities on offer.

The Russians have also quickly developed some high-tech offerings. It is possible to fly in an MIG-29 aircraft, a fighter capable of more than twice the speed of sound, that was once part of the formidable Soviet Air Force. Those interested in Russia's achievements in the field of space travel should visit Star City, just outside Moscow, which is a cosmonaut training complex open to visitors.

Residential Russian-language courses and other short-term study programmes are available. Accommodation is usually with Russian families, and activities are organised. For further information, contact VAO Intourist, 13/1 Milyutinski per., Moscow (tel: (095) 753 0003; fax: (095) 797 3060; e-mail: info@intourist.ru).

Skiing: Skiing is on offer in the Caucasus, at Teberda-Dombay (west) and at Baksan Elbrus (north). As for the big cities, Moscow has a ski jump in the Vorobyevi Hills and days of cross-country skiing, with poles and boots provided, at Suzdal. Cross-country skiing is available outside the city at Olgino on the Gulf of Finland. Downhill skiing enjoys a short season in Russia and generally lasts from January to March. Skiing in Russia calls for much fitness and skill, more than the average skier takes with them each year to other European resorts as facilities in general will take some years to equal those of luxury alpine resorts.

Heli-skiing: Heli-skiing is now available in the Caucasus where, it is claimed, the powder snow rivals that of Colorado and there is a guarantee of snow throughout the short season. Amid the wilds of Karelia, north of St Petersburg, cross-country skiing is routed through the taiga and over a terrain of frozen rivers and lakes including Onega and Ladoga.

Those wishing to go trekking can climb to altitudes of 3200m (10,499ft) where the landscape changes en route from alpine meadows of red poppies to snow-capped peaks and scenic plateaux. Until recently, previously unexploited areas of the Fan Mountains, known as Matcha,

had never been trodden by Western feet. Perm in the Middle Ural Mountains is home to some of the more rare birds of prey. The Baseguy National Reserve has been created on the Kama River Basin and ornithologists can get glimpses of eagle owls, great grey owls, Ural owls and golden eagles.

The Caucasus Mountains, which stretch from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, separate Russia from Georgia and Armenia. Dominating the range is Mount Elbrus, at 5642m (18,510ft) the highest peak in Europe. The jagged peaks overlook a vast vegetation range from palm trees to deciduous forest and flower-carpeted valleys. Elbrus offers a strenuous, though non-technical, climb to its summit. Trekking, again strenuous, is across the beautiful scenery of the peak and its neighbours. Available are 6-day Elbrus trekking circuits and 3-summit climbs in the Adyl-Su Valley that include the Elbrus peak.

Siberia used to be associated with salt mines and permafrost, yet the Altai region of southern Siberia rivals Switzerland for rolling hills, snowy peaks, flowers and pine forests. Undiscovered areas of Siberia, on the borders of Kazakhstan and Mongolia where summer temperatures hit 22°C (71°F), are heady with the scents of its flowers, herbs and trees. Mount Belukha rises to 4506m (14,784ft) over a few scattered villages in an area where the bear population outnumbers the human. Not unsurprisingly, among tours offered are botany itineraries through June and July with safari camp accommodation. There are also horseriding holidays, with routes through the Alpine meadows and coniferous forests of the Sayano Altai Mountains, which also include opportunities for botany, birdwatching and river rafting.

Central Asia's Lake Baikal - dubbed the Blue Eye of Siberia - offers canoeing and camping holidays for groups. It is also possible to go scuba diving there.

The Kamchatka River in Russia's Far East has some stiff river-raft tests as well as canoeing. Getting around the Pacific peninsula, reminiscent of Alaska just across the Bering Sea, can be done by flying, on all-terrain vehicles or on two sturdily-shod feet.

Fishing: Fishing enthusiasts should note that the Veselovskaye Reservoir in the Rostov-on-Don region is noted for pike, perch, carp, bream, gudgeon, bullhead and roach.

Many towns and cities have artificial ice-skating rinks for the summer but during the hard winters frozen lakes and rivers ensure plenty of room for skating. St Petersburg's Central Recreation Park is a favourite among skaters and it also has a ski centre.

Spectator sports: Spectator sports: Almost every provincial city has a football team and larger cities have several clubs organised within factories, unions and government offices. International events include the Kremlin Cup tennis tournament and the Izvestia Hockey Prize. Russia's ethnic diversity is reflected in the wide variety of local traditional sports. Martial arts are a recent import and are steadily gaining in popularity.

11 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: The kind of food visitors will eat from day to day depends on which city they are visiting and the time of year. Breakfast is often similar to the Scandinavian, with cold meats, boiled eggs and bread served with Russian tea. Kasha (porridge) is a staple breakfast dish, made with milk and oats, buckwheat or semolina. For the midday and evening meal the food is often more traditional, again depending on the region. One of the more famous Russian dishes is borshch, a beetroot soup served hot with sour cream, and the sister dish of akroshka, a kvas soup served cold. Several dishes which are now often seen as international but find their origin in Russia are beef stroganov (beef stewed in sour cream with fried potatoes), blini (small pancakes filled with caviar, fish, melted butter or sour cream), aladyi (crumpets with the same filling and jam) and especially ikra or krasnaya ikra (black and red caviar). The local chicken kiev should not be confused with Western imitations. Tsipleonok tabaka is another chicken dish: the meat is

roasted on a spit. Whole roast suckling pig and roast goose stuffed with buckwheat, roast duck stuffed with apples and shashlik (shish kebab) are served at parties and for special occasions. A vegetable variant of shashlik also exists. Local dishes well worth trying include kotlyety po Pozharsky (chicken cutlets), pirozhky (fried rolls with different fillings, usually meat), prostakvasha (yoghurt), pelmeni (meat dumplings), rossolnik (hot soup, usually made of pickled vegetables) and shchi (cabbage soup). Stuffed cabbage leaves and sweet peppers are filled with boiled rice and minced meat. Mushrooms in sour cream are very popular. The great variety of salads available include winter salad and vinegret (made of diced vegetables). Desserts include morozhenoye (ice cream), ponchiki (hot sugared doughnuts) and vareniki (dumplings containing fresh berries, cherries or jam). Drink: One of the most popular drinks is chai (sweet tea served without milk). Coffee is generally available with meals and in cafés, although standards vary. Soft drinks, fruit juices and mineral waters are widely available. Vodka is often flavoured and coloured with herbs and spices such as zubrovka (a kind of grass), ryabinovka (steeped with rowan-tree berries), starka (dark, smooth, aged vodka) and pertsovka (with hot pepper). Posolskaya, Stolichnaya and Rossiskaya are popular brands. Krushon is a highly-recommended cold 'punch'; champagne, brandy and summer fruit are poured into a hollowed watermelon and chilled for several hours. This delicious cocktail is traditionally served from a crystal bowl. White wine and cucumber are used to make a drier variant. Nastoika is a fortified wine made of herbs, leaves, flowers, fruit and roots of plants with medicinal properties. Nalivka is a sweet liqueur made with fruit or berries. The cherry and strawberry flavours are highly recommended. Ryabin Cognac ('Ryabina na Konyakye') is made from rowan-tree berries.

Russian champagne is surprisingly good and reasonably priced. Imported wines from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and Armenian Cognac are excellent (for further information, see the separate sections on these countries). Kvas is a refreshing and unusual drink, made from a fermented mixture of rye bread, jam, yeast and water, and should be tried on a hot day. Drinks are ordered by grams or by the bottle. City-centre bars close around midnight.

Nightlife: Theatre, circus, concert and variety performances are the main evening entertainments. Tickets are available in advance or from ticket booths immediately before performances. Visitors should note that prices for foreigners are usually much higher than those paid by Russian nationals. The repertoire of theatres provides a change of programme almost nightly. In the course of one month, 30 different productions may be presented by the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Company. Details of performances can be obtained on arrival. Visitors should apply to the service bureau of their hotel. All of these establishments are open 0600-2200.

Shopping: A wide range of goods such as watches, cameras, wines and spirits, furs, ceramics and glass, jewellery and toys may be bought in Moscow and St Petersburg. Shops take payment in roubles and, occasionally, by credit card. It is necessary to allow extra time for souvenir hunting: shopping can be a time-consuming activity, owing to the relatively chaotic state of the retail trade in the Russian Federation. It is also advisable to shop around, as prices vary significantly. A good strategy is to choose your souvenirs in a department store such as GUM (on Red Square), and then buy them in a smaller, less centrally-located shop. Palekh and Kholui lacquered boxes make attractive souvenirs. Traditional and satirical Matryoshka dolls (wooden dolls within dolls) are widely available. Khokhloma wooden cups, saucers and spoons are painted gold, red and black. Dymkovskaya Igrushka are pottery figurines based on popular folklore characters. Engraved amber, Gzhel porcelain, Vologda lace and Fabergé eggs and jewellery are highly sought-after. A samovar makes a good souvenir. Antiquities, valuables, works of art and manuscripts other than those offered for sale in souvenir shops may not be taken out of the Russian Federation without an export licence. Shopping hours: 0900-1700 Monday to Saturday. Most shops are also open on Sunday. Department stores and supermarkets are open throughout lunchtime. Stores which are open 24 hours a day are becoming more common.

Special Events: The following is a selection of some of the main events celebrated annually:

Jan 7 Russian Orthodox Christmas. Mar Spring Festival. May Moscow Stars, Moscow. Jun (last two weeks) 'White Nights' Art Festival, St Petersburg. Dec-Jan Russian Winter, Moscow, St Petersburg, Novgorod, Irtutsk, Vladimr/Suzdal.

Social Conventions: It is customary to shake hands when greeting someone. Company or business gifts are well received. Each region has its own characteristic mode of dress. Conservative wear is suitable for most places and the seasonal weather should always be borne in mind. Smoking is acceptable unless stated otherwise. Avoid ostentatious displays of wealth; it is advisable to keep expensive jewellery, watches and cameras out of sight and take precautions against pickpocketing. Tipping: Hotels in Moscow and other large cities include a 10-15% service charge. Otherwise 10% is customary.

12 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: The Russian Federation is blessed by an abundance of natural resources of every description. This includes rich agricultural land on which grain, potatoes and livestock are the main products. Since economic reforms began in 1991, about two-thirds of agricultural land has been transferred to private ownership. The rest is still owned by collectives or directly by the State. (There is, however, still no legal mechanism allowing sale and purchase of land.) The country also has huge deposits of oil and gas - its major export earners - as well as coal and minerals including gold, diamonds, nickel, manganese, copper, iron ore and phosphates. Further unexploited deposits have been located and there are undoubtedly more to be discovered, but they are often in areas (such as the permafrost-covered regions of Siberia and the Russian Far East) where exploitation is technically difficult and therefore not immediately commercially viable. The large heavy industrial sector produces a full range of vehicles, metal goods, construction materials and machinery. Textiles and chemicals are other important industries. By contrast, light industry, and notably the production of consumer goods, is comparatively weak. The fastest-growing part of the economy throughout the 1990s has been the service sector, particularly banking, insurance and property which have developed from a very low base. Services now account for about half of economic output. Russia's main trading partners are the ex-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine along with Germany, the USA, Japan and Switzerland. Russia took the lead in establishing the Customs Union of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Overall, the economy has suffered serious decline as the painful process of reform has proceeded through the 1990s: total output has fallen by half since 1991. The nature of the Russian Federation itself, a vast geographical area with a hugely diverse economy, has made the reform process far more difficult to implement than in smaller Eastern European countries where it has passed off with, by and large, reasonable success. Some of the problems are fundamental. Perhaps the most significant of these is the inadequacy of the national infrastructure: insufficient and poor quality transport networks, and an erratic and antiquated telecommunications system, undermine and inhibit internal and external commerce. Moreover, the Russian Federation has proved unable to put into place a proper framework in which private business can operate: commercial law is sketchy and frequently unenforced; tax collection is, at best, patchy (this is a major cause of the Government's budgetary problems, leading to the regular non-payment of wages to public sector employees). Organised crime thrives in such an environment and Russian gangs are now among the world's most active. Foreign investors are deterred by such an environment and those who take the plunge frequently come away disillusioned. Yet the international community (principally the IMF, World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development which Russia joined as a 'country of operation') is aware that the global economy cannot afford the collapse of an economy the size of Russia's and is effectively bound to supporting it. This it has done with regular large injections of financial assistance - US\$15 billion since 1996 alone - while insisting that the Government implement strict

fiscal policies and rapid divestment of state-controlled resources to the private sector. Successive governments under a variety of premiers adhered, more or less, to the programme, until the discovery in 1999 that billions of dollars of international aid had been siphoned off by politicians, officials and their banking industry allies. The overall impression is of a government which is simply overwhelmed by the immensity of the economic task facing them, and an economy which has perhaps been forced too quickly into adopting market mechanisms. The Government has struggled to control the hyper-inflation which caused so much damage, especially in the initial stages of the reform process. It now appears to be on top of the problem, but at a heavy price in cuts in the welfare spending and provisions; and while the Rouble is freely convertible it will continue to be subject to speculative attack. There are causes for optimism - the economy is now growing at 7% annually - but the economic outlook is, at best, very uncertain.

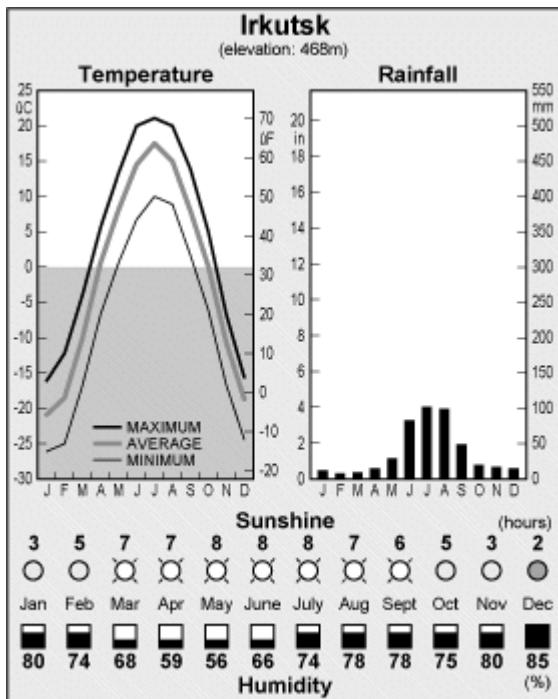
Business: As a result of recent economic changes which have taken place in the Russian Federation, there are now many thousands of private companies in operation and international business relations have become active. The main business centres are Moscow, St Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk and Vladivostock. Office hours: 0900-1800 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: The Trade Delegation of the Russian Federation, 32/3 Highgate West Hill, London N6 6NL (tel: (020) 8340 1907; fax: (020) 8348 0112); or Russo-British Chamber of Commerce, 42 Southwark Street, London SE1 1UN (tel: (020) 7403 1706; fax: (020) 7403 1245; e-mail: mail@rbcc.co.uk; web site: <http://www.rbcc.co.uk>).

Moscow Office: Please contact the London office for up-to-date details (information supplied to members only); or Ministry for Economic Development and Trade - Department for Economic Co-operation with Europe, 18/1 Ovchinnikovskaya nab, 113324 Moscow (tel: (095) 950 1779; fax: (095) 950 1780); or Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation, ul. Ilyinka 6, 103684 Moscow (tel: (095) 923 4323; fax: (095) 230 2455; e-mail: tpprf@rbcnet.ru).

Conferences/Conventions: With every passing year an increasing number of conferences, seminars and symposia (including some for the tourist industry) take place in the Russian Federation. Information on conferences and incentives is available from Intourist Travel Ltd, 219 Marsh Wall, London E14 9PD (tel: (020) 7538 8600; fax: (020) 7538 5967; e-mail: info@intourist.co.uk; web site: <http://www.intourist.co.uk>).

13 CLIMATE



Northern & Central European Russia: The most varied climate; mildest areas are along the Baltic coast. Summer sunshine may be nine hours a day, but winters can be very cold. **Siberia:** Very cold winters, but summers can be pleasant, although they tend to be short and wet. There is considerable seasonal temperature variation. **Southern European Russia:** Winter is shorter than in the north. Steppes (in the southeast) have hot, dry summers and very cold winters. The north and northeastern Black Sea has mild winters, but heavy rainfall all the year round.

14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History & Government: **HISTORY: PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION**
In the course of the 9th century, Viking tribes from Scandinavia moved southward into European Russia, tracing a path along the main waterway connecting the Baltic and Black Seas. The first monarchic dynasty, which ruled until the Mongol invasion of the 13th century, built Kiev as its capital. The Mongol Empire, which stretched across the Asian continent, was divided into a number of 'hordes' or individual kingdoms; Russia was put under the suzerainty of the Khanate of the Golden Horde. The next two centuries saw the rise of Moscow as a provincial capital and centre of the Christian Orthodox Church. In the late 15th century the Grand Prince of Moscow, Ivan III (the Great), annexed the rival principalities of Russia, including the Novgorod Republic to the north, thus becoming the first national sovereign. His grandson Ivan IV (better known as Ivan the Terrible) further expanded the state to the south and into Siberia. He was the first to hold the title of Tsar (derived from 'Caesar'). The political history of the period from 1500 until the mid-17th century was characterised by struggles between the tsar and the rich, powerful, landed nobility, known as the boyars. The Russian empire expanded gradually to acquire land to the south as far as the Caspian Sea and eastwards into Siberia. The two most important rulers of Russia in the 17th and 18th centuries were Peter the Great (1682-1725), who cemented the regime and established Russia as a leading European power, and Catherine the Great (1762-96),

generally recognised as an astute and energetic ruler, who pursued a policy of enlightened despotism at home while continuing the aggressive foreign policy initiated by Peter. In the first quarter of the 19th century, under Tsar Alexander I, the first steps were taken to dismantle the system of serfdom under which most people lived. The process was disrupted, however, by Napoleon's invasion of Russia. The French were driven out in 1812 and Napoleon's army was destroyed in the legendary retreat from Moscow. Alexander's successor completed the growth of the empire into the Caucasus (now Georgia) and Armenia, and reached agreement with England about the division of Central Asia into spheres of influence. Most of Siberia had been annexed by the 1840s, but the expansion to the south and east (creating more or less the present frontiers of the CIS) was not complete until 1905. Domestic policies remained conservative:

pressure for political and economic reform was met only with repression. By February 1917, the populace engulfed Russia in widespread strikes, rioting and army mutinies, which forced the Tsar to abdicate. The liberal Provisional government which took control was forced out of office by a Bolshevik coup in October of that year. The Bolsheviks (majority faction) were the more radical product of the split in the Social Democratic Party, formed in 1898, upon which much of the organised opposition to the regime was focused. Under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, the Bolsheviks moved quickly to consolidate their position, bringing land, industry and finance under state control. Within two years, having seen off the military challenge of the right-wing White Armies backed by the major European powers, who sought the re-establishment of the tsarist regime, the Bolsheviks were firmly in control. Lenin died in 1924 and was succeeded by Josef Stalin (Djugashvili) who instituted a crash programme of industrialisation and the forced collectivisation of agriculture. Famine and massive purges were the hallmark of this period. In 1941, the USSR was invaded by Nazi Germany, despite having signed a peace treaty with Hitler in 1939, in the start of what the Soviets referred to as the Great Patriotic War. Like Napoleon before him, Hitler's armies were driven out, again with massive loss of life on the Russian side (an estimated 20 million people). A large reconstruction effort had, by the early 1950s, repaired much of the war damage. In the meantime, the USSR had become the world's second nuclear power, having exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949, and sponsored the formation of a buffer zone of communist-controlled governments in Eastern Europe. The occasional instability of these regimes led the USSR to intervene militarily on two occasions - in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Foreign policy has since been dominated by relations with the USA, which fluctuated from outright hostility to the 'Cold Peace' of détente. The two sides came to the brink of nuclear war in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The Soviet Union was by now in the hands of Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, who shocked the Communist Party in 1956 by revealing the extent of Stalin's brutality. Also during Khrushchev's term, the split with China, which fractured the unity of the world communist movement, took place; the two countries have been at loggerheads ever since. After Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, the USSR was led until 1982 by Leonid Brezhnev. In retrospect, the Brezhnev years are seen as a period of stability and relaxation in international tensions (although he took the USSR into Afghanistan) coupled with domestic stagnation and inertia, presided over by an ageing and unimaginative party leadership. The very last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, took over the leadership in March 1985, after a 3-year inter-regnum of two General Secretaries, Andropov and Chernenko, who were more often than not indisposed by ill health. Gorbachev instigated a programme of social, political and economic reform, and a wholesale diplomatic offensive abroad, not only on nuclear arms control, but also in regional policies and relations with the Third World. An early success for Gorbachev was the treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces, signed in December 1987, which eliminated a whole category of superpower nuclear armaments. Another protracted dispute with the Americans was settled in early 1989, when the last Soviet forces left Afghanistan after a decade of fighting. At home, Gorbachev's programme centred on the slogan-concepts of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness). At the heart of the glasnost policy was the liberalisation of the media, which have since played an important role in bringing to popular attention policy errors and official mismanagement, previously hidden from most people. When Gorbachev took

office he declared that the 'nationalities problem' - a reference to 100-plus distinct ethnic groups in the Soviet Union - was the most serious facing the nation. He was quickly proved right as the relaxation of the state stranglehold over the country's political and social life allowed simmering aspirations and resentments to come to the surface, particularly in the southern republics of Trans-Caucasia and Central Asia. As the dire state of the economy became apparent, the Soviet Union all but ceased to be a player on the international arena, illustrated by its lack of reaction to the Kuwait crisis of 1990 (where the Soviet Union meekly followed the US line) and its lack of resistance to Western terms on the reunification of Germany. Gorbachev made his final stand by setting himself firmly against the dissolution of the USSR, despite growing demand in the republics for independence. The Baltic Republics were particularly adamant on this issue and organised plebiscites which proved that independence enjoyed overwhelming popular support. Gorbachev's disastrous decision to send the Red Army into Lithuania in early 1991 to prevent it from seceding, marked the beginning of the end. Squeezed by radicals and secessionists on one side and conservative elements in the military and KGB on the other, Gorbachev's position was becoming increasingly untenable. At this point a rival emerged - sacked head of the Moscow Communist Party, Boris Yeltsin, who won the election for the presidency of the Russian Republic in June 1991. This conferred on Yeltsin a legitimacy which Gorbachev, who had never received any popular mandate, could not match. Meanwhile, the conservatives in the party, the army and the KGB looked on with increasing horror realising that if they were going to arrest the transformation of the country (and with it their own positions), they would need to act quickly. On August 19, 1991, while Gorbachev was holidaying in the Crimea, a coup was staged by the 'State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR'. Badly planned, it fizzled out after three days, but Gorbachev's position had been completely undermined. Boris Yeltsin, who co-ordinated and rallied resistance to the coup, came out greatly strengthened. Gorbachev's last attempt to save the USSR was dismissed by the leaders of the republics who spent the remaining months of 1991 consolidating their own positions and sketching the rough outline of a post-Soviet system. An economic treaty was signed by eight republics at the end of October 1991, and the tri-partite agreement between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, which formed the nucleus of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), was settled in the first week of December.

HISTORY: SINCE THE BREAK-UP OF THE SOVIET UNION: With the end of the Soviet Union and the demise of Gorbachev, Yeltsin set about consolidating power within the Russian Federation. The Soviet and Russian Communist parties were suspended. During October and November 1991, Yeltsin set the direction for Russia with a new ministerial team and a radical economic reform programme (see Business Profile section). The programme came up against stiff opposition concentrated in the Congress of People's Deputies, the quasi-parliamentary elected body established by Gorbachev in 1989, and composed of an alliance of ex-Communists and conservative nationalists. The running battle between President and Congress was finally resolved in 1993 when Yeltsin announced that new elections would be held for the Congress - a measure which violated the constitution. This led, in the first week of October 1993, to an outbreak of street fighting between the supporters of the Congress and security forces (mostly army units and Interior Ministry troops) who remained loyal to Yeltsin. The Parliament building, the White House - where Yeltsin had made his famous stand against the coup plotters just two years earlier - came under siege. The pro-Yeltsin forces prevailed. With his position secured, Yeltsin was now able to introduce a new constitution - which passed a December 1993 national referendum - which allowed for greatly increased presidential powers and a new bicameral parliament. The new model drew heavily on the French and American examples. The powers of the legislature, the Duma, are strictly limited, although it remains an important barometer of public opinion. The most consistently successful party since 1993 has been the reconstituted Communist Party (whose ban was lifted in November 1992), under Gennady Zyuganov. Otherwise, the inappropriately named Liberal Democratic Party, a right-wing nationalist party led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, peaked briefly in the mid-1990s but has since faded. A variety of centrist and single-issue parties made up the balance of the Duma, which took office in mid-1994. The

struggle between the Duma and the presidency continued, intensifying during the course of 1995 over the disastrous conduct of the war in Chechnya (see below). Presidential elections due in 1996 seemed almost certain to remove Yeltsin from office. Russia had changed considerably over the previous five years. The all-pervasive influence of the Communist Party had been replaced by competing centres of power: the security forces; the military and its associated industrial complex; the so-called 'oligarchs', powerful business executives who had managed to secure control of important parts of the economy as the state relinquished control as part of its reform programme; and, finally, regional governors controlling their own fiefdoms many miles distant and with little interference from Moscow. (A prominent example is Alexander Lebed, a popular ex-army general and erstwhile presidential candidate who runs the Siberian oblast of Krasnoyarsk). A complex and frequently corrupt network of alliances between these elements now controlled the country. While the new ruling class grew rich, the majority of the population suffered as the economy contracted. A striking example of the power of the new order came with the 1996 presidential election, where Yeltsin, having presided over economic decline and subject to increasingly erratic personal behaviour (brought on by declining health and heavy drinking), was confidently expected to lose. However, after securing an alliance with key media 'oligarchs' (notably Boris Berezovsky, owner of Russia's largest media conglomerate), Yeltsin's fortunes rose under a relentless campaign which all but excluded opposition candidates. After narrowly topping the poll on the first ballot, with Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov a close second, Yeltsin comfortably won the run-off. However, with his health deteriorating, Yeltsin came to rely increasingly during his second term on his prime minister, whose appointment was subject to endorsement by the Duma. Viktor Chernomyrdin, a relative fixture as premier from 1993 until his sacking by Yeltsin in March 1998, was unique in lasting five years. In his place, Yeltsin appointed Sergei Kiriyenko, a 35-year-old economist. Five months was sufficient to show that Russia's problems were well beyond the capabilities of this political neophyte and in August he too was dismissed. Yeltsin put up Chernomyrdin once more but the Duma repeatedly refused to approve him. A compromise candidate was finally found in Yevgeny Primakov, a veteran diplomat - his tasks included negotiating with Iraq in the run-up to the 1991 Gulf War - and latterly head of the KGB's foreign directorate (now the SVR). Primakov lasted only until the following year when he too was dismissed by Yeltsin without warning or obvious reason. His place was taken by another ex-spy, Vladimir Putin, whose background was with the KGB's domestic organisation (now known as the Federal Security Service, FSB). Despite his inauspicious origins, Putin has proved to be a deft political operator: at the State Duma elections of December 1999, the pro-government 'Unity' party, created just two months earlier, came a creditable second to the Communist Party. The main reason for Putin's rising popularity was the progress of the second Chechen war. The Russian Federation is a far from homogenous entity, hosting nearly 100 nationalities with 16 autonomous republics and 30 autonomous areas. A number of these have been the cause of secessionist headaches for the Moscow government, especially in the southern Caucasus region where there is a majority Muslim population. 1991 and 1992 saw outbreaks of fighting in North Ossetia and Ingushetia, and serious tensions in the autonomous regions of Bashkiria and Dagestan. In Tatarstan, one of the larger regions with a population of one million, an independence referendum in March 1992 drew a 61% vote in favour. But the most serious situation of all was in Chechnya, where the Russians were determined to thwart the popular Chechen secessionist movement. (The history of Russo-Chechen relations is replete with warfare and large-scale brutality. In 1944, accused by Stalin of collaboration with the Germans, almost the entire population was forcibly moved to the barren steppes of Kazakhstan. Many thousands did not survive. The people were eventually 'rehabilitated' by Krushchev and allowed to return home.) Full-scale fighting broke out in 1994 and lasted until a ceasefire in August 1996 paved the way for an uneasy peace. The Chechen guerrilla fighters proved more than a match for the conventional troop formations and equipment deployed by the Russians and fought them to a standstill, albeit at the cost of thousands of casualties (mostly, as ever, amongst civilians) and massive destruction of property. Under the terms of the August 1996 accord, formal consideration of Chechnya's final status was deferred until 2001. Until then, the region was to all

intents and purposes considered independent with its own 'president', the former military commander Aslan Maskhadov. For Moscow, however, the defeat was a considerable humiliation and one which they were both determined and likely to try and avenge. The appointment of Putin, a more ambitious and aggressive character than his predecessors, heralded a new drive by the military to take control of the rebellious province. A pretext mysteriously and conveniently arrived in October 1999 in the form of a series of bomb explosions in Moscow apartment blocks which caused several hundred casualties and public outrage. The Government blamed Chechen separatists and began the assault on the rebel territory almost immediately. The campaign was characterised by overwhelming Russian firepower directed at 'guerrilla positions' which reduced the already badly damaged capital, Grozny, and most other towns to rubble. As before, progress was slow and tortuous. But the systematic use of massive air strikes and artillery barrages was bound to prevail eventually and by the early months of 2000, with the Russian government waving aside domestic and international protests alike, the subjugation of Chechnya was all but complete. The strategy of the Chechens, with their remaining fighters confined to guerrilla attacks from mountain bases, is now to keep the Russians off-balance as far as possible. Putin took much of the credit and quickly reaped the dividend as the visibly ailing Yeltsin finally felt able to pass on the presidential baton. The ailing president announced his resignation on New Year's Eve. It was little surprise when, at the scheduled presidential poll in March 2000, Putin won on the first round of voting, taking over 50% of the poll. With the Chechnya problem suppressed, if not solved, for the time being, Putin can now devote his attention to Russia's rotten political and economic structures. The early indications are that he proposes to curtail the wide autonomy enjoyed by many provincial governments. It is also clear that the FSB federal security service, with whom Putin has close links, is destined for a major role. Abroad, Putin's major problem is shoring up and improving the Government's credibility in the West, upon which it continues to rely for financial support. On the broader stage, permanent membership of the Security Council gives Russia a voice at the 'top table' but in the many parts of the world - the Middle East and Africa, for example - where it once enjoyed a significant influence, its voice is all but ignored. After the drift of the Yeltsin years, Russians are expecting much from Putin and his new premier, Mikhail Kasyanov.

Government: Under the 1993 constitution, broad executive powers are held by the President who is directly elected for a four year term and governs with the assistance of an appointed cabinet (whose Premier must be endorsed by the legislature). The bicameral legislature consists of the State Duma, with 450 members directly elected for four years, and the Federation Council, with 178 members - the head of the regional legislature and executive in each of the country's territories. These territories, which make up the Federation, comprise 21 republics, 49 administrative oblasts ('region'), 6 provinces, 1 autonomous oblast, 10 autonomous okrugs ('district'), and two urban areas (Moscow and St Petersburg) with special administrative status. The Russian Federation covers almost twice the area of the United States of America, and reaches from Moscow in the west over the Urals and the vast Siberian plains to the Sea of Okhotsk in the east.

The capital, Moscow, was founded in 1147. The focal point of the city is Red Square, on one side of which is the Kremlin surrounded by a thick red fortress wall containing 20 towers. The tsars were crowned here; Ivan the Terrible's throne is situated near the entrance.

Those interested in Russia's achievements in the field of space travel should visit Star City, just outside Moscow, which is a cosmonaut training complex open to visitors.

St Petersburg, northwest of Moscow, is known both as a cultural centre and for its elegant buildings. The city is spread over 42 islands in the delta of the River Neva. Wide boulevards, tranquil canals and bridges led to the city being known as the 'Venice of the North'. The Palace Square and the Winter Palace are among the most interesting sites for followers of Russian history. The Hermitage houses all the vast treasures of the former tsars.

For those wishing to get a better idea of the huge variety of scenery in the Russian Federation, cruises can be taken along the mighty Volga River between Kazan, the cultural centre of the Tartars, to Rostov-on-Don, once an Armenian town and the gateway to the Caucasus.

Russian cuisine is based on the staples of buckwheat (to make porridge or blini), borschch (beetroot soup) or shashlik (shish kebab). Whole roast suckling pig, roast goose stuffed with buckwheat, and roast duck stuffed with apples are served at parties and for special occasions.

15 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: The Russian Federation covers almost twice the area of the United States of America, and reaches from Moscow in the west over the Urals and the vast Siberian plains to the Sea of Okhotsk in the east.

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