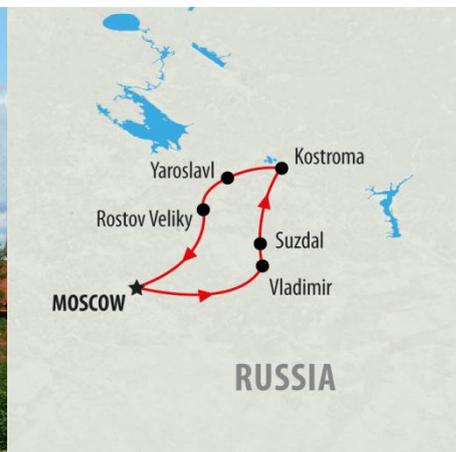


# The Golden Ring

## 7 days | Starts/Ends: Moscow



*Russian history and architecture, famous old cities and towns. The Golden Ring is one of the oldest Russian trade routes. It heads to the north-east of Moscow and forms a circle, exploring Vladimir, Suzdal, Kostroma, Yaroslavl and Rostov Velikiy before returning full circle to Moscow.*

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- Moscow - UNESCO-listed Red Square, Kremlin and Lenin's Mausoleum and St Basil's Cathedral
- Vladimir - ancient golden ring town - Golden Gate, Fort and Assumption Cathedral
- Suzdal - 11th century village - kremlin, UNESCO-listed cathedrals, wood houses and rural surrounds
- Kostroma - Epiphany and St Ipaty Monasteries, Trinity Cathedral and the Volga River
- Yaroslavl - Transfiguration of the Saviour Monastery, St. Nicholas Nadein and Elijah the Prophet church frescoes
- Rostov Veliky - 16th century Assumption Cathedral

#### What's Included

- Airport arrival transfer on day 1 and departure transfer and day 7
- Entrance fees to the museums as per the itinerary
- Professional English speaking guide
- Breakfast daily
- Guided sightseeing to all sights listed
- 6 nights standard, superior or deluxe hotel

#### What's Not Included

- International flights and visa
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow USD\$5 - 10 per day, per traveller. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Day 1 : Moscow

Welcome to Russia's famed historical heartland! Airport arrival transfer, hotel check in and overnight.

#### Overnight - Moscow

#### Day 2 : Red Square

Today enjoy a guided tour of Moscow's most famous sites - in Red Square see the beautiful St. Basil's Cathedral, with its wildly colourful turban shaped domes, wander around the

historic GUM department store and if open, pay your respects to Lenin at the mausoleum. This afternoon explore the grounds of the mighty Kremlin - Russia's powerhouse, visit its gold domed cathedrals, Ivan the Great Bell Tower and the Armoury, where you can see incredible jewels and ancient artifacts.

#### Overnight - Moscow (B)

#### Day 3 : Vladimir and Suzdal



Moscow - Vladimir - Suzdal. Driving onward to Vladimir, the city which gave way to Moscow as Russia's capital. Tour the impressive defensive fort built in 1108, the beautiful Assumption Cathedral with frescoes by the greatest of old Russian painters, Andrei Rubliov and the famous Golden Gate.

This afternoon head to the beautiful, rural Suzdal. Exploring the town mostly on foot, see the enchanting wooden houses, medieval churches and the Assumption Refractory and prison, built on the order of Catherine II, to house those who committed crimes against

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the church. Suzdal is also famed as a place of exile for many Russian ladies of noble birth, including Peter the Great's first wife, Evdokia. **Overnight - Suzdal (B)**

## Day 4 : Kostroma

Suzdal - Kostroma. Today, travel to Kostroma, known as the 'Cradle of the Romanov dynasty', as it was home to first Tsar of the Romanov Dynasty. Take a guided tour of this 12th century town which sits on the banks of the Volga River. Visit the Epiphany and St Ipaty Monasteries, see the frescoes inside the Trinity Cathedral and wander around Susanina Square. **Overnight - Kostroma (B)**

## Day 5 : Yaroslavl



Kostroma - Yaroslavl. This morning drive to Yaroslavl, which was founded by a Kievan prince. The main attraction is the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour - founded in the 12th century, it was one of Russia's richest and most fortified monasteries by the 1500's. Other sights of interest on the tour include the beautiful frescoes in the churches of St. Nicholas Nadein and Elijah the Prophet. **Overnight - Yaroslavl (B)**

## Day 6 : Rostov Veliky

Yaroslavl - Rostov Veliky - Moscow. Today enjoy the sights of the lakeside town of Rostov Veliky. This historic town is rich in ancient architecture, with many monuments dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Dominating the central square is the impressive 16th Century Assumption Cathedral and between the square and the lake is the Kremlin, which has eleven beautifully ornate towers and is home to several elaborately decorated churches and palaces. This afternoon travel onward to Moscow. **Overnight - Moscow (B)**

## Day 7 : Moscow

Your tour concludes after breakfast and onward departure transfer to the airport.(B)

### 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

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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](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.

## 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-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.

## 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

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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)
- 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

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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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