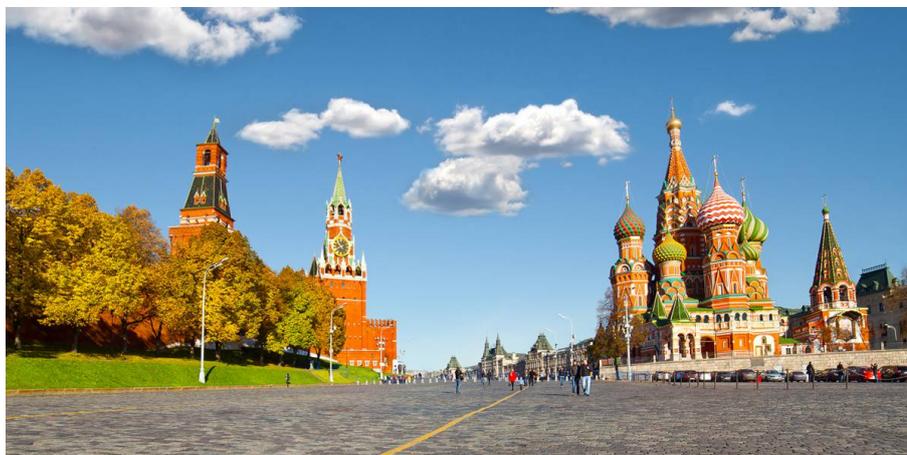


# Vodka Shot

## 6 days | St Petersburg to Moscow



*This short and sweet 6 day tour of Russia takes in the must-see sights of St Petersburg and Moscow in one short blast. From the masterpieces of the Hermitage and colourful Church on Spilled Blood in the City of the Tsars, to the whimsical turrets of St Basil's Cathedral and the mighty Kremlin in the capital – this is the best of Russia in under a week.*

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- St Petersburg - UNESCO-listed city area including: Nevsky Prospekt, Museum and University districts, Church on Spilled Blood, The Bronze Horseman and Admiralty End
- Moscow - UNESCO-listed Red Square, Kremlin and Lenin's Mausoleum and St Basil's Cathedral. Optional Inside a Soviet Bunker tour.
- St Petersburg's palaces - the Hermitage Museum at the Winter Palace and St Catherine's Palace (visited in winter) or the gardens of Peterhof (visited in summer)

#### What's Included

- 5 breakfasts, 2 lunches and 1 dinner (including a Welcome Dinner on day 1)
- 1 overnight train from St Petersburg - Moscow in a 4-berth cabin including bed linen
- 4 nights 3 star hotels
- Escorted by an English speaking Russian tour guide
- Specialist Russian guides at local sights
- Guided sightseeing - Moscow and St Petersburg
- Airport arrival transfer on day 1
- Moscow Metro travel card - 6 journeys
- All relevant transfers and transportation on tour

#### What's Not Included

- Entrance Fees: USD\$50-60pp, paid in local currency
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow USD\$3 - 5 per day, per traveller. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- International flights and visa

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Day 1 : St Petersburg

Tuesday. Welcome to Russia. Arrival transfer from the airport to hotel and check in. Later tonight by 7pm you'll be treated to dinner with

the rest of your group at the hotel, followed by an informative welcome meeting. Remainder of the evening at leisure - your tour guide can recommend some local bars for you to try out.

#### Overnight - St Petersburg (D)

#### Day 2 : Peterhof or Catherine Palace



St Petersburg is known as the 'City of Tsars' and today we head out of the city to explore one of the tsars' lavish palaces. We visit Peterhof Palace and its beautiful gardens on the Gulf of Finland in the summer (May to mid October) and in the winter we visit Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo (or Pavlosk Palace if Catherine Palace is closed). Often referred to as the 'Russian Versailles', Peterhof is famous for its beautiful gardens which are a wonderland of greenery and flowers, sweeping vistas and ornate architectural decorations, with spectacular gold fountains. At Catherine's Palace it's the exterior and lavishly decorated interior that is the highlight and the famous Amber room

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is simply spectacular, bedecked in gold and amber.

This evening you have the opportunity to join in on some optional excursions including a night at the ballet or a Cossack show. All optional excursions are subject to availability, and are booked and payable locally. **Overnight - St Petersburg (B)**

## Day 3 : St Petersburg City Tour



St Petersburg – Moscow. Today we take in the highlights of the beautiful city of St Petersburg. Travelling by bus we make our way along the famed Nevsky Prospekt, past the museum and university districts and a few stops will be made along the way to see the magnificent St Isaac's Cathedral and The Bronze Horseman. We then visit the Peter and Paul Fortress and the ornate Peter and Paul Cathedral which houses the tombs of the Romanov monarchs. We also pay a visit to the spectacular Church on Spilled Blood. After a hearty lunch we enjoy a guided tour of the Hermitage Museum in the beautiful Winter Palace - which houses one of the biggest and best art collections on earth.

This evening we board an overnight sleeper train bound for Moscow. **Overnight - Sleeper Train (B, L)**

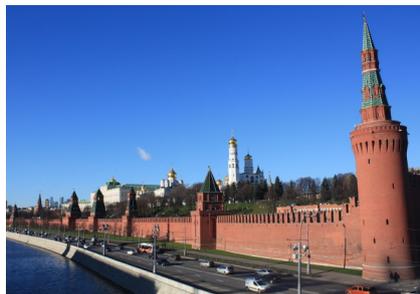
## Day 4 : Red Square & Kremlin



This morning we arrive into Russia's capital. Taking the metro, we will make our way to the legendary Red Square for the start of our walking tour. Here we will take in sights such as the epitome of Russian power – the Kremlin, Lenin's Mausoleum and the ritzy GUM department store. At the south end of the square, feast your eyes on the iconic St Basil's Cathedral. We also tour the mighty Kremlin, with a guided walk through the grounds to see numerous government buildings, gold-domed cathedrals and the Tsar Bell - the largest bell that never rang! If open, you can pay your respects to the grandfather of Communism at Lenin's mausoleum. Remainder of the day is at leisure.

During our stay in Moscow there will be the chance to join some of our optional evening excursions, such as a traditional Cossack Show or a Moscow by Night coach tour. **Overnight - Moscow (B, L)**

## Day 5 : Optional Bunker Tour



This morning those who have booked our optional Inside a Soviet Bunker add-on will head 65 metres underground and explore the fascinating Underground Cold War Museum - a Stalinist-era Soviet Bunker that up until recently was a top secret symbol of Soviet Power. The rest of the day is free to explore the capital. There are plenty of great galleries, museums, cafes, shops and bars all within walking distance in the city centre.

**Overnight - Moscow (B)**

## Day 6 : Moscow

Sunday. Moscow. Our tour comes to an end after breakfast and hotel check out at 12 noon. (B)

## HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

**Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.**

### Harbor Club Hotel

Well-located in St Petersburg, the Harbor Club Hotel can be found on a quiet street, yet only a short walk from the bustling city centre. Its guestrooms feature modern décor, with spacious ensuite bathrooms and modern amenities including air conditioning. You'll also find a shared lounge and bar, as well as an on-site restaurant serving tasty European cuisine. Here, guests can enjoy a continental or buffet breakfast or, if you'd prefer, there is also the option of dining in the comfort of your hotel room.



### Izmailovo Gamma Delta

Formerly part of the Olympic Village at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, Divided into two wings, Gamma and Delta - the Izmailovo Gamma Delta is part of one of the biggest hotels in the world. The rooms are comfortable and with modern amenities and there is also a number of excellent restaurants plus a gym and swimming pool. On arrival to the hotel guests are often welcomed with chocolate and still bottled mineral water. Well located with good access to transport links.



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## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Victory Day - 9 May

On 9 May every year Russia celebrates Victory Day, which commemorates the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. On this special day the streets fill up with revellers to witness the country's biggest military parade. Please be aware that if you are travelling during or around this time certain sites may be closed due to parade preparation.

### Optional Excursions

We offer a range of optional evening excursions which are bookable locally. The optional excursions that are offered change each week dependent upon what is on in St Petersburg and Moscow at the time and the group size. Some of the excursions only operate a specific times of year.

At the welcome meeting on day 1 your tour leader will give you a list of the optional excursions that are available during your tour and the cost of them in Roubles. Please note that the price of the optional excursions is dependent upon the number of people who choose to book and if the excursion is escorted by the guide and includes transportation. Below are some of our most popular optional excursions that can be booked and paid for locally in Roubles (cash) on the morning of day 2.

- Watch a wonderful Russian ballet in St Petersburg. We offer performances in the Mariinsky/Mikhailovsky Theatre or the Royal Hermitage Theatre depending on availability. Prices vary from USD\$100-200
- Located across 42 islands, Saint-Petersburg is a perfect place to explore by water and enjoy the stunning architecture that this city boasts. Have a wonderful journey by boat along the rivers and canals and feel the atmosphere of the biggest Northern port of Russia. (Offered 15 May - 15 Sept) From USD \$25
- If you're keen to enjoy some traditional Russian entertainment, head to a Cossack

Show for a night of traditional song and dance. Offered in St Petersburg. From USD\$60

- Visit the Russian Vodka Museum in St Petersburg - the first museum in the world dedicated exclusively to Vodka. Try a few top quality brands and learn about the distilling process. You'll hopefully experience how the right type of Vodka, drunk in the right way, can be very pleasurable. From USD\$25
- Experience Moscow by night on a coach tour taking in city sights that are hard to reach during the daytime, with a knowledgeable local guide and vodka! (minimum of 6 people are required for this trip to run). From USD\$40
- Watch the world-class national dance show 'Kostroma' in Moscow, which offers an aesthetic journey into Russia's deep history, with a varied mix of national dances and contemporary ballet pieces. From USD\$50

### Entrance Fees Not Included

Moscow and St Petersburg entrance fees are not included in the cost of our Russia group tours\*, these need to be paid to your tour leader on day 2 in local currency - Roubles. You will find the cost of entrance fees noted under 'What's Not Included' on page 1 of this document.

Please note that entrance fee amounts do change and thus upon your arrival to Russia your leader will give an exact total and breakdown. Please note that we do not include a guided tour of the interior of St Basil's Cathedral, should you wish to go inside please budget approx USD\$8.

\*Please note that on our Helsinki to St Petes and St Petes & the Baltics visa free Russia tours, entrance to The Hermitage and Peter & Paul Fortress in St Petersburg, is included.

### Tipping

As in many countries tipping is becoming the norm in Russia. In better restaurants it is suggested that you tip 10% of the bill if you were pleased with the food/service.

If you would like to express your appreciation to your tour guide, we've made suggestion as to the appropriate amount on page 1 (under

the heading 'Exclusions') of these Trip Notes. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture.

### Visas

Most travellers require a visa to visit Russia. In order to obtain your visa a Russia Letter of Invitation is required (endorsed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) which we can procure for any passengers for a fee of GBP£25/USD\$59.

As of 30 March 2017, South African passport holders will be granted visa free entry to Russia for a duration of up to 90 days when travelling without the intention of living, working or studying in Russia.

If you're a resident of the UK and would like someone to handle your visa application for you then we recommend CIBTvisas. Please visit <http://www.cibtvisas.co.uk/onthego> to start your visa application with them.

If you reside overseas or are departing the UK more than 3 months prior to arrival in Russia, we can provide you with the necessary invitation letter for entry into Russia in order for you to procure the visa independently from a Russian Embassy/consulate in your region. Please note independent applications are your own responsibility.

Further information is available online at [onthegotours.com/Russia/Visas](http://onthegotours.com/Russia/Visas). It is your responsibility to ensure you procure your visa in a timely fashion. We recommend you apply for your visa at least 1 month before departure.

### Arrival Transfer

An arrival transfer is included for all those arriving on day 1 or those arriving earlier who have booked pre tour accommodation through On The Go. Our transfer representatives wait 90 minutes from the time your flight has landed and they will be holding a visible On The Go sign. If you are delayed please contact our Moscow or St Petersburg office (as detailed on your tour voucher) to advise that you have been delayed for whatever reason. If your luggage has been misplaced, head to 'Information' or your airline's desk prior to exiting Customs to find out how you may lodge a 'lost luggage' report.

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PLEASE NOTE: Arrival transfers are not included for Helsinki to St Pete's and St Pete's and the Baltics visa free Russia tours.

## Overnight Trains

Many of our group tours include a comfortable overnight train journey. Russian trains are solid, utilitarian and reliable. All our passengers are reserved in 4-berth closed cabins with freshly laundered bed linen provided. Though not air conditioned, trains are indeed heated during the winter season. We recommend stocking up on some snacks and drinks before you board the train.

We book train tickets 65 days in advance of travel, and once they have been purchased they are non-refundable and non-changeable. Should you wish to upgrade to a 2 berth cabin you will need inform us 65 days prior to departure, otherwise you will have to pay a cancellation fee on top of the upgrade price. If you book your tour less than 65 days before departure then it is unlikely you will be in the same carriage as the others in the group as their tickets will have already been purchased.

If you prefer not to travel by overnight train, our Back in the USSR and White Russian tours travel by high speed train from Moscow to St Petersburg.

## Fitness

There may be a lot of walking involved on your tour, particularly in Moscow where we explore most of the sites on foot, therefore please be aware that a reasonable level of fitness is required.

## Health Requirements

It is recommended that you be vaccinated for Diphtheria, Polio and Tetanus. Food and waterborne diseases are more common than in the UK, so Typhoid and Hepatitis A are recommended. If visiting Yekaterinburg and undertaking outdoor activities between May and August, a vaccination for tick-borne Encephalitis may be recommended. This information is only intended as a guide and recommendations can change so please consult with your local healthcare provider.

Drink bottled water only, pack some anti-diarrhoea medication, mosquito repellent and sun cream if visiting in summer.

## Currency

While the Russian Rouble is no longer a closed currency, it can sometimes be difficult to buy in advance or to exchange upon your return. As such we recommend exchanging Pound Sterling, US Dollars and other major currencies in Russia, plus you may receive a better exchange rate in destination. To avoid issues, exchange only clean, unmarked bank notes. Bureau de Change and ATM machines exist in Moscow and St Petersburg (to a lesser extent in the provinces). Changing traveller's cheques is a real hassle. Credit cards are readily accepted.

## Climate

Russia is a destination that offers year-round appeal. Certainly summer is appealing for many travellers. Devoid of snow-covered landscapes, Russia positively blooms in spring and summer. The snow melts to reveal beautifully coloured flowers and manicured lawns at many of Russia's most famous palaces, parks and gardens and previously spindly birch trees heaving with green foliage. Russia is pleasantly warm in summer. In July and August temperatures have been known to rival the Mediterranean. During mid-summer in the northern city of St Petersburg there is no real darkness and this wonderful phenomenon is known as 'the white nights'.

Autumn (September - October) is brief but also a good time to travel to Russia, when there are less crowds and the country is swathed in golden autumnal hues. From November through to February winter sets in and the country is usually blanketed in crisp white snow. Despite the freezing temperatures, this is a magical time to visit if you like snow - think fluffy hats, warm coats, picturesque snowy landscapes and a very high chance of experiencing a white Christmas!

## Time

Russia (European Russia west of the Urals) is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Meantime (GMT). From the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October, summertime is in force in

the UK and time reverts to 4 hours ahead of GMT.

## Voltage

Standard voltage in Russia is 220V, 50Hz AC. Sockets require a Continental or European plug with two round pins. Remember to pack a travel adaptor.

## Hotels

In Russia On The Go use 3 star accommodation as classified by the Russian Ministry of Tourism. However, please be aware that the 3 star standards through-out Russia vary greatly and cannot be compared to hotels of a similar standard in Western Europe or, and in particular, the United States.

Russia suffers from a severe shortage of quality 3 star hotels. Tourism is relatively new to the land, resulting in demand for hotels far outweighing the supply. With demand being high, hoteliers have unified with massive price increases, yet continue to paint a rose coloured picture as to what constitutes '3 star' hotel.

On The Go in Russia have taken great lengths to locate the best quality hotels at realistic prices in each of the cities we travel to. All the hotels we provide are clean, comfortable and functional, as well as being within close proximity to public transport, amenities and local sights.

## What to Pack

- A frameless backpack or small suitcase on wheels is recommended for your tour. Complimentary portage is not offered at hotels or train stations. Often we need to walk some distance from where we're dropped off/picked up at train station
- Smaller day bag for your camera and i-Pod etc
- Summer - Russia can get very hot during the summer months of July/August. Pack lightweight cottons and warmer clothes for the evening
- Winter - Russia is bitterly cold from October through to March. Pack a scarf, quality gloves, hat, thermal leggings and longer length coat. You'll also need a warm pair of boots/shoes with a good grip

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- Personal first aid kit (see 'Health precautions')
- Sunglasses and an umbrella
- Swim wear and a towel (for the banya/sauna)
- Mosquito repellent & sunscreen (if visiting in summer)
- Money belt and a universal adapter
- Flat pack toilet paper and anti-bacterial wipes
- Spare camera batteries, especially if you possess a digital camera which requires specialist high-power batteries
- Two spare passport photos/passport photocopy in case of loss/theft
- Your luggage should not exceed 20kg (44pounds). Pack as light as possible to leave room for the souvenirs!

## Food & Drink

### Food

Russia produces a very diverse culinary repertoire. Beyond Moscow, St Petersburg and other big cities, the choice is far more limited. Which is why we include meals on in provincial Russia on our group tours.

Caviar, smoked sausage, pickles, field mushrooms, cheese and soured cream are the basis of zakuski (hors d'oeuvres or appetisers) - a popular dish. Also try savoury piroshki (a stuffed pastry) and blini (savoury stuffed pancakes). The Russians excel at hearty meat and vegetable-based soups. The tsar of all soups is Borsch and Solyanka is also good.

Well-loved classic mains include - beef Stroganoff (invented in Russia, as was chicken Kiev), pelmeny (Siberian-style dumplings) and spicy Georgian cuisine such as shashlyk. Russian rye bread is flavoursome and most often eaten without butter. Fish varieties include - omul (similar to salmon and from Lake Baikal) and sturgeon - often poached and served with a sauce or mushrooms. Russians also excel at the art of ice-cream making. St Petersburg is particularly renowned for its ices.

### Drink

Russians consume an average 12 litres of pure alcohol a year, which is three times the average for the rest of the developed world and also testament to how good the vodka

really is! Vodka is one of Russia's most famous exports. Supermarket & liquor store prices range from USD\$3.00 for a half litre up to USD \$20.00 for connoisseur brands.

Russian beer (pivo) is also inexpensive and very good. The market leader is Baltika who produce 9 excellent brews, appropriately labelled 1 through 9 and sold on tap and in bottles.

Drink only bottled water in Russia. It is inexpensive and available everywhere. Locally, the water is considered drinkable, but it contains undesirable levels of heavy metals and Giardia, an annoying little stomach bug. If you do pick up Giardia, it can be treated with antibiotics.

## Moscow Metro

The Moscow Metro is the easiest and quickest way to get around and your tour (if incorporating time in Moscow) will include a Moscow Metro travelcard (for 6 journeys/rides). A Stalinist gift to the people of Moscow, this is one Stalinist project Muscovites are proud of. Graffiti-free stations offer an air of elegance with granite and marble-clad surrounds. Many of the stations boast chandeliers, huge mosaic freezes depict the power of good Soviet workers banding together to help the state and strikingly elaborate sculptures cast in bronze offer a study of people from an age where collectivism was at the forefront of the Communism dream. Art Nouveau style lamps illuminate the long escalator arches.

Riding the Moscow Metro is a sightseeing excursion in itself. Meanwhile, although St Petersburg has an equally fine Metro transportation system, as the city is more walker-friendly you'll be able to get to most inner-city sights often without the need to board the Metro.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Mind your purses and bags aboard the Metro. Pickpockets are as prevalent here as elsewhere.

## Trading Hours

As a rule shops are open from 9.30am to 7pm or later and generally closed on Sunday. Banks are usually open weekdays from 9am

to 5pm in Moscow and St Petersburg, with a break for lunch. Restaurants, cafes and bars trade until late. In Moscow and St Petersburg, many grocers trade 24/7.

## Shopping

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has embraced the free market. Souvenirs are authentic, inexpensive and usually well-made. The trademark souvenir is the brightly decorated wooden Matryoshka doll - a set of dolls within dolls. Enamelled wooden boxes known as palekh are also popular. Perhaps the most curious hangover of Communist times is the quantity of surplus Red Army and military souvenirs. The ubiquitous 'fluffy brown hat', so common an image of Russia, is also a must-buy. The Russians themselves wear similar hats but theirs are often made of real mink, ermine or fox fur. A great place to shop for reasonably priced souvenirs is the Izmailovsky Market in Moscow, which is conveniently located, just a short walk from our hotel.

## A Russian Banya

If your tour visits Novgorod or Pskov there's the opportunity to sample an invigorating Russian banya (sauna) with veniki (birch twigs). In the public baths of ancient Rome - Romans employed strigule, a curved, scraping instrument to remove dirt and stimulate their skin. The Turks use a kese - best described as a rough cloth - massaging mitt. For their banya - Russians use bundles of very thin birch twigs, with and without leaves. These bundles are known as 'veniki' in Russian. Why birch twigs? Birch relieves pain in the muscles and joints and lifts the mood of the banya user. Once prepared and in the sauna, the twigs (which need to be softened in a bowl of water for around 10 minutes) are employed in a sort of light massaging 'thrashing' motion across the body. It's best to get someone else to do this. Although it sounds painful on bare skin - it isn't and it's something you should try! The massage with the veniki stimulates blood circulation and the overall experience will leave you feeling clean, exhilarated and fresh! In winter, it's fun to get all hot and sweaty and then run outside and roll around in the snow. Give it a whirl, if you dare!

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