



Russia

Introduction

Official Name: Russian Federation

Nationality: Russian

Area: 17,075,200 square kilometers (6,592,772 square miles)

Languages: Russian, many minority languages

Currency: Russian ruble (RUR)

Location: Northern Asia and Europe, bordered by Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, and Ukraine, with coastline on the Arctic Ocean

Statistical Information

Population	141.4 million
0-14 years	14.6 percent
15-64 years	71.1 percent
65+ years	14.4 percent
Birth rate	11 births/1,000
Death rate	16 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	1.4 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	-0.484 percent
Life expectancy	65.9 years
Literacy	99.4 percent
Below poverty line	17.8 percent
Ethnic groups	79.8 percent Russian
	3.8 percent Tatar
	2 percent Ukrainian
	1.2 percent Bashkir
	0.9 percent Chechen
	12.4 percent other
Religion	15-20 percent Russian Orthodox
	10-15 percent Muslim
	2 percent other Christian
	63-73 percent atheist or nonpracticing believer

**Note: Religion statistics are estimates based on practicing believers. Russia has large numbers of*

non-practicing believers and atheists due to years of Soviet rule.

Economy

Russia ended 2006 with its eighth straight year of economic growth since its financial crisis in 1998. Poverty has steadily declined and the middle class has expanded. During Putin's first term as president, a number of reforms were implemented in the areas of tax, banking, labor, and land codes, which helped attract more foreign investors. Russia has signed a bilateral trade agreement with the United States as a possible precursor to membership in the World Trade Organization. Despite Russia's recent success, serious problems persist. Russia is vulnerable to swings in world commodity prices because timber, metals, oil, and natural gas account for 80 percent of its exports. The manufacturing base in Russia is outdated and in poor condition, and must be replaced or modernized in order to achieve wide economic growth. Political uncertainties due to corruption and lack of trust in institutions make some foreign investors hesitant. Russia has made very little progress toward building the rule of law, which in Western countries is the bedrock for a strong modern market economy. In addition, Putin has granted influence to forces within his government that desire to reassert state control over the energy and communication sectors of the economy.

Government

Capital: Moscow

Russia is a federation divided into 85 federal administrative districts. The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term, and is eligible for reelection. The premier and all other ministers are appointed by the president. The legislature consists of two houses which together comprise the Federal Assembly, or *Federalnoye Sobraniye*. The Federation Council, or *Sovet Federatsii*, consists of 176 members appointed for four-year terms by top executive and legislative officials in each of the 85

federal administrative districts. The State Duma, or *Gosudarstvennaya Duma*, has 450 members elected for four-year terms on the basis of proportional representation from parties winning at least seven percent of the vote.

Note: Election rules and pre-election reporting by the media are so tightly controlled by the central government that it is no longer completely accurate to say that democratic elections actually happen in Russia.

Climate

Since Russia spans a wide range of latitudes and longitudes, including 11 time zones, there is no single Russian climate. In the European part of Russia, the climate is largely humid and temperate. Siberia is subarctic, while the polar north is tundra. Winters vary from cool along the Black Sea and in the southern steppes to frigid in Siberia and the polar north. Summers are warm in the southern steppes and the European parts of the country, but cold along the Arctic coast and throughout Siberia.

Environmental Issues

Russia has high levels of air pollution due to heavy industry, emissions from coal-fired plants, and transportation in major cities. Inland waterways and seacoasts are heavily polluted from industrial, municipal, and agricultural sources. Deforestation and resulting soil erosion remain a problem. Soil in some agricultural areas is contaminated due to improper application of agricultural chemicals. There are also scattered areas which suffer varying levels of radioactive contamination. Toxic waste contaminates some ground water supplies, and urban solid waste management practices are problematic. Some areas of the country also experience soil and water contamination from improperly stored and abandoned stocks of obsolete pesticides.

History

By the seventh century B.C., the Scythians, a powerful nomadic tribe of skilled horsemen, controlled the region of southern Russia from the Danube on the west to the borders of China on the east. The Scythians were conquered and displaced by the Sarmatians, a related tribe, in the third century B.C. In later centuries, the southern steppes of Russia were invaded by other tribes such as the Goths in the third century A.D., the Huns in the fourth century, and the Turkic Avars in the sixth century. The Khazars had built a strong empire in southern Russia by the seventh century, and by the eighth century the Bulgars had established an empire in the Volga region. By the ninth century, the Slavs had settled in

the regions of Ukraine, Belarus, Novgorod, and Smolensk, under the rule of the Khazars.

In the ninth century, Scandinavian traders and warriors known as the Varangians arrived in Russia. One of their leaders, Rurik, established himself in Novgorod by 862, founding a dynasty. Rurik's successor, Oleg, united the eastern Slavs and freed them from Khazar domination. He also signed a treaty with the Byzantine Empire in 911. The territory became known as Kievan Rus after its capital was transferred to Kiev in 822.

Vladimir I, who reigned from 980 to 1015, adopted Greek Orthodoxy and made it the state religion in 988-89. Byzantine cultural influence became predominant.

From 1237 to 1240, the Tatars (also known as Mongols), led by Batu Khan, invaded Kievan Rus and destroyed all major Russian cities except Novgorod and Pskov. They established the Empire of the Golden Horde, extending throughout southern and eastern Russia. The Empire of the Golden Horde lasted until 1480.

During the 14th century, the Muscovite princes of the grand duchy of Vladimir began to consolidate their power. Moscow gradually took precedence over other cities, although Muscovite princes remained under the suzerainty of the Tatars. In 1380, Dmitri Donskoi, grand duke of Moscow, defeated the armies of the Golden Horde at Kulikovo, though Moscow continued to pay tribute to the Tatars for another hundred years.

Under Ivan III and Vasily III, the Muscovite state expanded and its rulers became absolute. Moscow began annexing other Russian principalities. Under Ivan, the duchy of Moscow stopped paying tribute to the Tatars, and in 1497 Ivan adopted Russia's first code of laws.

In 1547, Ivan IV, also known as Ivan the Terrible, was crowned tsar of all Russia at the age of 17. He conquered the Tatars and extended Russian rule over the region of the Volga, laying the basis for the annexation of Siberia. Peasant-soldiers known as Cossacks defended the annexed territories. At home, Ivan brutally crushed opposition from the boyars, powerful feudal nobles, and set up an autocratic government. After Ivan's death, Boris Godunov ruled Russia, continuing Ivan's policy of weakening the boyars while giving more power to state officials. Under Godunov's rule, the Russian church was

recognized in 1589 as an independent patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church.

Godunov's death in 1605 ushered in the period of Russian history known as the "Time of Troubles." During this period, both Poland and Sweden exerted a great deal of influence on Russian life. After 1646, Russia effectively reasserted its autonomy. Romanov tsars ruled Russia from 1613 to 1917, though after 1763 the official name of the Romanov dynasty became the House of Romanov-Holstein-Gottorf.

By the 17th century, Russia was centuries behind Western Europe in economic development. In outlook and culture, it remained medieval, and was not considered to be a member of the European group of nations. Russia's distrust of foreign innovations and advances kept its society ignorant and isolated. The consolidation of power was effected not by reforms or a middle class, but by forcibly depriving the nobility of their political influence. In return, the nobles were given land grants and increasing influence over the peasants. In 1649, serfdom, which had been practiced for centuries, was legally recognized in Russia. Serfs were peasants who were legally bound to the land, and had to serve the noble who owned the land they lived on. Serfdom grew increasingly oppressive in Russia until there was virtually no distinction between serfs and slaves. This oppression led to several violent peasant revolts.

Peter I, also known as Peter the Great, ascended to the Russian throne in 1689. He altered Russian politics, administration, and culture considerably, including forced "Westernization." He created a standing conscript army and navy, and made the church thoroughly subservient to the state. Under his reforms, autocratic rule increased and the serfdom of peasants became harsher. Seeking more maritime power, Peter began to wage war with the intention of expanding Russian power. As a result of the Northern War of 1700-1721, Russia gained Livonia, Ingermanland, Estonia, and parts of Finland, formerly Swedish territory, securing a Russian presence on the Baltic Sea. In 1703, Peter founded St. Petersburg on the Gulf of Finland, then transferred the capital there in 1712. He also began to push toward the Black Sea, but his war with Turkey from 1711 to 1713 ended in defeat.

Over the next two centuries, Russia continually pushed for expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. In 1762, Catherine II became the tsar of Russia. Under her rule, Russia became the chief power of Europe. She continued Peter the Great's policies of absolute rule and territorial expansion.

She annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 1783 and obtained vast new territories in the west and south through the treaties of Kuchuk Kainarji and Jassy with Turkey. She harshly suppressed a peasant revolt led by Pugachev from 1773 to 1775, strengthening the upper class and lessening the chance of social reform. However, she was considered an "enlightened despot," and under her rule Russian writers, scientists, and artists began to rise in importance.

Alexander I, who reigned from 1801 to 1825, gained more territory in wars with Turkey and Prussia. In 1812, Napoleon began his attack on Russia and took Moscow, but his army was nearly destroyed during the winter. Napoleon's defeat and the resulting peace settlement at the Congress of Vienna made Russia and Austria the leading powers of Europe.

After Alexander's death in 1825, members of a secret revolutionary society known as the Decembrists rebelled against the new tsar, Nicholas I. The rebels marched to Senate Square but were crushed by artillery fire. Five of their leaders were executed. The failed Decembrist insurrection led to both increasing police terrorism and the spread of underground revolutionary activity among the educated.

Alexander II, who gained the Russian throne one year before the end of the Crimean War, instituted important liberal reforms during the first period of his reign. In 1861, Alexander liberated the serfs, perhaps the most important of his reforms. He also made significant changes in local government, the judicial system, and the educational system. Toward the end of Alexander's reign, he grew increasingly conservative. In 1881, he was assassinated and the throne passed to Alexander III.

The Trans-Siberian Railroad, constructed from 1891 to 1905, opened much of Siberia to exploration and colonization. Nicholas II, the last Russian emperor, proved to be a weak ruler. Russian defeat in the highly unpopular and disastrous Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), fought over Manchuria and Korea, led directly to the Russian Revolution of 1905. Emperor Nicholas II was forced to grant a constitution and establish a parliament, called the Duma. Soon after instituting democratic reform, however, the emperor curtailed the new freedoms. Revolutionaries grew restless, and the emperor countered with police terror. He tried to channel public discontent into anti-Semitic outbreaks. This led to the outbreak of pogroms, campaigns of violence against Russian Jews.

As Russian industry grew, the leftist Social Democratic Party found support among industrial workers. In 1912, the party formally split into two factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

Meanwhile, Russia played an important part in the outbreak of World War I by promoting Pan-Slavism, or Slavic nationalism, in the Balkan Peninsula. Ill-prepared for the war, and cut off from its Western allies by Germany and Austria-Hungary, Russia suffered serious losses during the course of World War I.

Inflation, food shortages, and low morale among Russian troops contributed to the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne and was replaced by a provisional government supported by the Mensheviks. Nicholas was executed in 1918, ending the Romanov dynasty. The new provisional government could not control the councils of soldiers and workers, and on November 7, 1917, the Bolsheviks seized the government in what was known as the October Revolution. Russia had not yet adopted the Gregorian calendar, so early November in the West was still late October in Russia. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik party, took the official title of Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, becoming a virtual dictator of Russia.

Russia withdrew from World War I and was forced to sign the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918. The treaty forced Russia to cede large territories to the Central Powers. Civil war broke out shortly after the treaty was signed, partially in reaction to the poor terms of the treaty. The Anti-Bolsheviks (Whites) fought against the ruling Bolsheviks (Reds). Both sides committed atrocities, and by the end of the war in 1920 Russia was devastated.

The Bolsheviks became the Communist party of the Soviet Union, with the goal of complete socialization. In December of 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as the Soviet Union, was established. Many of the harsh measures associated with Soviet rule appeared during the first years of the new government, including the torture and execution of opponents. After Lenin's death in 1924, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin vied for leadership. Stalin emerged victorious by 1925; Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929.

In 1928, the government adopted the first Five-Year Plan. This plan emphasized the production of capital rather than consumer goods and set up a system of farm collectivization. Peasant farmers (called *kulaks*)

who refused to go along with the forced collectivization were "liquidated": more than five million peasant households were eliminated, their property confiscated, and the peasants sent to labor camps in Siberia. By the end of the 1930s, 99 percent of farmland was owned by the state.

Although the state raised the level of literacy and established a system of free medical care, life under Communist party rule was brutal. The education system and the media were completely in the hands of the state, and freedom of movement was severely restricted. All criticism of public policy was banned, and the secret police became the state's main instrument of control. A large and powerful bureaucracy arose, composed of high-ranking Communist officials.

Religion was intensely persecuted in the early years of the Soviet Union. By the late 1930s, the government relaxed somewhat on the issue of religion, but by that point anti-religious teaching in schools had already seriously affected the younger generation.

The announcement of an alleged plot against Stalin's regime, supposedly headed by the exiled Trotsky, led to the great purge of 1936 to 1938. Stalin purged the Communist party, the armed forces, and the government of any persons who were allegedly dissident to his regime. Most of the arrests and trials were carried out in secret, with the exception of a few public "show trials." The victims of Stalin's purges were either sentenced to death or to life in a Siberian labor camp.

On August 3, 1939, the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany. Soviet troops entered Poland, which was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. In 1940, Soviet troops occupied Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and incorporated them into the USSR. In April of 1941, the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact with Japan.

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, joined by Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Finland. The German offense succeeded at first, partially because the Soviets were taken by surprise, but also because Stalin's purges had robbed the armed forces of some of their most brilliant military minds. In 1943, the tide turned, and Soviet forces drove the Germans back toward their own country. Soviet victory was obtained at a great price: more than 20 million Soviets died, both soldiers and civilians. By the end of the war, the United States had

contributed around \$9 billion in aid to the Soviet Union under a lend-lease agreement, meaning that it was, at least in theory, to be paid back.

After the end of World War II, all cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union ceased. The two nations had emerged from the war as the two great superpowers of the world, and they deeply distrusted one another. The ensuing Cold War was characterized by a period of “Red terror” on the part of the Americans, who feared and distrusted the Soviets, and equal measures of distrust and disdain for Western capitalism on the part of the Soviets. Stalin again reasserted his absolute power during the Cold War years. Millions of soldiers and ethnic minorities who had come into contact with Allied soldiers during World War II were deported to Siberia or central Asia. Stalin also began another round of anti-Semitic pogroms, killing many prominent Jewish writers. Propaganda was widespread; the government claimed Russian origin for nearly everything, extolling Communist achievements.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, policy in the Soviet Union began to change. Nikita Khrushchev became premier in 1958, and pursued a more flexible foreign policy. The Soviet Union was now willing to sign alliances with and offer aid to non-Communist countries in the Middle East and other developing areas. Khrushchev denounced Stalin and his practices. In 1961, the reputations of 1930s purge victims were restored, Stalin’s body was removed from its place of honor next to Lenin, and Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd.

In 1964, the Communist party ousted Khrushchev, replacing him with Leonid Brezhnev. Under Brezhnev, critics of Soviet life were harshly punished, and the Soviet Union followed a foreign policy which mandated intervention in any Communist government where Communism was threatened. U.S.-Soviet relations entered an era of détente, where relations were somewhat less tense.

Mikhail Gorbachev took over the government in 1985. He initiated a program which he called glasnost and perestroika, meaning openness and restructuring. In 1986, a nuclear reactor in Chernobyl exploded, spewing radioactive material over a large area. In response to the disaster, Gorbachev removed media restrictions, allowing free coverage of the disaster. For the first time in years, people could freely discuss aspects of Soviet life.

In August of 1991, a group of senior officials attempted a coup, detaining Gorbachev in the Crimea and preventing him from signing a treaty which would grant greater autonomy to the USSR’s constituent republics. Within three days, the August Coup collapsed due to the resistance of junior military leaders such as Boris Yeltsin and leaders of the constituent republics. On August 23, Yeltsin banned the Soviet Communist party in the Russian part of the former Soviet Union.

In the aftermath of the August Coup, the USSR disintegrated. It was legally abolished on December 31, 1991. The former Soviet Union became 15 nations, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Yeltsin emerged as the president of Russia, the largest part of the former Soviet Union. Russia took the USSR’s former seat on the United Nations Security Council. Although a reorganized Communist party remained a significant presence within Russian politics, it has been pushed aside by forces supporting Putin.

Since the disintegration of the USSR, Russia has had to face separatist movements in several ethnic areas within Russia, most notably in Chechnya and Tartarstan.

Russia continues to move toward establishing stronger relationships with Eastern Europe and, to some extent, with the West.

Ethnic Groups

Due to its vast size and huge population, the Russian Federation is home to nearly 160 ethnic groups, including indigenous peoples. Most of these ethnic groups comprise less than one percent of the total population.

Ethnic Russians comprise nearly 80 percent of Russia’s population. They are descendants of East Slavic tribes, and their language, Russian, is considered one of the living descendants of Old East Slavonic.

Tatars account for 3.8 percent of the Russian population, and live mostly in the steppes and the Crimean peninsula. Tatars are of Turkic and Mongol origin, and first came to Russia from Mongolia as the Golden Horde in the 13th century. During World War II, the entire Tatar population fell victim to Stalin’s oppressive regime; in 1944 they were accused of being Nazi collaborators and were deported to Siberia and central Asia, where many died of disease and

starvation. Since the 1980s, around 250,000 Tatars have returned to their Crimean homelands.

The Bashkir ethnic group makes up a little over one percent of the population. Most Bashkirs live in the Russian republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan. Bashkirs are of Turkic descent; most speak Bashkir, although some speak the closely related Tatar language. Bashkirs have a reputation of being hospitable but suspicious. Traditionally, settled Bashkirs practiced agriculture, cattle-rearing, and beekeeping. Nomadic Bashkirs herded cattle in the steppes. Bashkir national dishes include *yūryu*, a type of gruel, and a cheese called *skūrt*.

The Chechen people originated in the Caucasus area between Asia and Europe, and are predominantly adherents of the Sunni or Sufi branches of Islam. Chechens live mainly in the isolated, mountainous land of Chechnya, which is internationally recognized as part of the Russian Federation. From 1994 to 1996, a bloody war raged through Chechnya as Russian forces put down Chechen rebels who demanded autonomy.

Other significant ethnic minorities in Russia include Ukrainians, Armenians, and Chuvashs. At one time, Russia had the third largest population of Jews (after the United States and Israel), but due to Jewish emigration there are fewer than 230,000 Jews remaining in Russia today.

Religion

The Russian Orthodox Church is the largest Orthodox denomination. The existence of full communion among Eastern Orthodox churches ensures that the denominations do not drift very far apart. Like other Orthodox denominations, the Russian Orthodox Church places an emphasis on preservation rather than evolution or adaptation of doctrine and practices. Most ethnic Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, but many are not practicing believers, a lingering trend from the strongly atheistic influence of Communism. Since the fall of Communism, the Russian Orthodox Church has experienced resurgence in activity. The government has returned many old church buildings that were expropriated during Communist rule, although many are in deteriorating condition.

The Old Believers split from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1666-67 after Patriarch Nikon instituted reforms within the Russian Orthodox Church in an attempt to bring it into alignment with its Greek counterpart. Old Believers clung to the historical practices, publicly denouncing ecclesiastical reforms.

After implementing reforms, the Russian Orthodox Church anathematized the Old Believer sect and persecuted them vigorously. Many prominent Old Believers were arrested and tortured, and some were even executed. Old Believers had no civil rights in Russia. Nevertheless, communities of Old Believers survived and even flourished in remote, isolated communities throughout the country. Old Believers retain practices such as completely monodic (unison) singing during worship. Their worship services are generally much longer than modern Orthodox services, and can last up to eight hours on a feast day. Old Believers also maintain the use of Old Slavonic in their texts and liturgies. When saying formal prayers, Old Believers use special beads called *lestovka*. They continue to use cast and carved icons in their worship (the Russian Orthodox Church prohibited the veneration of icons in relief). Old Believers consider shaving one's beard a sin. The use of tobacco is strictly prohibited, and some sects even forbid coffee and tea. Old Believers tend to oppose ecumenism in principle; even various sects within the larger group of Old Believers are often not in communion with each other.

In the second half of the 18th century, German, Scottish, Danish, and Swedish traders in St. Petersburg were allowed to establish Lutheran and Presbyterian churches. German and Czech emigrants in southern parts of Russia were allowed to plant their own Lutheran congregations. When Russia annexed large sections of what was formerly Poland in 1792, many Reformed Poles came under Russian rule. They were allowed to keep their own churches. Baptist and Pentecostal missionaries helped give birth to a strong Baptist and only slightly less strong Pentecostal movement in Russia. English-speaking Protestant visitors to Moscow might consider visiting worship services at the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in central Moscow. Directions to their services as well as worship times can be found at the chaplaincy's website, moscowprotestantchaplaincy.org.

Turkic populations in Russia (such as the Tatars and Bashkirs) have a much stronger tendency to belong to the Islamic faith. Islam continues to grow in Russia, comprising nearly 10 percent of the population today.

There is a growing movement of those who practice Slavicism, or Slavic neo-paganism, in Russia. This group draws on the ancient, pre-Christian traditions of Slavic tribes. Ecology and respect for nature are important in the neo-pagan movement, and symbols drawn from the natural world, such as suns, stars, and trees, are very common.

In remote areas of Siberia, some indigenous (Inuit) tribes still practice traditional shamanism, sometimes syncretized with a major religion such as Christianity. In this religion, shamans act as mediators between the physical and the spirit world, and are able to communicate with the spirits.

Culture

Food—The staples of the Russian diet are bread and potatoes. Cabbage, carrots, and beets are also common; onions and garlic are used liberally in Russian dishes. Russians love meat; sausage, pork, chicken, beef, mutton, and dried or salted fish are fairly inexpensive. Delicacies such as veal, duck, sturgeon, and salmon were traditionally aristocratic foods, and they are now popular among the new wealthy class. Slightly soured milk, known as *riazhenka*, and other dairy products are common. In rural areas, unpasteurized dairy products are sold from trucks, but in major cities pasteurized products are widely available. Fruits and berries are collected in late summer and made into jams and preserves for use during the winter. Mushroom-picking is an art in Russia, and many Russians can identify local edible varieties. Salted or pickled cucumbers, cabbage, garlic, and tomatoes are popular. Russians love tea, and their coffee is served thick and strong. Russian vodka is the most common alcoholic beverage in the country, and home-brewed vodka remains an important form of currency in rural areas.

Social status—Up until the 19th century, Russian society was aristocratic. When Communism was implemented, the original idea was to obtain social and economic equality for all. This, of course, never happened, and today the vast majority of Russians live near or below the poverty line. Privatization has benefited only the powerful and influential, contributing to a new class of entrepreneurs, some of whom are incredibly wealthy. A middle class is slowly emerging in Russian cities, formed of intellectuals in smaller business ventures or mid-level management.

Gender roles—Many people in Russia have an inflexible view of the roles of women and men: men are not able to cook, clean house, or care for children, while women are bad at driving cars, managing money, and supervising others. Men are valued for leadership, bravery, strength, and rationality;

women are valued for beauty, intuition, emotion, selflessness, and generosity.

Marriage—In Russia, romantic love is considered the only acceptable premise for marriage. In contemporary times, some Russians marry to improve their economic status or housing prospects, but this is rare. Marriages brought about by unplanned pregnancies are common. Approximately half of Russian marriages end in divorce, with economic hardship and alcohol abuse as major contributing factors.

Education—Primary schools are state-funded, although funding has been decreased, forcing teachers to provide instruction with aging and outdated materials and buildings. Academic standards are high. Over 90 percent of the Russian population completes secondary education, and around 12 percent complete higher education. Higher education is a mark of social prestige, and is considered necessary for economic success.

Etiquette—Russians are very formal when talking with people other than close family members. Improper use of informal language is considered uncouth. Russians have a code of table manners. Guests, even unexpected ones, must be treated with generosity, and guests are expected to willingly and graciously receive the host's hospitality. Women are expected to be well-groomed, with clean and pressed clothes and demure behavior. In crowds, lines, and on public transportation, pushing and shoving are common.

Travel/Transportation

In some areas of Russia, roads are scarce or non-existent. Local driving regulations are strictly enforced by traffic police, and violators receive strict sentences. Russia has a zero tolerance policy regarding driving under the influence of alcohol.

Visitors should avoid driving at night, especially outside of major cities. On rural roads, it is common to find livestock crossing the road with little warning. Construction areas or stranded vehicles are rarely marked with lights. Cars are often in a state of disrepair—many lack either a headlight or working brake lights. Bicyclists rarely employ lights or reflectors. Due to these conditions, sudden stops may be necessary.

Newer roads in Russia have little built along them, and it is possible to drive for miles before encountering a gas or service station. Make sure your

car is in top condition and carry spare parts, such as fan belts and fuses.

A valid U.S. driver's license with a notarized Russian translation or a Russian license is necessary to drive in Russia. Tourists may use an international driving permit (IDP). An IDP is a document which allows a motorist to operate a vehicle in another nation when accompanied by a valid driver's license from his or her own country. An IDP is not a license in and of itself; it is a translation of an American or Canadian driver's license.

You can apply for an IDP in the United States or Canada before traveling. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are the only organizations in the U.S. authorized by the State Department to issue IDPs. The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) is authorized to issue IDPs to Canadian citizens. The cost of an IDP is under \$20, and the application will need to be accompanied by two passport-sized photos.

Foreigners in Russia on a business visa or with a permanent residence status in Russia must hold a valid Russian driver's license. To obtain a Russian driver's license, you must take and pass the appropriate exams in Russia.

For more information on driving rules and regulations, including mandatory insurance information, visit <http://www.russia-travel.org>.

Illness/Injury

Medical care in most areas of Russia is below Western standards. Shortages of medical supplies, variation among practice standards, and a lack of comprehensive primary care all contribute to a confusing and sometimes suspect medical system.

Up-to-date facilities in Moscow and St. Petersburg do not necessarily accept all cases. There is an American-British clinic in St. Petersburg staffed by English-speaking Russians. All medical facilities usually require cash or credit card payment at the time of service.

Travelers should avoid medical procedures involving blood transfusions, due to uncertainties surrounding the local blood supply. The cleanliness of tattoo parlors and piercing services is likewise suspect.

Crime

Russia has very high crime rates, widely varied in nature. The U.S. Embassy receives frequent reports

of unprovoked, violent harassment of ethnic minorities in Russia, including several beatings and murders. Travelers are cautioned to avoid areas that "skinheads" are known to frequent, or where large crowds have gathered. Americans of South or East Asian or African descent and those perceived to be from the Caucasus region of Russia are the most vulnerable to racial harassment. In addition to public harassment, these minorities may be at risk for police harassment.

Visitors to Russia should always remain aware of their surroundings. In Russian cities, visitors should take the same types of precautions they would take in any major city. Tourists should keep wallets in inner front pockets, carry purses tucked firmly under their arms, wear the shoulder strap of camera cases or other bags across the chest, and avoid walking close to curbs. The areas with the highest incidences of theft, pickpocketing, and assault include underground walkways, subways, overnight trains, train stations, airports, markets, tourist attractions, and restaurants.

In some cities, groups of children or adolescents can be aggressive, swarming tourists or assaulting and knocking them down. These groups usually target foreigners who appear vulnerable, such as elderly tourists or persons walking alone.

Stolen credit cards are often used immediately. If your card is stolen, report it to your credit card company or bank immediately to avoid fraudulent charges.

There are few registered taxi services in Russia. Visitors should avoid informal cabs, as these pose serious security risks. Do not share a cab with a stranger, as many robberies occur in taxis shared with strangers.

One street scam in Russia is known as the "turkey drop." In this scam, an individual "accidentally" drops money on the sidewalk in front of the intended victim. A second person either waits for the victim to pick the money up, or picks it up himself and offers to split it with the victim. The individual who dropped the money then returns and aggressively accuses both parties of having stolen the money. This type of confrontation usually results in the victim's money being stolen. The best defense against this scam is avoidance. Never pick up money lying on the sidewalk, even with the intention of returning it to the person who dropped it. Instead, walk quickly away from the scene.

To avoid highway crime, visitors should avoid driving at night, especially outside major cities, and sleeping in vehicles. Never pick up hitchhikers; not only does this put you at risk for robbery, but it also puts you in danger of being arrested for unwittingly transporting narcotics.

In the Russian business world, extortion and corruption are rampant. Threats and acts of violence are commonly used to resolve business disputes. Organized criminal groups have a strong presence in Russia and exert influence over much of the business world. These criminal groups, and sometimes even local police, will often target foreign businesses, demanding protection money. U.S. citizens should report any extortion attempt to the Russian authorities as well as to the U.S. Embassy.

Safety and Security

The Caucasus region (including Chechnya) continues to experience civil and political unrest; American citizens are encouraged to avoid this region. The U.S. government's ability to assist American citizens in this region is extremely limited. Local criminal gangs have kidnapped many foreigners, including Americans, for ransom. U.S. citizens have disappeared in the region of Chechnya and remain missing. There have been several kidnappings of persons working for the media and non-governmental organizations in the area.

Over the last several years, there has been an increase of terrorist activity in Russia. Although Americans are not specifically targeted, there is a general risk of foreigners being the victims of an indiscriminate attack.

Americans living or traveling in Russia should register with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General. This can be done online—check the website of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow at moscow.usembassy.gov.

Entry/Exit Requirements

The Russian visa system is complex and restrictive for foreigners who live or travel in Russia. Russian immigration and visa laws change frequently, and immigration officials do not consistently enforce laws and regulations governing entry and exit from the country. For the most up-to-date visa information visit the website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation at www.russianembassy.org.

The Russian government does not recognize the authority of U.S. embassy officials to intervene in visa cases. The U.S. embassy is not able to act as a visa sponsor, submit visa applications, register

private travelers, or request corrections or replacements for visas or migration cards.

U.S. citizens must always possess a valid passport and appropriate visas for their travel in Russia. It is not possible to obtain an entry visa upon arrival; Russian visas must be applied for in the country of citizenship before travel.

A Russian entry visa has two dates on it; the first date indicates the first day the traveler is permitted to enter Russia, and the second date indicates the day by which the traveler must exit Russia. The visa is only valid for those exact dates. Even if a visa is misdated through an error of the Russian Embassy, the traveler will still not be allowed to enter the country before the printed start date. Any mistakes in visas must be corrected before the traveler enters Russia.

Russian visas are valid for specific dates and specific purposes. Foreigners should make absolutely sure they obtain the correct visa that reflects their intended purpose in Russia. Foreigners can be expelled from the country for engaging in activities that are not reflected in their visa status.

All travelers to Russia must list all destinations to be visited and register with authorities upon arrival at all destinations. There are several closed cities throughout Russia, and attempts to enter these cities without authorization will result in fines or deportation.

Every foreign traveler must have a Russian sponsor. This sponsor may be a hotel, a tour company, a relative, or an employer. The official sponsor is listed on the visa; it is crucial that you know how to contact your listed sponsor since application for any replacement, extension, or changes to a Russian visa must be done through the sponsor.

An exit visa is required to leave Russia. Most Russian visas are valid for both entry and exit. It is helpful to make a copy of your visa in case of loss or theft, but Russian officials will not accept a photocopy as a valid exit visa. Without an original visa, U.S. citizens may not leave Russia.

Travelers who overstay their visa, even by one day, may not be allowed to leave the country until their sponsor intervenes on their behalf and requests a visa extension. This can take up to 20 calendar days. In the meantime, travelers with expired visas will have difficulty checking into a hotel. The U.S. embassy has no means or authority to help stranded travelers.

All foreigners entering Russia must fill out a migration card. One part must be left with immigration authorities at the port of entry, and the traveler must hold on to the other part for the duration of their stay. Upon exit, the traveler's half of the migration card must be presented to immigration officials. Russian immigration officials do not distribute these cards at ports of entry; it is up to the traveler to find them and fill one out.

Immunizations

There are no required immunizations for entrance into Russia. However, various diseases are endemic to different parts of the country, and travelers should consider being vaccinated.

Make sure routine vaccinations are up to date, since there have been diphtheria outbreaks in Russia, even in major cities. Typhoid can be a concern in Russia, and risk increases with a longer stay. Rarely, cases of cholera have been reported. Russia is considered an intermediate risk area for both hepatitis A and B; travelers are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated for both strains.

Water Safety

Tap water is considered unsafe for drinking throughout Russia, except in Moscow. Tap water carries the risk of water-borne illnesses such as cholera. Drink bottled water and carbonated beverages.

Special Circumstances

Many Americans go to Russia to teach English. Some have complained about Russian schools' failure to facilitate proper visas or to pay agreed-upon salaries. Prospective teachers should ask for references from other foreign teachers who have taught at the school being considered, as well as insist upon a written contract with the school stipulating the conditions and provisions of their employment. Red flags include instructions to arrive in Russia on a tourist visa and change visa status later, cash payment under the table, with no taxes taken out, and requirements that the school hold onto the teacher's passport for the length of employment. A legal employee must surrender his or her passport to the employer upon arrival for registration purposes, but the registration process should take less than three weeks, upon which time the passport must be returned to the employee.

The Russian ruble is the only legal form of currency; businesses will not accept American currency. Worn or marked American bills are often not accepted at banks or exchange offices. ATMs are plentiful in

urban areas of Russia, so travelers do not need to carry large amounts of cash. Credit cards are becoming more widely accepted, especially in Moscow. In rural areas, however, business still operates on a cash basis.

Russian officials strictly monitor the exportation of items considered to have cultural value. There have been reports of visitors arrested for attempting to leave the country with antique items they believed were purchased legally. Any article that appears old or that could have cultural value must have a certificate indicating that it has no cultural or historical value in order to be allowed out of the country. Any item over 100 years old, regardless of cultural or historical value, may not be taken from the country even if it is accompanied by a certificate.

Piracy of CDs and DVDs is a serious problem in Russia. Under Russian law, transactions involving pirated copies of CDs or DVDs are illegal, and the government has increased enforcement of this law.

Electricity

Russia uses 220V/50Hz electricity, so a power converter is necessary to use American appliances on Russian circuits. Russian plugs are either type C or type F, which means a set of adapter plugs is also required to convert American types A and B plugs to fit in Russian receptacles.