

Discover Russia

9 days | St Petersburg to Moscow



Take in the highlights of St Petersburg and Moscow before getting off the beaten track and exploring Russia's historic Golden Ring towns of Suzdal, Kostroma and Yaroslavl. Loaded to the hilt with beautiful architecture, golden spires and onion-domed monasteries, with picturesque countryside to boot, the Golden Ring is one of Russia's most enchanting destinations.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Explore the beautiful city of St Petersburg, including the exquisite Church on Spilled Blood, Peter & Paul Fortress and Nevsky Prospekt
- Marvel at the dazzling array of art and exhibits in the world-famous Hermitage Museum, at the Winter Palace in St Petersburg
- Discover a lavish residence of the tsars on a day trip to Catherine Palace at Tsarkoe Selo (winter: mid-October to April) or Peterhof Palace and gardens (summer: May to mid-October)
- Take in the highlights of the capital on a walking tour, visiting Moscow's famous

Red Square, home to the historic GUM Department Store, Lenin's Mausoleum and spectacular St Basil's Cathedral

- Take a guided tour of the Moscow Kremlin, Russia's political power house. Stroll around the grounds of this fortified complex, visit the Kremlin's cathedrals and see the mighty Tsar Bell
- Experience the delights of rural Russia in the picturesque riverside town of Suzdal. See the ancient Kremlin and UNESCO Listed monasteries, visit the fascinating Museum of Wooden Architecture and sample a traditional Russian banya (sauna)
- Visit the quaint riverside city of Yaroslavl with its impressive skyline of onion shaped domes. Explore the city on a coach tour and enjoy a wood painting class
- Uncover the Golden Ring town of Kostroma, with its ancient churches and monasteries, and visit the Snow Maiden's house with its Ice Room and Ice Bar

What's Included

- 8 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 2 dinners (including a Welcome Dinner on day 1)
- High speed train from St Petersburg to Moscow
- 8 nights 3-4 star hotels
- Guided sightseeing - Moscow, St Petersburg, Suzdal, Kostroma, Yaroslavl

- Escorted by an English speaking Russian tour guide (for groups of 6 or more)
- Airport arrival transfer on day 1
- Specialist Russian guides at local sights
- Moscow Metro travel card - 6 journeys
- All relevant transfers and transportation on tour
- A traditional wood painting class in Yaroslavl
- Russian banya (sauna) experience in Suzdal

What's Not Included

- Entrance Fees: USD\$85-95pp, paid in local currency
- International flights and visa
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow USD\$3 - 5 per day, per traveller. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : St Petersburg

Tuesday. Welcome to Russia. Arrival transfer from St Petersburg Pulkovo Airport to your hotel and check in. At 7pm this evening meet your guide and the rest of the group for an informative welcome meeting and dinner at the hotel. Remainder of the evening at leisure - your tour guide can recommend

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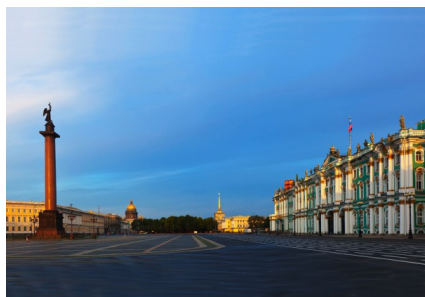
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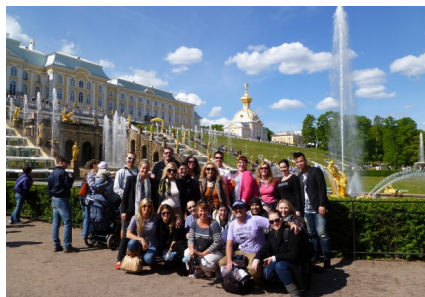
some local bars for you to try out. **Overnight - St Petersburg (D)**

Day 2 : The Hermitage Museum



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. Then we explore the Peter and Paul Fortress and the ornate Peter and Paul Cathedral which houses the tombs of the Romanov monarchs. After a hearty lunch it's time for a guided tour of the incredible Hermitage Museum in the beautiful Winter Palace - which houses one of the biggest and best art collections on earth. Spend the rest of the day at leisure and this evening consider an optional excursion to the ballet or perhaps a Cossack show. All optional excursions are subject to availability and minimum numbers - book and pay locally. At the Welcome Meeting on day 1 you will be given a list of available options to book. **Overnight - St Petersburg (B, L)**

Day 3 : 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 is simply spectacular, bedecked in gold and amber.

Returning to the city centre we visit the beautiful Church On Spilled Blood and then there's free time to explore or shop for souvenirs before we board the 5pm high speed train to Moscow. Reaching the capital in just 4 hours, we transfer to our hotel for the night. **Overnight - Moscow (B)**

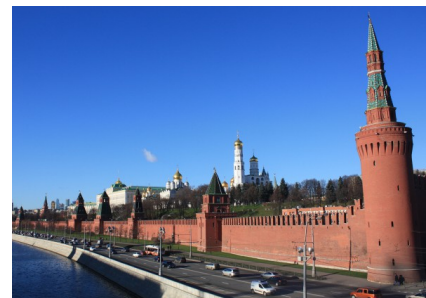
Day 4 : Red Square & Kremlin



This morning we take the metro to 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 - which is 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 optional evening excursions, such as a traditional Cossack Show or a Moscow by Night coach tour and river cruise. Optional excursions are subject to availability and can be booked and paid for locally. **Overnight - Moscow (B, L)**

Day 5 : Optional Bunker Tour



Those who have booked our optional Inside a Soviet Bunker Tour Add-on will head 65 metres underground this morning 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 amazing galleries, museums, plenty of cafes, shops (including the GUM department store for high rollers) and bars all within walking distance.

Overnight - Moscow (B)

Day 6 : Suzdal



Moscow - Suzdal. This morning we bid farewell to the capital and travel by train to Vladimir. Here we'll meet our new guide and transfer to Suzdal, a picturesque Golden Ring town loaded to the hilt with ancient buildings, stunning medieval architecture and an astounding number of churches and monasteries. With pretty meadows and livestock grazing freely along country lanes, Suzdal has the relaxed feel of a small pastoral village.

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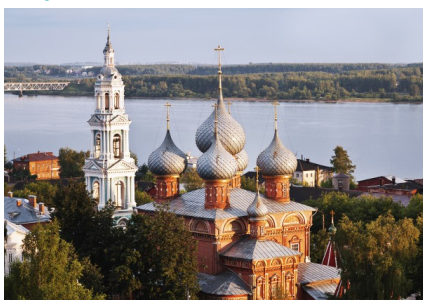
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On a walking tour of Suzdal we see the Suzdal Kremlin, Market square, Alexander monastery, Pokrovsky Monastery and Rizopolozhensky monastery. The highlight of the day is the remarkable Museum of Wooden Architecture which has a reconstruction of an ancient Russian village from Ivan The Terrible's time. This afternoon you can enjoy a traditional Russia banya (sauna) and if you get too hot you can always jump in the river to cool off! **Overnight - Suzdal (B, D)**

Day 7 : Kostroma



Suzdal - Kostroma - Yaroslavl. The next stop on our tour of the Golden Ring is the historic city of Kostroma which sits on the banks of the Volga River. We have a guided tour the city and visit the fairytale land of the Snow Maiden's museum. Here we explore the mansion, learn all about Russian fairy tales and visit the chilly ice-room where you can enjoy ice cocktails at the ice bar. From Kostroma we travel on to Yaroslavl for the night. **Overnight - Yaroslavl (B, L)**

Day 8 : Yaroslavl



Yaroslavl - Moscow. After breakfast today we get to test our artistic skills at a wood painting class in the grounds of one of city's oldest monasteries and you can take your artwork home as a souvenir! Then we explore Yaroslavl, a historic UNESCO-listed city which

sits on the confluence of two rivers and has a skyline crowded with onion-shaped domes and imposing spires. Yaroslavl is the biggest and most modern Golden Ring town that we visit. A tour of the city takes in the Assumption cathedral, the remarkable 16th Century Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, Theatre square and more. We also visit The Residence of Her Majesty the Queen of Maslenitsa, which is an interactive museum with colourful wooden buildings. Maslenitsa (Butter Week) is a Russian folk festival where people eat traditional pancakes called blinis and you'll have the opportunity to sample a tasty blini at the museum.

This afternoon we travel by train back to Moscow, where we spend our final night in the Big Smoke. **Overnight - Moscow (B)**

Day 9 : Moscow

Wednesday. Our tour comes to an end after breakfast today. Hotel check out and make your own way to the airport. (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 Delta Hotel

The 4 star Izmailovo Delta Hotel forms part of the huge Izmailovo Gamma Delta complex, which was built to accommodate guests and participants of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. Offering comfortable guest rooms with modern amenities, the complex also boasts 16 restaurants and bars serving Russian and international cuisine, a SPA, gym and swimming pool, in addition to shops, a bank and post office. Conveniently located with the Partizanskaya Metro Station just 350 yards away, it's a quick 10 minute metro ride to Red Square where you can take in the highlights of the capital. The hotel is also ideally located for souvenir shopping, with the famous Izmailovo Market just a short stroll away.



Stromynka Hotel

The Stromynka Hotel is an ideal base for exploring the picturesque town of Suzdal. This charming, centrally located hotel is just a short stroll away from the historic Suzdal Kremlin and the Pokrovsky and Alexandrovsky Convents. The cosy guest rooms are typical of rural Russia, made of wood and simply furnished. Modern comforts include free WiFi, air conditioning, flat screen TV and a minibar. After a day of sightseeing guests can relax in the lounge or those feeling a little livelier can demonstrate their singing ability at the hotel's karaoke bar.

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Alyosha Popovich Dvor Hotel

The Alyosha Popovich Dvor Hotel is a colourful property whose design was inspired by traditional Russian folk tales. The guest rooms are spacious and equipped with plush furniture and gorgeous fabrics. In the restaurant, guests can feast upon authentic Russian cuisine, which can then be washed down by a pint of fresh beer. When it comes to relaxing, visitors can while away the hours in the onsite sauna or take a dip in the Finnish baths. The hotel is conveniently located in the historical centre of Yaroslavl, just steps from the nearest bus stop.



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

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 and have a minimum group size.

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 Russian Roubles (cash) on the morning of day 2.

- Watch a wonderful Russian ballet in St Petersburg. We offer performances in the Mikhailovsky Theatre or the Royal Hermitage Theatre depending on availability. Prices vary from USD\$100-200

Please note: we cannot reserve ballet tickets in advance and therefore they're subject to availability. Your tour leader will find out how many people wish to book at the welcome meeting, check what seats are available and provide a price. If you have a specific ballet that you'd like to watch or you want to guarantee that's you'll have good seats, we strongly recommend booking tickets yourself online prior to departure.

- 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). The rates are subject to a minimum of 6 participants. From USD\$45

- Experience Moscow by night on a panoramic coach tour and river cruise (minimum of 6 people are required for this trip to run). From USD\$60

- 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\$60

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.

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 will procure for you. We will provide a Letter of Invite for the duration of the tour and any pre or post night's accommodation that you have booked through On The Go Tours. If you book your own pre or post tour accommodation you will need to request a separate Letter Of Invite from the hotel for these nights.

South African passport holders are 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. 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.

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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.

Overnight Trains

Russian Revolution, Route of the Romanovs and The Big Chill 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.

Please note for any train journeys - 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.

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-born 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.

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.

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
- Personal first aid kit (see 'Health precautions')
- Sunglasses and an umbrella
- Swim wear and a towel (for the banya/sauna)

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- 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 Suzdal 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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