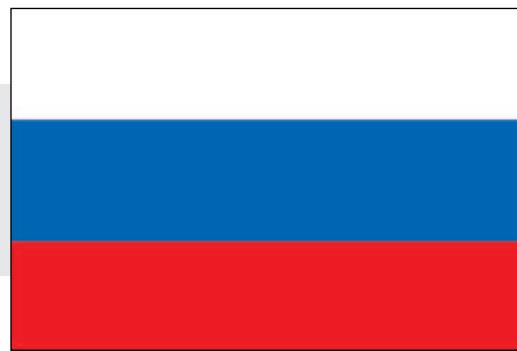


*St. Basil's Cathedral*  
Flickr / Pedro J Pacheco

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## Russian Cultural Orientation



# Russian Cultural Orientation

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*View from St. Isaac's Cathedral*  
Flickr / Ville Miettinen

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## CHAPTER 1

# Profile

## Introduction

Modern Russia is the product of more than five centuries of territorial expansion initiated by the once modest principality of Muscovy. As the Russian Empire grew, it absorbed numerous sizable ethnic groups living on its expanding periphery. Today, more than 190 ethnic groups live in the Russian Federation.<sup>1, 2</sup> Russia is a staggeringly large country, occupying more than one-ninth of the world's total land area.<sup>3</sup>

Russia possesses a wealth of natural resources, but its harsh climate and challenging topography make large portions of it relatively inhospitable to human habitation.<sup>4</sup>



*Emerald city - Moscow Kremlin*  
Flickr / Alexey Kljatov

dropped for others.<sup>10,11</sup> Since 2014, the quality of life has slipped steadily.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Russians continue to adapt to an economy and social structure vastly different from what existed during the Soviet era.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Geography

Russia is the world's largest country. It is more than 17 million sq km (6.6 million sq mi), extending from Eastern Europe across northern Asia to the Pacific Ocean. Russia spans 11 time zones and almost half of the earth's circumference. The section of the country



*Map of Russia*  
Wikimedia / Arciade

Russia has a population of about 142.4 million people, giving it one of the lowest population densities among the major nations of the world.<sup>5,6</sup>

The Russian people have experienced considerable change since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Russian Federation became the successor state, and the country transitioned from a command economy to a more market-based one.<sup>7,8</sup> Initially, the country's standard of living dropped sharply, but it rose in the 2000s.<sup>9</sup> Between 2000 and 2008, the government attempted to achieve stability, control breakaway regions, and install labor, banking, and property reforms. Although many Russians benefited from the newly structured, globalized economy, the quality of life

west of the Ural Mountains is referred to as European Russia, while the eastern Asian regions collectively are known as Siberia.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Russia borders 14 countries. On the coast of the Sea of Japan in the far southeast, Russia shares a short border with North Korea (18 km/11 mi). Moving west, Russia borders northeastern China (4,133 km/2,568 mi) and northern Mongolia (3,452 km/2,145 mi). West of Mongolia, Russia shares another short border with China (46 km/29 mi) and an extensive border with Kazakhstan stretching 7,644 km (4,750 mi) to the northern Caspian Sea. Between the Caspian and Black seas, Russia borders the countries of Azerbaijan (338 km/210 mi) and Georgia (894 km/556 mi). North of the Black Sea and tracking northwest along its western boundary with Europe, Russia abuts Ukraine (1,944 km/1,208 mi), Belarus (1,312 km/815 mi), Latvia (332 km/206 mi), and Estonia (324 km/201 mi). To its northwest, Russia shares borders with Finland (1,309 km/813 mi) and Norway (191 km/119 mi). Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast, an exclave in Eastern Europe, borders Lithuania (261 km/162 mi) and Poland (210 km/131 mi).<sup>19, 20</sup>



*The Lena Pillars*  
Flickr / Maarten Takens

To Russia's north lies the Arctic Ocean and its coastal subdivisions, which include the Barents Sea (in the west), the Kara and Laptev seas (to the north of central Russia), and the East Siberian Sea (in the east). The Chukchi Sea lies off Russia's far northeast, and to the south, the Bering Strait separates Alaska and Russia. South of the strait lies the Bering Sea, which bounds the eastern side of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula and extends into the North Pacific Ocean. On the western side of the Kamchatka Peninsula lies the Sea of Okhotsk. The Sea of Japan lies on Russia's far southeastern coast.<sup>21, 22</sup>

## Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

### Kola Peninsula

Covering roughly 100,000 sq km (38,610 sq mi), the Kola Peninsula lies mostly north of the Arctic Circle in Russia's far northwest. The Barents Sea lies to its north and the White Sea to its south and southeast. Glaciers cover much of the peninsula, and its interior has provided a wealth of ores and minerals. In the north, the land is

*Teriberka,*  
Kola Peninsula  
Flickr / ninara



tundra (Arctic plains with permafrost soil). The entire peninsula receives less than 25 cm (10 in) of rainfall annually, and few plants can survive in the infertile soil and cold climate.<sup>23, 24</sup>

### Russian Plain

Also called the East European Plain, the Russian Plain is relatively flat and low, with an average elevation of 200 m (656 ft). The forces of glaciers, streams, and winds have layered its surface with sedimentary rock. This massive plain extends from the Caspian and Black seas in southern Russia to the Arctic Ocean in the north. In the east, it extends to the base of the Ural Mountains.<sup>25, 26</sup> The Russian Plain is home to several major cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The northern region of the plain contains several lakes and swamps amid an expanse of poorly drained terrain. Farther south, the soil is rich, with agricultural lands receiving irrigation from the Volga and Don rivers.<sup>27, 28</sup> In the southern Russian Plain, the Caspian Lowland surrounds the northern side of the Caspian Sea and extends through both Russian and Kazak territory. As it spans the boundary between Europe and Asia, the Caspian Lowland forms the site of some of both continents' lowest elevations.<sup>29, 30</sup>



Grassland  
Flickr / Artur (RUS) Potosi

### Caucasus Mountains and Ural Mountains

Forming a southern boundary between Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, the Greater Caucasus Mountains extend approximately 1,200 km (746 mi) from the northeastern edge of the Black Sea to the western shore of the Caspian Sea. The Kura River forms a watershed on the eastern side of the range and drains into the Caspian Sea. Several mountains above 4,570 m (15,000 ft) in elevation exist in the northern Caucasus. This includes the extinct volcanic peak known as Mount Elbrus, which stands at an altitude of 5,642 m (18,511 ft) and is Europe's highest peak.<sup>31, 32, 33</sup>



Caucasus Mountain Lake  
Flickr / Ronan Shen hav

The Russian Plain and the European region of Russia end at the Ural Mountains. Spanning north-south across the country, this range extends into the Arctic Ocean in the form of an archipelago known as Novaya Zemlya. The average altitude of the range is approximately 600 m (1,968 ft).<sup>34, 35</sup>

### *West Siberian Plain*

Spanning the vast area between the Arctic Ocean in the north and the central Asian steppes to the south, the West Siberian Plain is the largest region in Russia. It begins east of the Ural Mountains and covers an area of more than 2.6 million sq km (1 million sq mi). Its eastern border is the Yenisey River in central Siberia. Much of the plain is less than 100 m (328 ft) in elevation.

The land is higher and dryer in the south, where the majority of the regional population is located.<sup>36, 37</sup> The North Siberian Lowland extends to the northeast from the West Siberian Plain, separating the Taymyr Peninsula's Byrranga Mountains from the Central Siberian Plateau. The lowland's east-west length is 3,000 km (1,864 mi), and it lies approximately 50–70 m (165–230 ft) above sea level. Swamps intermittently cover this region.<sup>38</sup>



*Yenisei River*  
*Flickr / Olga Filonenko*

### *Central Siberian Plateau*

Extending from the Yenisey River in the west to the Lena River in the east, the Central Siberian Plateau ranges between 300–700 m (984–2,297 ft) in altitude. Erosion from regional rivers has formed deep canyons in the plateau, and complex geologic processes have layered it in unusual ways. Specifically, the plateau consists of a mix of metamorphic, igneous, and sedimentary rock that volcanic



*Putorana Plateau*  
*Flickr / jxandreani*

lava covers in places. The North Siberian Lowland and the Taymyr Peninsula border the plateau on the north, and the volcanic Putoran Mountains, which rise as high as 1,701 m (5,581 ft), border it on the northwest. The Eastern Sayan Mountains border the southern part of the plateau.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup>

### *Taymyr Peninsula*

Located in north central Siberia, the Taymyr Peninsula is the northernmost extension of land in all of Asia and Europe. Its territory covers around 400,000 sq km (154,400 sq mi), with tundra-covered lowlands spreading north and south from the central Byrranga Mountains. The Laptev Sea bounds the peninsula to the latter's east. The Gulf of Yenisey and the Kara Sea lie to the west of the peninsula. To the north lie the Vilkitsky Strait, a string of large islands known as Severnaya Zemlya, and the Arctic Ocean.<sup>42, 43</sup>



*Tundra in Siberia*

*Wikimedia / Dr. Andreas Hugentobler*

### *Mountains of the South and East*

Approximately one-fourth of Russia's landmass consists of an extensive series of high mountain ranges that wrap around the southern and eastern regions of the country. At the western end of this region, the Altai Mountains border eastern Kazakhstan, a small strip of northern China, and the northwestern region of Mongolia. The highest point in this chain is 4,374 m (14,350 ft). Farther east, the Sayan Mountains surround the Tuva Basin and span a segment of the Russian-Mongolian frontier. These mountains are slightly lower in elevation than the Altai Mountains.<sup>44, 45, 46, 47</sup>

Near Lake Baikal in southern Siberia, additional mountain ranges spread to the northeast. The Yablonovy and Stanovoy ranges extend eastward toward the Sea of Okhotsk, dividing the drainage systems of eastern Siberia's longest rivers, the Lena and Amur. At the eastern end of the Stanovoy Range, the Dzhugdzhur Mountains fan northeastward along the shore of the Sea of Okhotsk, eventually merging into the Verkhoyansk Mountains, which rise to heights of 2,389 m (7,838 ft). The Chersky Range lies to the northeast of the Verkhoyansk Range and follows a similar course. At the



*Altai Mountains*  
Flickr / Pavel Kazachkov

that encircles the Pacific. The highest volcano is Klyuchevskaya Sopka, which reaches an elevation of 4,750 m (15,584 ft). Several others rise to more than 3,050 m (10,007 ft) in altitude. Offshore lie the Kuril Islands, which similarly contain a number of active and inactive volcanoes, extending in a chain southward and ending to the immediate northeast of Japan.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup>

## Climate

Russia has a continental climate.<sup>55</sup> The eastern and southern mountains block moderating oceanic influences from the Pacific and Indian oceans. Russia's northern and western frontiers are vulnerable to oceanic influences from the Arctic and Atlantic oceans. Because of these conditions, only two seasons exist in Russia: a long, cold winter and



*Oymyakon in Yakutia*  
Flickr / Maarten Takens

eastern end of these mountain chains lies the Kolyma Range, which extends northeastward. North of these converging mountain ranges lies the Kolyma Lowland, a swampy region that extends north to the East Siberian Sea.<sup>48, 49, 50, 51</sup>

The Kamchatka Peninsula extends southward from the far northeastern region of Russia into the North Pacific Ocean, separating the Sea of Okhotsk from the Bering Sea. The peninsula's two mountain chains include more than 125 volcanoes, 22 of which are active; this region constitutes the northwestern section of the seismic "ring of fire"

a short, mild summer. Spring and fall are short transitional stretches between the two climatic extremes.<sup>56</sup>

Average annual temperatures in most of Russia range from freezing to well below freezing. Excluding Antarctica, the coldest January temperature in the world,  $-71^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-96^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), was recorded at Oymyakon in the eastern mountains of Siberia. On the other hand, in summer, Russia experiences temperatures over  $38^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $100^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summer temperatures are more moderate and vary more according to latitude compared to temperatures in winter, when variations are greater moving west to east rather than north to south. Average July temperatures measure between  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $39^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the northern Arctic islands to  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $68^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) across southern Russia.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup>

In the southern region of western Russia, a steppe climate begins at the Black Sea and extends to the immediate northeast, encompassing the North Caucasian Plain, the southern reaches of the Volga Valley and the Ural Mountains, and southwestern Siberia. Cold and dry winters characterize this climate. In the central region of western Russia, a continental climate extends from the Baltic and Black seas to the Ural Mountains. The climate in this zone is temperate and less harsh than in the colder regions.<sup>60, 61, 62</sup>

In northern Russia, a subarctic climate zone stretches east from Saint Petersburg, across the Urals, and over most of Siberia. Farther north, a tundra climate zone spans the Arctic coast from west to east, reaching into eastern Siberia. Dry and extremely cold winters, interrupted by a short summer, characterize this climate. Extreme polar desert conditions characterize the Arctic islands.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup>

## Rivers and Lakes

Russia has some of the longest rivers in the world. Although some of them serve as important transportation networks, blocks of ice obstruct many of them for extended periods of the year. Many of the country's rivers and waterways provide hydroelectric power and irrigation waters. Many of its coastal waters and river deltas are icebound for most or all of the year.<sup>66, 67, 68</sup>



Tatarstan  
Flickr / Thomas Depenbusch

## Volga and Don Rivers

The Volga is the longest river in Europe, but only the fourth-longest in Russia.<sup>69</sup> It originates in the hills that lie to the northwest of Moscow. The Volga drains much of the East European Plain, winding 3,530 km (2,193 mi) toward the Caspian Sea in the south, where it empties. The Volga has two main tributaries, the Kama and Oka rivers, and several linking canals. The entire Volga system carries two-thirds of the nation's riverine traffic.<sup>70, 71, 72</sup>



*Volga-Don Canal riverbank  
Flickr / michael clarke stuff*

Beginning southeast of Moscow, the Don River flows 1,870 km (1,162 mi) on its course across the southwestern region of European Russia. It empties into the Sea of Azov, a northeastern extension of the Black Sea. At Volgograd, the Don River links to the Volga River through the Volga-Don Canal, which is 100 km (63 mi) in length. Much of the Don River is frozen during the winter and extremely shallow in late summer.<sup>73, 74</sup>

## Ob and Irtysh Rivers

The Ob River and its tributary, the Irtysh River, form the largest river system in Asia. Measuring a combined length of 5,410 km (3,362 mi), the Ob and the Irtysh drain the West Siberian Plain as they flow to the northwest from their respective sources in the Altai Mountains. These rivers converge in central Russia, flowing north as the Ob River and emptying into the Arctic Ocean. Before it enters Russia, the Irtysh River passes through northeastern Kazakhstan from its source in northwestern China. For a portion of the year, ice blocks both rivers.<sup>75</sup>



*Tolmachevo, Novosibirsk  
Flickr / Alex Polezhaev*

## *Yenisey and Lena Rivers*

Located on the eastern edge of the West Siberian Plain, the Yenisey River runs north from its headwaters in the eastern Sayan Mountains. It follows a course along the western edge of the Central Siberian Plateau and empties into the Arctic Ocean's Kara Sea. In terms of volume, the Yenisey is the sixth-largest river in the world, carrying more water than any other Russian river system.<sup>76, 77, 78</sup>

The world's tenth-longest river, the Lena River originates in southern Siberia near Lake Baikal. It runs northeast before curving north on the western side of the Verkhoyansk Range, thus separating Russia's eastern mountain territory from the Central Siberian Plateau. It empties into the Arctic Ocean at the Laptev Sea, with a drainage area that covers approximately 2,490,000 sq km (961,000 sq mi). For most of its length, ice blocks the river for at least half of the year.<sup>79, 80</sup>



*Lena River near Yakutsk*  
Flickr / James St. John

## *Lake Baikal*

Formed approximately 20–25 million years ago, Lake Baikal is the world's deepest lake—1,620 m (5,315 ft)—and oldest freshwater lake. Averaging 48 km (30 mi) wide,



the lake is 636 km (395 mi) long and covers an area of roughly 31,500 sq km (12,200 sq mi). More than 330 streams and rivers flow into the lake, which holds about one-fifth of the total fresh water on the Earth's surface. Mountains that rise steeply from its western shores to heights of more than 2,560 m (8,400 ft) above sea level surround the lake. Several hot mineral springs are located in the area, which is prone to earthquakes. Lake Baikal, once famed for its crystal-clear waters, and nearby forests have been seriously polluted by industrial activity on the lake's shores.<sup>81, 82, 83, 84</sup>

*Three Sons Rocks, Olkhon Island*  
Flickr / amanderson2

## Major Cities

### Moscow

Situated in the west, Moscow is the nation's capital and largest city, with a population of 10.4 million.<sup>85</sup> Moscow is the country's political, economic, industrial, scientific, educational, and cultural center. Czars used Moscow as their command base until 1712, when Saint Petersburg became



*Night Kremlin and Big Stone Bridge*  
Flickr / Axel Axel



*St. Basil and the Kremlin Moscow*  
Flickr / Mariano Mantel

the nation's capital. Moscow became an important metallurgical and textile center and a center for the Russian labor movement. In 1918, the capital was transferred back to Moscow, and between 1922 and 1991, the city served as capital of the Soviet Union.<sup>86, 87</sup>

Moscow is home to Moscow State University and more than 270 other institutions of higher education. The city houses the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian State Library. Moscow's cultural institutions include the Bolshoi Theater and Ballet, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, and several monasteries. Public gardens and parks occupy 30% of the city's land, including Gorky Park near the Moscow River, which houses the Moscow Zoo and Botanical Gardens.<sup>88, 89</sup>

### Saint Petersburg

Saint Petersburg (known as Leningrad from 1924–1991) is Russia's largest seaport and second-largest city, with 5 million residents. Occupying both banks of the Neva River and several of its islands, the city is located northwest of Moscow on the Gulf of Finland. During the winter, icebreakers keep its harbor open for shipping. The city is intersected with delta waterways, and more than 300 bridges connect its various parts. Between 1 June and 2 July, the city experiences nearly 19 hours of daylight.<sup>90, 91</sup>

Between 1712 and 1918, Saint Petersburg was Russia's capital, and it remains one of the nation's major cultural, industrial, and scientific centers. The city was the site of two historic revolutions in 1917, the first overthrowing the monarchy and the second

installing the Bolsheviks. Saint Petersburg is known as Russia's most European city because it contains lavishly built cathedrals, palaces, libraries, and universities. A center of theater, music, and dance, Saint Petersburg is home to the famed Mariinsky Opera and Ballet Theater. The city inspired such Russian authors as Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, and Gogol. The Hermitage is one of the world's most famous museums. Inside the Peter and Paul Cathedral lie the tombs of the czars who ruled Russia until the 20th century.<sup>92, 93</sup>



*Saint Petersburg*  
*Flickr / commart*

### *Novosibirsk*

Novosibirsk, originally named Novonikolaevsk, lies in south central Russia on the banks of the Ob River. Russia's third-largest city, Novosibirsk began as a small settlement

where a Trans-Siberian Railroad bridge was built on the Ob River. From its beginnings as a transportation hub, Novonikolaevsk grew to become a commercial and industrial center. It was one of the first Russian cities to accept the compulsory primary education system implemented in 1913.<sup>94, 95</sup> Russia's civil war tore Novonikolaevsk apart between 1917 and 1919, when both the Red and White armies struggled to control the city. Fighting was intense, resulting in substantial casualties and infrastructural damage, including the destruction of the Ob River bridge. After Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921, the city began to revive. It was renamed Novosibirsk in 1926, and under Stalin's economic policies, it became one of Siberia's largest industrial centers. As post-Soviet Russia adopted new policies in the 1990s, the city became a gateway into the Siberian market.<sup>96, 97</sup>



*Novosibirsk*  
*Flickr / Maks Tropnikov*

## *Nizhniy Novgorod*

Located east of Moscow on the banks of the Volga River at its confluence with the Oka River, Nizhniy Novgorod (formerly Gorky) is Russia's fifth-largest city.<sup>98</sup> The city emerged in 1221 as a military fortress to defend against invading tribes. Its strategic location made it an important trading hub, where traders exchanged fish, salt, and goods from the Orient. It was a center of Orthodox religion.<sup>99, 100</sup> In the 18th century, Nizhniy Novgorod developed into a regional administrative center with medical facilities and cultural institutions including theaters, schools, and a printing press. Novelist Maxim Gorky was born in the city, and many Russians known for their contributions to the sciences and arts lived there. The city is the home of the annual Makaryev Fair, which attracts travelers from all over the world.<sup>101, 102</sup> During the Soviet era, Nizhniy Novgorod became a base for military production and research. Today, the city remains a center for industrial activity.<sup>103, 104, 105, 106</sup>



*Novgorod*

*Flickr / Victoria Vasilieva*

## *Yekaterinburg*

Located in central Russia on the eastern side of the Ural Mountains, Yekaterinburg was founded in 1723 by Peter the Great, who named it after his wife, Empress Catherine I. The city grew into an industrial center, which it remains today. The city's most significant industries include steelmaking, timber processing, pulp and paper production, and chemicals.<sup>107</sup> Yekaterinburg is a center for research, with particular focus on industry. The largest local research facility is the Urals Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and its 18 institutes.<sup>108</sup> Yekaterinburg was the site of the 1918 assassination of Russia's last czar, Nicholas II,



*Yekaterinburg*

*Flickr / Paweł Maryanow*

and his family by Bolsheviks of the newly formed Soviet government. The event occurred in the basement of the Ipatiev House, which authorities later tore down and replaced with a church known as the Cathedral-on-the-Blood. Today, the church is a site of pilgrimage.<sup>109</sup>

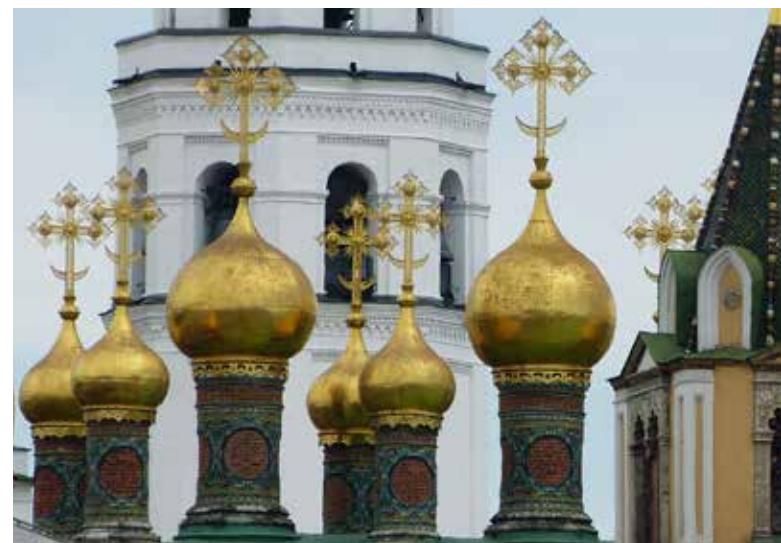
## History

### Early History



Vladimir I, ruler of  
Kievan Rus  
Wikimedia / Unknown

Although people have inhabited the territory that makes up modern-day Russia since Paleolithic times, the modern Russian state can only be directly traced back to the ninth century C.E. Kievan Rus, founded in Kiev (now in Ukraine). Kievan Rus ruled from the 10th to the 12th centuries. Before this time, many distinct tribes had occupied the western region of Russia. During the Kievan Rus era, the ruler Vladimir I instituted Christianity as the state religion, thereby providing the foundation for the later development of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tied to Kievan Rus through the practice of Christianity, Byzantine culture became influential in Russia during this time. Specifically, Byzantine forms appeared and endured not only in the church but also in Russian architecture, art, and music, as well as in other arenas of Russian culture.<sup>110, 111, 112</sup>



Golden Domes - Moscow Kremlin  
Flickr / Mariano Mantel

### Middle History

A series of Mongolian invasions in the 13th century contributed to the decline of Kievan Rus, which internal strife had already begun to fracture. During the period of Mongolian control and occupation, the principality of Muscovy (later Moscow) rose as a regional power, ultimately consolidating the area that now constitutes European Russia. Muscovy produced a series of powerful leaders, including Ivan III (1462–1505), also known as Ivan the Great, who expanded the empire and adopted the title of czar.<sup>113</sup> Following Ivan III and his son, Vasily III, the notorious Ivan IV (1533–1584), also known as Ivan the Terrible, assumed the throne. Muscovy experienced a period of continued territorial expansion and internal strife as Ivan IV consolidated power through brutal methods of conquest and control. In 1613, after the reign of Boris

Godunov and the subsequent Time of Troubles, the Romanov dynasty began, lasting more than 300 years, until the 1917 revolution.<sup>114, 115</sup>

During his rule from 1682–1725, Romanov ruler Peter the Great used Western models to modernize the Russian state, including its military, government, and education systems.<sup>116</sup> The profound changes made by Peter the

Great created a rivalry between the forces of Western reform and nationalist tendencies tied to Slavic identity and tradition. This dichotomy has endured throughout Russia's history, frequently appearing in the country's literature and political thought.<sup>117, 118, 119</sup>



*The Tsar's Front Porch*  
*Flickr / Woody Hibbard*

### *Russia as a European Power*

Building upon the successes of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great (reigning from 1762–1796) transformed Russia into a European power. She further expanded the empire by incorporating the territories of Ukraine, Crimea, and a section of Poland. Catherine's policies favored the nobility, and she was an ardent supporter of the arts and education, particularly in regard to European tastes. Catherine engineered a mass relocation of Jewish peoples in Russia, placing them in a region called the Pale of Settlement, where they were later brutally attacked in pogroms.<sup>120</sup>

The 19th and early 20th centuries brought momentous change to Russia. Under the rule of Alexander I (1801–1825), the government instituted a variety of reforms, but the czar later reversed these reforms as he grew more conservative after his defeat of Napoleon in 1812. In the years following the reign of Alexander I, Russia continued its expansion, incorporating regions of Central Asia, Siberia, and the Caucasus. Some developments from this period signaled positive change, such as the opening of the Pacific port of Vladivostok in 1860 and the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Russian culture made its mark on history during this period. Literary giants such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Pushkin gained international fame, and a number of other artists, musicians, and literary figures made significant contributions to Russian and world culture.<sup>121</sup>



*Alexander I*  
*Flickr / Internet Archive Book Images*

But in other ways Russia could not compete with the West. The nation's economy lacked an industrial base and unemployment increased as cities grew. As part of a series of reforms, Czar Alexander II (1855–1881) emancipated the serfs (indentured peasants). Revolutionaries assassinated Alexander II in 1881 and his successor, Alexander III, reinstated reactionary policies that allied the czarist government with the nobility. The freed serfs continued to live in impoverished conditions, and riots against the government were common through the turn of the century.<sup>122, 123</sup>

### *Revolution in Russia*

Under Czar Alexander III, the government enacted a number of counterreforms in a failed effort to control the restive population. The government monitored the press, prohibited peasant and working-class children from attending secondary school, banned the political activity of university students, and imprisoned or exiled dissenters. After Japan defeated Russia in the unpopular Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the czarist government began its steep decline, brought about in part by the actions of members of the disaffected working class, peasants, and the educated middle class. Nicholas II, son of Alexander III, was to be the last czar.<sup>124</sup>



*Czar Nicholas II*  
Flickr / Museum of Photographic Arts

The first revolution occurred during the Russo-Japanese War, and widespread strikes followed. In 1905, Czar Nicholas II (1894–1917) was forced to install a constitution and a democratic governing body (known as the Duma), as well as some minor governmental reforms. At the same time, his government suppressed the rebellion and channeled people's anger into pogroms against the Jewish population.<sup>125, 126</sup>

World War I, which the Russian government entered to avoid German domination, signaled the end of the Russian monarchy. Although Russian landowners and nobility supported the war, the majority of peasants and working-class Russians saw it as simply another hardship. The Russian war effort thus split along class lines as internal dissent against the czar, corruption in the nobility, and widespread poverty

reached a critical point. In 1917, revolution broke out in Saint Petersburg. The army mutinied, and Duma leaders forced Nicholas II to step down. Later that year, the Bolshevik Red Army (communists) seized power and installed a Soviet government. Known as the Whites, counterrevolutionary forces fought against the newly formed communist government, spawning the Russian Civil War. The Bolsheviks won the civil war, and led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, they formed the Soviet Union in 1922.<sup>127, 128</sup>

### *The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.)*

After Lenin died in 1924, Josef Stalin became General Secretary of the Communist Party and oversaw the nation until his death in 1953. As dictator, Stalin ruled Russia with



*Stalin Monument*  
*Flickr / Jon's pics*

complete authority, controlling all aspects of the country's domestic and foreign policy. Under his rule, millions of Russians died in political purges, in famines created by the state, and in forced coercion into huge industrial and agricultural collectives. Stalin sent millions of people, including ethnic minorities, writers, scientists, army and party officials, and anyone whom he perceived as an enemy, to Siberia to live in *gulags*, or prison camps.<sup>129, 130</sup>

Although initially allied with Russia, the Axis powers attacked the U.S.S.R. in 1941, and the country entered World War II on the side of the Allies, losing more

than 20 million people in the sustained conflict. After the war ended, the U.S.S.R. joined the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member.<sup>131, 132, 133</sup>

Subsequent Soviet leaders included Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, with Mikhail Gorbachev becoming the last Secretary General of Russia's Communist Party. Gorbachev tried to reform the Soviet Union, implementing policies such as *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). But the Soviet system was too unwieldy to be reformed and it collapsed in 1991, accompanied by Gorbachev's resignation as president. Authorities held free elections, and in 1991 Boris Yeltsin became the Russian Federation's first president. In the same year, Russia and most of the former Soviet Republics reconstituted themselves as the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose confederation of independent countries.<sup>134, 135, 136</sup>

### *The Russian Federation*

During the 1990s, the newly formed Russian Federation had to negotiate new alliances as well as manage internal dissent. The Yeltsin government adopted a pro-American foreign policy, which drew opposition from some groups, and it drafted a new constitution, which voters approved. The public also elected a new parliament, which carried representation from a variety of political parties. In subsequent years, the government strongly opposed the incorporation of Russia's former satellites into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had previously served as an alliance against the Soviet state. In Russia, there was also a general sentiment that the country



*Government Building of the Russian Federation*  
Flickr / wgossett

remained underrepresented in Europe's political bloc. To extend its reach, Russia renewed its alliances with China and a few Middle Eastern countries, while remaining committed to international trade and the global economy.<sup>137, 138, 139</sup>

Elected in 2000, Vladimir Putin became Russia's next president, and he rapidly strengthened the central government, asserting dominance over potential separatist republics. Internally, Putin reformed and stabilized the economy. After 11 September 2001, Russia's ties with the United States once again strengthened, resulting in the formation of the NATO-Russian Council in 2002.<sup>140</sup>

### 2000-2012

The Russian people have seen their nation's international influence fluctuate since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia occupies a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and it gained a voice in NATO. For several years, Russia worked to develop stronger diplomatic relationships and cultural exchanges with the European Union (EU), the United States, and Asian countries. The country's trade sector became stronger as its economy expanded, but the global financial crisis that began in 2008 hit the economy hard. Militarily, the country has made efforts to develop a more mobile and professional army, but progress has been limited. Still, Russia's military leaders remain committed to a large nuclear force for self-defense.<sup>141, 142, 143</sup>

Relations between Russia, the European Union, and the United States worsened in 2008 when Russia entered into an armed conflict in Georgia. Russia supported the separatist movements in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's intervention on the side of South Ossetia took the fight deep into Georgian territory.<sup>144</sup> Following Russia's recognition of the breakaway republics, relations deteriorated further between Russia and the



*Russian Navy ship commander*  
Flickr / Joint Force Command Lisbon Office of the Public Affairs Advisor

United States.<sup>145, 146</sup> Relations warmed some when Dmitry Medvedev assumed the presidency in 2009. Cooperation on important strategic issues, including nuclear arms, increased.<sup>147</sup> But relations chilled once again when Vladimir Putin, elected to a third (nonconsecutive) term, became president in 2012. Putin's support of the al-Assad regime in Syria has stymied international efforts to quell the violence and end the civil war in that country.<sup>148, 149</sup>

### Recent Events

Relations with the West fell to their lowest point in April 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea, an autonomous region of Ukraine.<sup>150</sup> Following the annexation, Russian troops remained in Ukraine. By October 2015, a fragile cease-fire was in place but there was

no sign that the thousands of Russia troops would withdraw anytime soon.<sup>151, 152, 153</sup> Russia also became more firmly embroiled in the Syrian crisis in the fall of 2015. Russia sent military hardware to bolster the al-Assad regime, and Russian missiles coming from ships based in the Black Sea hit Syrian targets. Russian aircraft have also carried out bombing campaigns throughout the nation. Russia appears to be building an airbase near Latakia, Syria, but it is not clear whether Soviet ground troops will join the conflict.<sup>154</sup>

By October 2015, Russia's economy was reeling from the effects of low oil prices and international economic sanctions imposed after the invasion of Crimea.

The country is in recession. Ordinary Russians are struggling to make ends meet and nearly one in seven now lives in poverty.<sup>155, 156, 157</sup> Nevertheless, Putin's

support remains high. It is not clear how long he will be able to hold on to his high polling numbers. Scheduled parliamentary elections in 2016 may show some rifts.<sup>158, 159, 160, 161</sup>

## Government

Russia is a federal republic with most powers vested in the president, who has broad authority to issue decrees with the force of law. The president appoints the nation's ministers, including the prime minister. Voters elect presidents for a 6-year term and may reelect them to a second term. In an unprecedented move, Vladimir Putin, who had already served two terms as president, was elected to a third (nonconsecutive) term and is eligible to run for a fourth term. After Putin's second term in office, Dmitry Medvedev served one term before deciding not to run again.<sup>162, 163</sup>



*Vladimir Putin*  
*Flickr / Global Panorama*

The legislature consists of the more powerful State Duma (the lower house) and the Federation Council (the upper house). Using a popular vote according to a proportional representation scheme, Russians elect all 450 deputies of the State Duma to 5-year terms. In order to be eligible, candidates must receive at least 7% of the vote. The Federation

Council, Russia's upper legislative house, has 2 senators from each of the nation's 83 regional districts. Provincial legislatures elect one senator and the provincial governor nominates the second, whom the regional legislature must confirm.<sup>164, 165, 166</sup>

The Russian judicial branch comprises the Constitutional Court, military courts, arbitration courts, and courts of general jurisdiction. The Constitutional Court rules on disputes between the executive and legislative branches as well as between the federal and local governments. The court also has jurisdiction over constitutional issues, impeachment proceedings against presidents, and appeals from lower courts. Attempts in recent years to increase the autonomy of the judiciary have not been entirely successful. Many sitting judges view their role as one of protecting the interests of the state.<sup>167</sup>

## Media

Russia has a history of suppressing free speech and freedom in the media. The nation received a "not free" rating from both Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, which also ranked the country 152nd out of 180 countries.<sup>168, 169</sup> During Putin's first two terms as president, media freedom was severely restricted and the independent media declined. The situation improved somewhat under



*Interview at location of Boris Nemtsov's murder*  
*Flickr / Morten F*

Medvedev, but his departure and Putin's reelection have again created pressure on the media to toe the state line and avoid criticizing the government.<sup>170</sup> Observers list Russia as a country of concern because of the frequent prosecution of independent journalists as well as frequent harassment.<sup>171</sup> The state controls, formally or informally, most of the media outlets. The major TV networks remain closely monitored by the government, but a growing number of independent newspaper and radio stations provide opportunities for the public to receive less censored information.<sup>172</sup>

The internet is presently less restricted and remains uncensored, but media users have an uphill struggle against the authorities.<sup>173, 174</sup> Government authorities have the right to block unacceptable content, which can include topics related to religion and ethnicity, as well as sites critical of the government. Bloggers have been under pressure to monitor their content, and some bloggers have received prison sentences or suffered physical attacks. These actions have prompted Reporters Without Borders to place Russia on its "enemies of the internet" watch list.<sup>175, 176</sup>

Although there have been a number of documented attacks against and murders of independent journalists since 2000, the frequency has slowed since 2010. The government has allowed some opposition views to be expressed on TV. But Putin's response to media coverage of the protests following his election in 2012 has created suspicions that controls on the media may tighten again during his new presidential term.<sup>177, 178</sup>

## Economy

Since 1999, Russia's economy has become more market-based and experienced significant growth, due largely to increased oil and gas production.<sup>179</sup> The economic sector remains dominated by 100–200 large corporations, mostly in the energy and natural resource sector, but there has been a shift toward the service sector in recent years. Small- and medium-sized enterprises play only a small role in the nation's economy.<sup>180, 181, 182</sup>



*Oil field*  
Flickr / Heating Oil

Improvements in the overall standard of living have brought Russians to a level comparable to that in most European nations, although nearly 16% of the population lives below the poverty line. But disparities between the rich and poor remain one of the nation's most serious issues.<sup>183, 184</sup> The ranks of the middle class have plummeted, and since 2014 the standard of living has fallen steadily.<sup>185, 186, 187, 188, 189</sup> Unemployment is approximately 5.8%, but among those aged 15–24, the rate soars to 15%.<sup>190, 191, 192, 193</sup> The country's highest rates of unemployment are in the North Caucasus: Ingushetia (23%) and Chechnya (17.7%). In the country's two major cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, unemployment is negligible (1.5% and 1.6%, respectively).<sup>194</sup>

There are serious challenges for sustaining a strong economy. Russia's population is aging and the nation's low birthrate portends a shortage of workers to fill positions, threatening economic growth unless the trend reverses.<sup>195, 196</sup> Another weakness in the economy includes the slow growth in the manufacturing sector. Low oil prices continue to plague the economy. Inflationary pressures are mounting. Sanctions could continue to take a bite out of the recovery efforts.<sup>197, 198, 199, 200</sup>

## Ethnic Groups

More than 190 ethnic groups make up the Russian population. Except for ethnic Russians, who represent 78% of the population, no group makes up more than 4% of the population.<sup>201, 202, 203</sup> Ethnic Russians, who originated from the East Slavs, are spread throughout the country. Approximately three-quarters of Russians identify themselves as Orthodox Christians.<sup>204, 205, 206</sup> Ukrainians, about 1.4% of the population, have strong historical and cultural ties with the Russians.<sup>207</sup> Like the Russians, Ukrainians are overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian. They are concentrated in Russia's southwestern border region but also live throughout the country.<sup>208, 209, 210</sup>

Constituting approximately 3.7% of Russia's population, the Tatars live primarily in western Russia, in the Volga River and Ural Mountain regions, and are descended from the early Mongol invaders.<sup>211, 212</sup> The Tatar people are predominantly followers of Sunni Islam.<sup>213</sup> They have an uneasy relationship with Moscow, based on a long history of Russian oppression. During Stalin's purges, nearly half of the population died from starvation. Tatar society is close-knit with clear leadership, which some see as a political threat to Moscow's rule.<sup>214, 215</sup>



*Russian Orthodox Christian Clergy and Nuns*  
Flickr / Mariano Mantel

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# Overview

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## Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Russia constitutes over one-ninth of the earth's total land area, making it the world's largest country.

**TRUE**

Russia extends over more than one-ninth of the world's total land area.

With more than 17 million sq km (6.5 million sq mi) of territory, Russia is the largest country in the world.

2. Several of Russia's major cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg, are located on the Russian Plain in the European region of the country.

**TRUE**

Extending over most of European Russia, the Russian Plain is home to several of the nation's major cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

3. Russia has four distinct seasons.

**FALSE**

Only two seasons exist in Russia: a long, cold winter and a short, mild summer. Spring and fall are short transitional stretches between the two climate extremes.

4. The Russian people directly elect all members of the Russian legislature.

**FALSE**

Although members of the lower house are elected by popular vote, provincial legislatures elect half of the members of the upper house. Provincial governors nominate the other half, whom the regional legislatures must confirm.

5. Because Russia is home to more than 190 ethnic groups, ethnic Russians now form less than half of the country's total population.

**FALSE**

Although there are numerous ethnic groups in Russia, ethnic Russians make up the majority (nearly 80%) of the country's population.



## CHAPTER 2

*The Pantocrator*  
Flickr / Mariano Mantel

# Religion

## Introduction

Russian Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion in the Russian Federation. Christianity came to Russia from Byzantium in the 10th century C.E. when missionaries converted Prince Vladimir I. As the leader of Kievan Rus, Vladimir I designated Christianity as the official state religion, and for the next 1,000 years the Russian Orthodox Church dominated the religious landscape. Russia's religious climate changed dramatically in 1917, when the Bolsheviks took power. As atheistic communists, the Bolsheviks opposed organized religion, and they instituted restrictive measures against its practice. Although the Russian Orthodox Church experienced a brief revival



*Temple: Our Lady of Kazan*  
Flickr / Andrey

during World War II, it was not until the 1980s, when the Gorbachev regime took power, that the government restored tolerance for religious worship. After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, religious practice once again became a visible and openly accepted part of life.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

Islam is Russia's second-largest religion and one of several legally recognized religions or alternative belief systems. In 1997, the Russian government officially recognized Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.<sup>4, 5</sup> Many practitioners synthesize aspects of these faiths with elements of ancient or folk religions, such as animism, shamanism, astrology, witchcraft, and New Age views. Of the many Russian people who identify themselves as religious, a large percentage do not participate in the

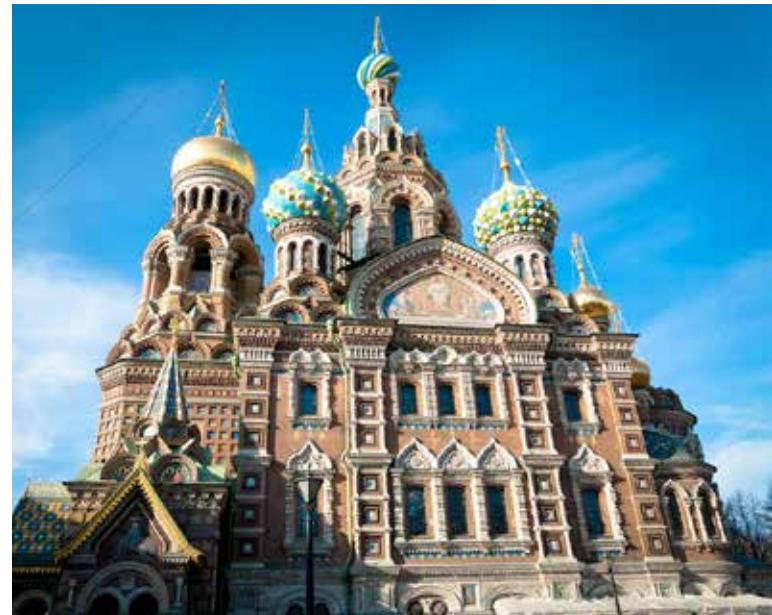
religion they profess.<sup>6, 7</sup> Many Russians are nonreligious or prefer to remain unaffiliated with any organized church or belief system.<sup>8</sup>

The Russian constitution provides for freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the legal equality of different religions. But a law passed in 1997 requires a religion to be established for 15 years before it can be officially registered and sanctioned in the country. This has prevented several other organized belief systems from operating in Russia. Overall, despite the constitution's legal protections, many minority religious groups continue to face discrimination or persecution, with limited prosecution of those who discriminate.<sup>9</sup>

## Major Religions in Russia

After 70 years of Soviet rule, most Russians claim no religion or are nonpracticing believers. Between 15% and 20% of the population belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, the nation's largest Christian denomination, and between 10% and 15% are adherents of Islam.<sup>10</sup> Russia was once home to a significant number of Jews, but most have emigrated or assimilated into the larger culture, leaving fewer than 235,000 Jews in the country, most of whom live in Moscow.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

*Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood, St. Petersburg*  
Flickr / Joaquim Rendeiro



## Christianity

The Russian Orthodox Church originated from Byzantine Christianity of the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

For centuries, the Christian Church had two main centers: Rome and Constantinople. In the 11th century, differing viewpoints regarding the nature of Christ drove a wedge between the two. By 1054, the Roman and Eastern churches had split, resulting in the formation of the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

Like other Christian faiths, the Russian Orthodox (“right believing”) Church believes in the Holy Trinity and in the distinct but inseparable divine and human natures of Jesus. The Church recognizes a number of saints, including Mary, the mother of Jesus.<sup>16, 17</sup> The veneration of icons and the inclusion of mystical forms of prayer are central features of Orthodox practices. The Church has a strong monastic tradition, which means that, ideally, both lay people and monks should fulfill the same requirements, living their lives according to the teachings of Christ.<sup>18, 19, 20</sup>

For many people throughout the country, the Russian Orthodox Church represents Russian history and culture.<sup>21</sup> Although the Orthodox Church has not regained the strong role it had prior to communism, the Church has a growing political presence, and the state has adopted Orthodox Christmas as an official holiday.<sup>22, 23</sup>

Russians belong to a number of other Christian denominations, including Roman Catholicism and various Protestant denominations. The government initially excluded some of these in the 1997 law that approved some religions and restricted others because of their practices and history in Russia. But since the passage of the law, many Protestant churches have gained full status, and the Catholic Church has established a presence in some areas of Russia. Additional Christian denominations include the Old Believers (who split from the Orthodox Church centuries ago), Baptists, and Evangelicals.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup> But authorities do not allow unrecognized churches to distribute religious materials or operate religious schools.<sup>27, 28</sup>



*Christ at St. Isaac's Cathedral*  
Flickr / brando.n

## *Islam*

Russia's earliest converts to Islam were the Dagestanis who converted around the middle of the seventh century. In the 15th century, the Russian Empire expanded into traditionally Muslim regions, particularly those of the fallen Mongol Empire.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup>



*Mosque in Saint Petersburg*  
Flickr / Christophe Chenevier

Today, Islam is Russia's second-largest religion. Russia's Muslims are concentrated in ethnic republics such as Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, in western Russia's Volga River region. Moscow is Europe's largest Muslim city.<sup>32, 33, 34</sup> Although scholars identify the majority of Russia's Muslims as members of the Sunni sect, Muslims themselves have a different view; 30% of Russia's Muslims identify themselves as Sunni and 6% as Shi'a. A large number (45%) say they are "just a Muslim," with no preference for one sect over the other.<sup>35</sup>

Islam is a monotheistic religion, which means its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term *islam*

means "to submit" or "to surrender." So a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.<sup>36</sup> Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Allah's message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of their sect, Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam, which are the essential obligations of the Muslim faith. The first of these is the *shahada*, the declaration of faith that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is God's messenger." The *salat* is the requirement to pray five times a day. *Sawm* is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. *Zakat* is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the *hajj*, which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.<sup>38</sup>

### Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. Treat Islam's holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.)

Qurans must always be kept out of latrines.<sup>39</sup> Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.<sup>40, 41</sup>



*The Quran*  
Flickr / Themepplus

### Religion and the Russian Government

Russia is a secular state with a constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion and equality of all religions. Although Russians generally respect rights relating to freedom of religion, members of religious minorities often face restrictions and discrimination. In addition, the state often violates constitutional guarantees of equality of all religions.<sup>42</sup> The state continues to exercise some measure of control over Russia's churches. During the Soviet era, the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church established a collaborative relationship with the KGB and the Kremlin. The ongoing repercussions of this relationship have caused tension between detractors and advocates of Russia's current church-state relationship, which is relatively close.<sup>43, 44</sup> In recent years, the two institutions have sought mutual support, with the Russian government embracing the Orthodox Church as an essential element of Russian identity, values, and culture. The Russian Orthodox Church, of which President Putin is a member, enjoys a special relationship with government officials, which gives it greater access to a number of public institutions, including schools and hospitals.<sup>45, 46, 47, 48, 49</sup>



*Government meeting*  
Flickr / Namecoin

In 2002, the country passed a law designed to counter extremist activities. Authorities can charge individuals or groups with extremism, ban publications, and imprison or fine those who disseminate materials promulgating extremist positions. The government has banned a number of extremist Islamic religious organizations. The Ministry of Justice also oversees religious curriculum to guard against religious extremism. Under a recent change in the law, extremism is now defined in a religious context and the threat or use of violence is no longer essential to bring about charges.<sup>50</sup>

## Religion and Daily Life

Observers have historically considered Russians a religious people, and religion was once evident in virtually every aspect of daily life. When Russian Christians went to church on Sundays, it was to pray rather than to socialize, and they often went alone. Russians have no tradition of Sunday church attendance as a form of social outing, and few Russians regularly attend church services.<sup>51, 52</sup>

Although there has been a resurgence of religious beliefs in Russia, an accompanying growth in church attendance has not occurred. Most Russians continue to live relatively secular lives.<sup>53</sup> Despite low rates of church attendance, evidence of the impact of religion on daily life is clear. The characteristic Russian attitudes of fatalism and passivity are rooted in religion. Russians appear willing to endure the hardships and trials of daily life in exchange for a better life in the afterlife.<sup>54, 55, 56</sup> The main Christian holiday is Easter, rather than Christmas, because it celebrates the triumph of life over death. Another sign of deep-seated religious orientation is the view that life is short, and the accumulation of material goods is less important than maintaining spiritual balance.<sup>57, 58</sup>

Elements of many of Russia's pagan traditions are also evident. Some of the largest pagan festivals merged into Christian celebrations. For example, the pagan summer fest melded into Christian Whitsunday celebrations, in which worshippers decorate churches with

birch branches and make wishes. "Parents' Saturdays" are a remnant of ancestor worship, and Russian funerals are often reminiscent of pagan funeral traditions. The growing popularity of fortune-tellers and faith healers can also be attributed to a deep and abiding religious tradition.<sup>59, 60, 61, 62</sup>

Among the Muslim population, conservative dress codes, including the wearing of the hijab, are becoming more popular.<sup>63</sup> In Chechnya, authorities have barred women without hijabs from entering state buildings, which violates Russian law separating religion from the state. Because of separatist violence there, Russian officials have granted leeway to the president.<sup>64</sup> Muslims celebrate traditional religious holidays and fast during the holy month of Ramadan.<sup>65</sup>

*A religion procession*  
Flickr / Yuri Timofeyev



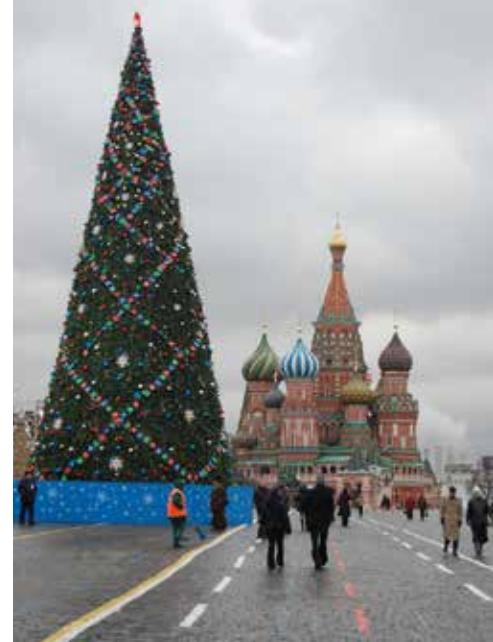
## Religious Events and Holidays

Russians celebrate a variety of holidays, but only Orthodox Christmas is observed as a national religious holiday.<sup>66</sup> Russians celebrate Orthodox Christmas on 7 January in the middle of the New Year Holiday Week.<sup>67</sup> Observers of this holiday celebrate by honoring and praising Jesus Christ in Christian church services throughout the country. Russians emphasize the religious nature of the day and place less emphasis on gift giving.<sup>68</sup>

For Orthodox Christians, Easter (*Pashka*) is the most significant religious holiday in Russia, but it is not a national holiday.<sup>69, 70, 71</sup> Russians celebrate Easter in the latter part of April or the first part of May. The date changes from year to year, and it usually falls later than that of Easter observance in the United States.

Celebrations begin before Easter with Pancake Week, which comes just before Lent. Following Pancake Week, many Orthodox Christians fast for 7 weeks, abstaining from meat and dairy products. They break their fast on the Thursday before Easter. Then observers attend church services to worship and reflect on their religious faith. It is common to color Easter eggs and share a special meal with family and friends. On Easter morning, people greet each other with the phrase “Christ has arisen!” and kiss each other three times on the cheeks.<sup>72, 73, 74</sup>

In addition to the holy month of Ramadan, when devout Muslims fast, Russian Muslims celebrate two other major holidays. The first is *Uraza Bayram* (Eid al-Fitr), which comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.<sup>75, 76</sup> The second is *Kurban Bayram* (Eid al-Adha), which is at the end of the hajj and commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son.<sup>77, 78</sup>



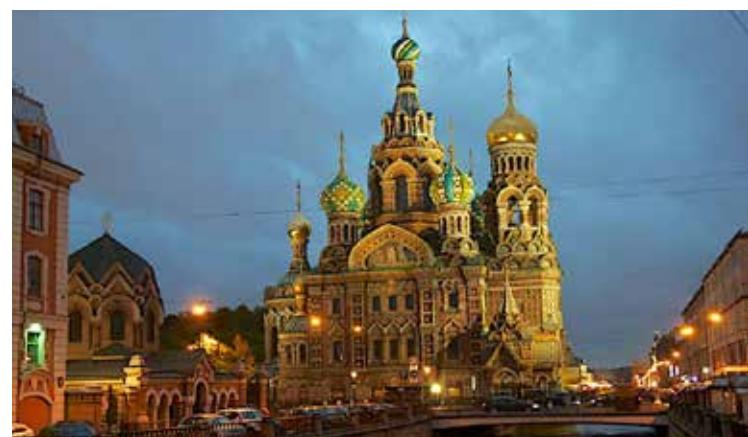
St. Basil's Christmas  
Flickr / Patrick Buechner

## Buildings of Worship

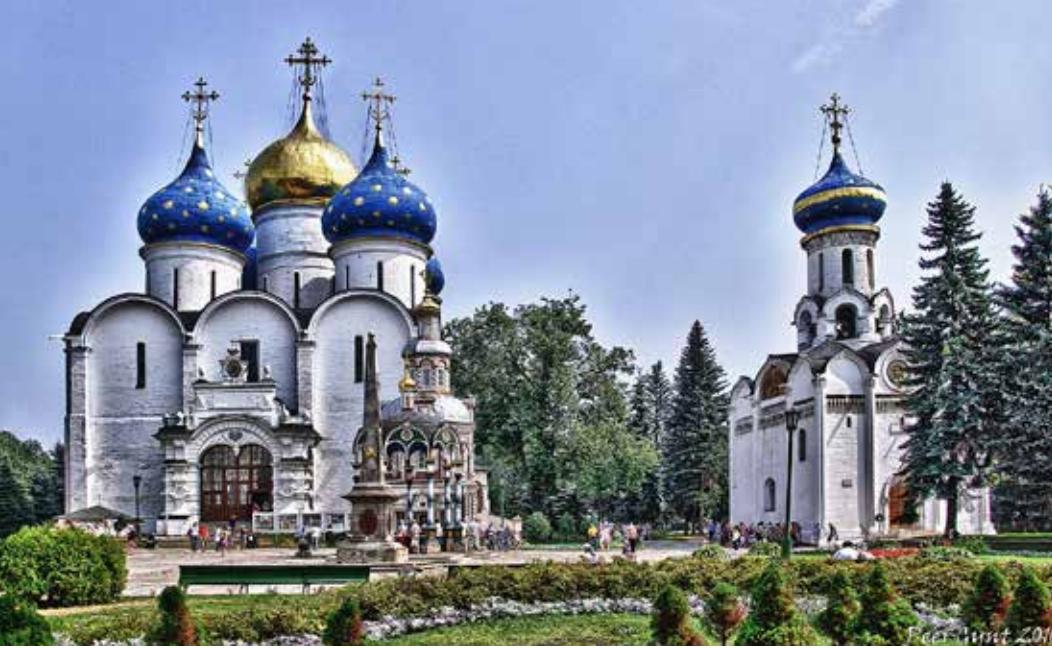
### Russian Orthodox Churches

Orthodox Christians worship in churches. The Russian churches have a unique architectural style characterized by verticality, bright colors, and multiple domes.<sup>79</sup>

Elaborate artwork and icons often decorate Orthodox churches. Each icon has a traditional place in the



The Blood Church:  
Saint Petersburg  
Flickr / Jane drumsara



*The Assumption Cathedral*  
Flickr / Andrey Korchagin

church. The central piece of any Orthodox church is the icon stand, separating the main section of the church from the sanctuary. Located at the eastern end, this area is off-limits to everyone except the priest.<sup>80</sup>

Small wooden churches are common in the countryside. Although in some respects these churches are simple, many of them have complex features such as onion domes, a Byzantine design that symbolizes heaven according to Orthodox belief. A number of these small-scale wooden churches

can be seen on the island of Kizhi (near Saint Petersburg), where settlements were built as early as the 14th century. In 1960 the government officially designated the Kizhi settlement, with its unique wooden architecture, as an open-air museum.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps the most famous Russian church is St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square in Moscow. Russians built the church, with its multiple brightly colored domes, in the 16th century, and it remains a symbol of the deep spirituality of the Russian people.<sup>82</sup>

### *Mosques*

Although the specific design of mosques varies, all mosques typically include several elements. Most have four walls. The *qibla* is the wall facing Mecca. In the *qibla* is a small niche called the *mihrab*, which helps the faithful identify the proper direction to face during prayers. To the right of the *mihrab* stands a pulpit, or *minbar*, where the imam stands while giving services. Mosques also often have a minaret from which the calls to daily prayers are issued. Many mosques also have an ablution fountain in the center of the courtyard (*sahan*) at which Muslims may conduct ritual washing before prayers.<sup>83, 84</sup>

*Kul-Sharif, Kazan*  
Flickr / S Nazari



Since Putin's election, more than 7,500 mosques have been built.<sup>85</sup> The largest mosque in Russia and in Europe is the main mosque in Moscow, which can accommodate 10,000 worshippers.<sup>86</sup> The six-story mosque's main dome is 46 m (151 ft) high and 27 m (89 ft) in diameter.<sup>87</sup>



*Orthodox prayer*  
Flickr / Hendrik Terbeck

## Behavior in Places of Worship

### Orthodox Churches

Most Orthodox churches are open to visitors.<sup>88</sup> Russian Orthodox churches are symbolic of Russia's religious and cultural background and should be treated with respect. Because images of Christ are sacred to Russian Orthodox Christians, it is advisable to approach them quietly and with a respectful attitude. The veneration of icons is traditional in most Orthodox churches. Many Russians will respectfully kiss an icon, although never on the face.<sup>89</sup> Worshippers normally stand throughout the entire religious service, which can last several hours. During services, men stand on the right and women on the left.<sup>90, 91, 92</sup>

**Exchange 1:** May I enter the church?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I enter the church?	mozhna mnye voytee v tseRkaf?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	Daa



Men should remove their hats upon entering a church, and women should cover their head with a scarf. Clothing should be modest. Appropriate dress includes clean shirts and pants for men and long skirts or pants with blouses or sweaters for women. Shorts, tight dresses, and short skirts are not appropriate attire. Some churches may turn away women who are wearing pants, but many allow such clothing if it is clean and neat and not revealing. Clothing with images or writing on it is generally inappropriate.<sup>93, 94, 95</sup>

*Orthodox greeting*  
Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov

## Other Christian Churches

General rules for church etiquette apply in Russia. Catholic churches generally welcome visitors. Most Catholic women wear a chapel veil in church.<sup>96</sup> Even though visitors may simply be touring the church building, Catholics expect visitors to show respect. Avoid eating, chewing gum, or smoking while inside a church building or cathedral. Turn off cell phones. Wear clothing that is modest, clean, and neat.<sup>97</sup> If attending a Mass, Protestants should not take part in the Communion service, known as the Eucharist. Most Catholics bless themselves with holy water and make the sign of the cross. This is optional and non-Catholics are not obligated to do so.<sup>98</sup>



Catholic mass  
Flickr / falter

### Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do I need to cover my head?	mnye noozhna pakRyt golavoo?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nyet

Similar rules apply for Protestant churches. Visitors should dress conservatively. Women should avoid tank tops and tight-fitting clothing.<sup>99</sup> Men should remove their hats. Be silent and respectful, especially during a service. Turn off cell phones.<sup>100, 101</sup> Visitors should also mind their body language; crossed arms or hands placed in pockets may be considered inappropriate. Visitors should not take photographs inside or outside places of worship without permission.<sup>102</sup>

## Mosques

Some mosques in Russia allow non-Muslims, but visitors should check to be certain. General rules for visiting mosques anywhere in the world typically apply in Russia. Before entering a mosque, it is imperative to remove one's shoes. Several other rules generally apply when visiting mosques. Be sure to ask a local if



A mosque in Russia  
Flickr / Jose Javier Martin Espartosa

there are any specific requirements. Clothing should be conservative and clean. Women should avoid tight-fitting or short-sleeved shirts or blouses and wear a scarf to cover their hair. Men should wear long pants and shirts with sleeves. T-shirts are generally inappropriate.<sup>103, 104</sup>

It is not acceptable for visitors to enter a mosque when prayers are being conducted. If you arrive before prayers begin, the basic rules of etiquette for attending religious or sacred institutions apply: speak softly and respectfully, and do not disturb those at prayer. Do not walk in front of someone praying because doing so invalidates the person's prayer.<sup>105, 106</sup>

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# Overview

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## Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Christianity spread to Russia in the 17th century, during the reign of Peter the Great.

**FALSE**

Christianity has had a significant presence in Russia since the 10th century, when Vladimir I instituted the Christian faith as the state religion.

2. The Russian Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the legal equality of all religions.

**TRUE**

Despite these constitutional protections, many minority religious groups face discrimination or persecution in Russia.

3. Islam is the second-largest religion in Russia.

**TRUE**

Russia's Muslim community is the country's second-largest religious community after the Russian Orthodox Church.

4. In general, religious practice has revived in Russia since the end of the communist era.

**TRUE**

After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, religious practice once again became a visible and openly accepted part of life.

5. The federal government recognizes both Christian and Islamic holidays.

**FALSE**

Russians celebrate a variety of holidays, but only Orthodox Christmas is observed as a national holiday. Regional governments in predominantly Muslim parts of the country recognize several Islamic religious days as holidays.



## CHAPTER 3

Matryoshka doll artist and painter  
Flickr / Woody Hibbard

# Traditions

## Introduction

The Russian people have long been a mystery and a contradiction to outsiders. Foreigners take Russians as gruff and unemotional but often miss their personal warmth, problem-solving abilities, and endurance. Communism attempted to change the national character by making Russians more formal, precise, and reserved than they naturally are.<sup>1</sup> Imposing centralized control thwarted long-held collective values of helping one's neighbors, and valuing social networks above the individual. But with the fall of communism, the Russian character has returned.<sup>2,3</sup>

## Honors and Values

Russians highly value friends and help one another in hard times. Russians spend a great deal of time visiting, socializing and establishing friendships.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup> But visitors notice coldness, gloominess, and reserve among Russians that may be deceiving. Russians

seem severe because they do not smile at strangers, believing that only a stupid person smiles without reason. Smiles are meant for those closest to you.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, years of autocratic rule before and during communism created a deep pessimism about the future in the Russian people.<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, Russians lived in communes where they were supported and protected. And within the commune the group resolved its own issues or problems. Although communes have disappeared in modern Russia, collectivism is still highly valued over individualism. Without prompting, Russians help each other to navigate the roadblocks or offer advice to strangers. And Russian people enjoy spending time together; they may even bring a group of friends with them on dates.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Russians are extremely patriotic and proud of their history, nation, and culture. They hold war veterans in high regard. Many veterans often wear their medals and commendations in public, particularly on national holidays. Russians take pride in their heritage, wanting others to recognize the country's contributions to world literature, art, medicine, and science.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

Russians are distinguished by their compassion for the plight of others and their abiding patience. In their "Cinderella" story, the prince first falls in love with a frog who later becomes a princess. Thus, the prince is rewarded for his patience and identification with a pitiful frog. In this way, Russians have learned that they are more successful when they inspire pity than when they insist on their individual rights to achieve their goals. Russians are moved by those less fortunate and distrust success.<sup>14</sup>

*Distinguished veteran*  
Flickr / Tinou Bao



## Codes of Politeness

Russians typically greet foreigners with a firm handshake and make direct eye contact. Russians may consider it evasive or rude to break off eye contact too soon. On the other hand, when a man first meets a single woman, he should avoid making prolonged or overly direct eye contact with her. When a man shakes hands with a woman, the handshake should be less firm than with a man.<sup>15, 16</sup>



*A handshake*  
Flickr / SuperJet International

Even if it is cold, gloves should be removed before shaking hands.<sup>17, 18</sup> Many Russians are hesitant to shake hands over the threshold of an open door because they consider it bad luck.<sup>19, 20</sup> Embracing or kissing on the cheek is not acceptable except among family members or close friends.<sup>21</sup>

**Exchange 3:** Good morning.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good morning.	dobRaay ootRa
<b>Local:</b>	Good morning.	dobRaay ootRa

Russians consider it essential to address people with a title such as *Gospodin* (Mr.) or *Gospozha* (Mrs.) followed by the person's last name.<sup>22, 23</sup> In formal situations, such as at work or when addressing an older person, Russians often use all three parts of a person's name: first name, middle or patronymic name, last name. For example, the name Anastas Arkadyevich Oblinsky indicates that Anastas is the son of Arkady (*evich* means *son of*) in the Oblinsky family. Only close friends use first names alone.<sup>24, 25</sup> Or they may use the first name and the patronymic, such as Anna Arkadyevana (*evana* means *daughter of*).<sup>26</sup>

**Exchange 4:** Hello, Mr. Smirnov.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Hello, Mr. Smirnov.	zdRaavstvooytye, gaspaadeen smeeRnof
<b>Local:</b>	Hello!	zdRaavstvooytye!
<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you doing well?/ How are you doing?	oo vaas fsyo f-paRyaadkye?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

Avoid crossing your arms over your chest or placing your hands in your pockets when speaking; Russians consider this rude, especially when conversing with an older person.<sup>27</sup>

Russians frequently express strong opinions openly. But as a guest in Russia, it is best to avoid criticizing the country, Russian culture, or anything controversial that may be taking place.<sup>28</sup> Personal space in Russia is similar to that in the United States. Speakers normally stand about an arm's length apart. Touching during conversations is relatively uncommon except among family members or close friends.<sup>29</sup>

## Male/Female Interaction

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the communists declared women "free" and gave them the same rights and responsibilities as men. During the Soviet era, the government expected women not only to fight alongside men on battlefields and work



*A man holds an umbrella for a woman*  
Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov

in the nation's factories, but also to have babies who would become future soldiers. But underlying this apparent equality were Russia's strong patriarchal and conservative values, which are experiencing a revival. Today Russian men are more likely to view women as wives and mothers than as friends and equals.<sup>30, 31, 32, 33, 34</sup>

These patriarchal values are conveyed in the Russian terms *жениться* (*zhenitsa*) meaning "takes a wife," and *выходит замуж* (*vykodit zamuzh*) meaning "goes behind her husband." Both men and women carry out the strong man/weak woman roles in public. Men routinely open doors

for women, give up their seats on buses and trains, help a woman on and off with her coat, and so on. At the same time, it is not uncommon to see men flirting with women and treating them in an apparently condescending manner in business situations.<sup>35</sup>

Russians expect women to fill the traditional roles of wife and mother, caring for children, and taking care of household chores.<sup>36, 37, 38</sup> Women are more likely to live in poverty and face discrimination in the workforce. In spite of generally higher educational levels for women, they make less money, and although unemployment rates are about the same across the genders, women are more likely to be underemployed.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup> Women have stronger and wider social networks than men, perhaps because of their responsibilities as mothers, and so they tend to be healthier and happier than the average Russian man.<sup>42, 43</sup>

## Hospitality and Gift-Giving

### *Gift-Giving*

Being invited into a Russian's home is an honor, thus one should not turn down an invitation for food or drinks in a Russian home. Guests should acknowledge this by being on time (no more than 15 minutes late) and displaying good manners. Dress should be somewhat formal in order to show respect for the host.<sup>44</sup> Guests should remove their shoes before entering the home. Hosts commonly offer guests some kind of refreshment, and, if unwanted, it is appropriate to politely refuse the offer.<sup>45, 46</sup>

Russians have a strong tradition of gift giving, and it is customary to bring a gift when invited to a Russian home. Males are generally expected to bring flowers. But do not bring yellow flowers (a symbol of bad luck) or red flowers (a symbol of romance). Always give an odd number of flowers because an even number is reserved for somber occasions, such as funerals. Other appropriate gifts include tea, chocolates or other sweets, calendars, towels, or a bottle of wine. It is best to avoid giving a bottle of vodka because, once opened, Russians often feel obligated to finish it.<sup>47, 48, 49</sup> It is always appropriate to bring a small gift, such as candy, for a child. Russians commonly decline the initial offer of a gift. Simply offer it again, pointing out that it is "just a little something."<sup>50, 51, 52</sup>

**Exchange 5:** This gift is for you.

<b>Soldier:</b>	This gift is for you.	eta padaaRak dlyaa vaas
<b>Local:</b>	I cannot accept this.	yaa nye magoo eta pReenyaat

If your hostess is pregnant, do not offer her a gift for the baby. It is customary to wait until after a baby is born before bringing a gift. To do otherwise may be considered bad luck for the family.<sup>53, 54</sup>

### Table Manners

Russians are gracious and generous hosts who generally offer an abundance of food. Guests should always leave something on their plates as an indication they have eaten well. If guests clean their plates, it may signify to the host that they did not get enough to eat.<sup>55</sup> Guests should offer to help with the preparation of a meal or cleaning up afterward. The offer may be refused. But a reply of "Are you sure?" from a hostess signifies that she would like to accept the offer.<sup>56</sup>



*Receiving a lovely gift*  
Flickr / Kevin Hamm

*Russian hospitality*  
Flickr / Rosa Dik 009 --  
catching up !



**Exchange 6:** I really appreciate your hospitality.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I really appreciate your hospitality.	yaa tsenyoo vaashye gastyepReemstva
<b>Local:</b>	It is nothing.	nye stooeet blaagadaaRnastee

If you must refuse an alcoholic beverage, give a suitable reason, such as health or religious restrictions that prevent you from accepting.<sup>57</sup>

**Exchange 7:** What is the name of this dish?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What is the name of this dish?	kak nazvyfaayetsyaa eta blyooda?
<b>Local:</b>	This is borsch.	eta boRshch

In Russian homes, seating arrangements are usually made in advance. Commonly, the most honored person sits at the head of the table. The most important guest sits immediately to the right of the host (women sit to the right of the host while men are seated to the right of the hostess).<sup>58</sup> The oldest (or most honored) guest is served first. Guests should not begin eating until after their host has begun. Guests should also avoid putting their elbows on the table, and they should remain seated until the host gets up to leave the table. Men should pour drinks for women seated next to them. Finally, guests should always compliment the host or hostess on the quality of the food.<sup>59, 60</sup>

**Exchange 8:** This food is very good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	This food is very good.	eta oachyen fkoosnoye blyooda
<b>Local:</b>	It's pelmeni.	eta pyelmyenee

## Eating Customs and Types of Food

### *Eating Customs and Etiquette*

Russian table manners are casual and there are few strict rules.

Russians use continental table manners, which means holding the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating.

Bread is often used to soak up sauce or gravy. Hands are normally kept above the table rather than placed in one's lap. It is appropriate to rest one's



*Dinner table etiquette*  
Flickr / inga

wrists, but not one's elbows, on the table. Food should always be passed to the left.<sup>61, 62</sup> To indicate you have finished eating, place the knife and fork horizontally across the plate, facing to the left.<sup>63</sup>

### Meals and Food

Russians eat three meals a day. Breakfast (*zavtrak*) is usually eaten between 6 and 7:30 a.m. It may include tea and bread, or it may be more substantial, such as buckwheat pancakes

(*kasha*) or porridge with cheese and sour cream. Many Russians eat a snack later in the morning. Lunch is served in the afternoon between 1–2 p.m.

Traditionally, the afternoon meal was the largest, but today lunches are often a light meal consisting of soup or salad. The evening meal (*uzhin*) is frequently the main meal of the day and may be eaten after 8 p.m. among urban Russians. The first course may be appetizers (*zakuski*), possibly caviar, chilled meats, hard-boiled eggs, or salted fish. This meal may also start with *borsht*, a popular soup made of beets cooked in broth, with sour cream on the side. The main course generally includes meat. Sour cream is a common ingredient used in cooking. Many people are fond of the well-known *bifstroganov*, beef slices served over noodles with a sour cream sauce.<sup>64, 65, 66</sup>



Russian food  
Flickr / lazy fri13th

**Exchange 9:** What ingredients are used to make borscht?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What ingredients are used to make borscht?	eez kakeeKh pRadooktaf pReegatovlyen boRshch?
<b>Local:</b>	Red beetroot, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, onions, and beef.	svyokla, kaapoosta, maRkof, kaaRtoshka, look ee myaasa, gavyaadenny

Most meals include some kind of bread, a Russian specialty, which can be made in different ways.<sup>67, 68, 69</sup> In addition to the traditional brown bread, popular types include *oladi* (resembling a pancake), *shangi* (white bread rolls), *pyshiki* (small doughnuts), *baranki* (similar to bagels), and *kalachi* (Russian white bread). Russians may also serve beer or vodka in the evening.<sup>70</sup>

Russian vodka, traditionally made from rye but now usually made from wheat, is world famous and includes many varieties. Vodka, which means “little water” or “dear water,” was called “bread wine” in the past. Alternately glorified—as the basis of camaraderie and of fine dining with caviar—and condemned as the basis of Russia’s high rates of alcoholism, vodka is perceived as a characteristic part of Russian culture. Whether gulped to avoid its taste or sipped to savor its fine quality, vodka is immediately followed by snacks.<sup>71</sup>

## Dress Codes

Russians wear contemporary European clothing and appear neat and well-dressed in public. Among some women, wearing the latest fashions is important.<sup>72</sup> Russian dress

is normally conservative.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup> Appropriate business attire includes suits for men and women. Women’s blouses worn under suits should have a high neckline, skirts should be at least knee length, and jewelry should be modest. Dress shoes should be well polished. In urban areas, formal business attire is worn for meetings and official events.<sup>76, 77</sup> In urban centers, jeans and T-shirts are becoming popular. Young women wear short skirts, high heels, and a lot of makeup. Shorts are popular in the summer.<sup>78, 79</sup>

Because of the cold weather, people often dress in layers, starting with long underwear. Over that, people may wear one or two pairs of thermal socks, jeans or slacks, and a heavy shirt with long sleeves. If the weather is extremely cold, people may wear ski pants, heavy boots, and a sweater or insulated jacket. A warm fur hat (*ushanka*) is common among both men and women.<sup>80, 81</sup>



*Fashion*  
Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov

### Exchange 10: How should I dress?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How should I dress?	kak mnye slyedooyet adyetsyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	aadyentee bRyookee ee Roobshkoo s-dleeneem Rookaavoom

**Exchange 11:** Is this acceptable to wear?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this acceptable to wear?	eta mozhnaa aadyet?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

## Non-Religious Holidays

There are several non-religious public holidays in Russia. New Year's Day lasts for 7 to 10 days in Russia. The long holiday is the result of moving spring holidays to January to give people a respite from the cold. Most Russians listen to a presidential speech at five minutes before midnight. After the clock strikes the midnight hour, many listen to the national anthem and toast with champagne.<sup>82, 83</sup> Defender of the Fatherland Day, 23 February, was introduced as a holiday in 2006, replacing Soviet Army Day. Some Russians refer to it as "men's day" because men traditionally receive cards and presents as a sign of appreciation. Women's Day falls on 8 March, and Russians generally celebrate it at work. During the Soviet period, it was one of the most popular holidays and marked the beginning of spring. Male coworkers generally buy flowers for their female colleagues, who dress up for the day.<sup>84, 85, 86, 87</sup>

Labor Day and Spring Day occur on 1 May with no special activities to mark the occasion, although many Russians enjoy the day off with picnics and barbecues.



*New Year celebration*  
*Flickr / Giorgio Montersino*

Victory Day, on 9 March, is a popular and solemn holiday for every Russian. War veterans wear their medals and other commendations. People drink to victory and to those who perished in the nation's wars. It is a time of pride and glory. This celebration is followed on 12 June by Russia Day, which represents independence day: the day voters elected Boris Yeltsin president and the day on which Russia became a sovereign nation. It is a day to display national pride. People attend concerts and fireworks displays throughout the nation. The year's final holiday is Day of National Unity. Russians celebrate it on 4 November. Wreaths are laid on the tombs of national heroes. Orthodox Christians often attend a special church service. For most, however, the day is just a day off from work.<sup>88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93</sup>

## Dos and Don'ts

### *Dos*

- Do** be aware of all official regulations and follow them.
- Do** remove your shoes before you enter a private home, temple, or mosque.
- Do** wear a head scarf (women) before entering a Russian Orthodox Church.
- Do** remove your gloves before shaking hands.
- Do** shake a woman's hand less firmly than a man's.
- Do** arrive on time when invited to a Russian home.
- Do** bring an appropriate gift for your host or hostess.
- Do** leave some food on your plate if you are a guest.

### *Don'ts*

- Don't** show the soles of your shoes in public.
- Don't** criticize or show any disrespect to Russian officials, citizens, or the country.
- Don't** stare at or engage in overt expressions of affection with the opposite sex.
- Don't** stand around casually with your hands in your pockets.
- Don't** chew gum in public.
- Don't** whistle indoors, which many believe will bring bad luck.
- Don't** hang a coat over the back of a chair; hang it up instead.
- Don't** make the American OK sign; it is considered highly offensive.
- Don't** point to anybody with a finger. Use the entire right hand instead.
- Don't** make the "thumbs up" sign; it is highly offensive in Russia.
- Don't** use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Russians. Some may understand American slang.



*Orthodox Church parishioners*  
*Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov*

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# Overview

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## Chapter 3 Assessment

- Contemporary Russia has moved away from patriarchal traditions.

**FALSE**

Russia's strong patriarchal and conservative values are experiencing a revival. Today Russian men are more likely to view women as wives and mothers than as friends and equals.

- When greeting Russian men, it is important to use a firm handshake and maintain direct eye contact.

**TRUE**

To break off eye contact too soon may be perceived as rude or even evasive. But if a man is meeting a single woman for the first time, he should avoid making prolonged or overly direct eye contact with her.

- Russians tend to be individualists, more often preferring to be alone rather than socializing and visiting with friends.

**FALSE**

Russians have a strong collective tradition with an affinity for group, rather than individual, behavior. They spend a great deal of time socializing and building friendship networks.

- When visiting a Russian home, it is appropriate to bring an even number of flowers.

**FALSE**

An odd number of flowers must be given because even numbers are reserved for somber occasions, such as funerals.

- Russians are more likely to show empathy than reward success.

**TRUE**

Compassion and patience are Russian virtues that are rewarded.



## CHAPTER 4

*Urban crowd*  
Flickr / Stanislav Stankovic

# Urban Life

## Introduction

In 1917 the Soviet state was mostly rural, with only 17% of the people living in urban centers. By 2015, 74% of Russians were urban residents.<sup>1,2</sup> The pattern of urbanization took different forms. Shortly after the Russian Revolution in 1917, most cities became smaller as thousands left urban areas for the countryside.<sup>3</sup> By the 1930s under Stalin, the cities had begun to grow again. Stalin's administration took steps to rapidly centralize the economy around heavy industry, mostly located near densely populated cities concentrated primarily in western Russia.<sup>4,5</sup> Still, until 1959, the irregular pattern of urbanization resulted in Russia's eastern cities growing at a faster pace than its

western cities.<sup>6</sup> In post-Soviet Russia, the situation reversed itself as thousands began migrating from cities in Siberia and Soviet Central Asia to European Russia because of the switch from central planning to a market economy. Cities located in inaccessible, remote locations with harsh climates experienced population loss because the costs of transportation and energy—no longer subsidized—increased sharply. The loss of subsidies triggered steep increases in the costs of food and housing and in the production of goods, which in turn caused factories to shut down and the unemployed to migrate to western Russia.<sup>7</sup>

A serious issue related to 20th century industrialization in Russia is the drop in fertility, which has contributed to low population growth. Since 1920, when the average woman had about eight children, fertility rates have fallen, and the average woman now has one or two children.<sup>8,9</sup> President Putin believes that this shift has potentially critical consequences for the nation and has promised to implement programs designed to raise the fertility rate as well as keep Russians from moving abroad.<sup>10, 11, 12, 13, 14</sup> The policies appear to have had a positive effect. In 2012 Russia recorded its first year of population growth since 1991, although it is unclear how long this trend will continue. In spite of the rise in the number of babies, smaller numbers of women entering their childbearing years and relatively high mortality rates remain demographic risks.<sup>15, 16</sup>

## Urban Issues

Environmental conditions around Russian cities have worsened because of infrastructure problems. One key problem is the ineffective disposal of municipal solid waste, including hazardous wastes. Russia sends nearly 95% of its waste to the nation's landfills, 30% of which do not meet basic sanitation standards. There is little room to expand landfill sites and a failure to modernize the system could have disastrous health and environmental effects.<sup>17, 18</sup> Environmental hazards posed by inefficient means of waste disposal combined with air and other environmental pollutants make Moscow and Saint Petersburg among the most polluted cities in the world.<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>



Moscow is one of Europe's most densely populated cities, which has helped fuel a serious housing crisis along with traffic jams and pollution.<sup>22, 23, 24, 25, 26</sup> Because of spiraling property values and deteriorating urban infrastructure, housing is difficult to find. In the Soviet era, the state owned almost all urban housing. Rents were low but upkeep of housing was minimal.<sup>27</sup> In 2002, international observers classified nearly 40% of these prefabricated concrete apartment buildings as dilapidated, with aging water, sewage, and gas systems.

*Nikel, Kola Peninsula, Russia*  
Flickr / Ninara

More than a decade later, a significant number still lack heating and plumbing.<sup>28, 29</sup> The purchase of housing in Moscow averages USD 6,000–9,000 per square meter.<sup>30</sup> Plans are under consideration to move government offices from Moscow's city center to the outskirts and convert the office space to apartments to help ease the situation.<sup>31</sup>

Analysts estimate that national unemployment is approximately 5%.<sup>32, 33</sup> Economic sanctions and a flagging economy, however, have increased unemployment somewhat. Nevertheless, urban unemployment is significantly lower than levels in rural areas. In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the two largest cities, unemployment is negligible.<sup>34</sup> But many people remain underemployed, unable to find jobs that match their level of training.<sup>35</sup> Cities remain the main source of employment for most Russians, with urban areas other than Moscow and Saint Petersburg drawing more workers. Migrants, many from the former Soviet states, are also flooding into Russia in search of a better standard of living.<sup>36, 37, 38</sup> Rising tensions among the growing number of immigrants have erupted in violence.<sup>39, 40</sup>

## Healthcare

Russia officially provides universal healthcare for its citizens, but in recent years reduced government expenditures on healthcare have raised prices and reduced services.<sup>41, 42</sup> Partly because of this, Russia's many hospitals and large numbers of doctors fail to provide affordable, accessible, or adequate care. Healthcare facilities are being concentrated into fewer care centers, which means that in recent years many smaller facilities have closed.<sup>43, 44, 45</sup> Only 10 nations have a higher death rate than Russia; the

infant mortality rate is among the highest in the industrialized world and average life expectancy for men is about 65 years.<sup>46, 47</sup>

The government provides free healthcare with considerable variation in the standard of care, much of which is below Western standards.<sup>48, 49</sup>

Healthcare is divided into federal, regional, and municipal levels. Urban polyclinics provide general primary care and treatment for chronic diseases. Three to four specialists staff each facility. Special focus polyclinics treat children up to the age of 19. Special facilities exist for some groups such as police and high-ranking government officials.<sup>50</sup>



*Healthcare in a public hospital*  
Flickr / Antony Hill

### Exchange 12: Is Dr. Ivanov in, sir?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is Dr. Ivanov in, sir?	doktaR eevaanoof oo syebyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nyet

Hospitals commonly charge for disposable needles, medications, and certain extra services. Trained personnel are frequently unavailable to operate specialized medical machinery. Older equipment in hospitals is often in disrepair. Few facilities offer medical specialization, but the country's high-tech centers for heart surgery are located in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Sanitation practices in hospitals are lax, and patient care is not well coordinated between or within care centers.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>

### Exchange 13: Is there a hospital nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a hospital nearby?	zdyes yest pableezastee balneetsaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, in the center of town.	daa, f-tsyentye goRadaa

About 17% of Russia's 17,000+ pharmacies are privately owned, with 23% belonging to regional authorities and 60% to municipal authorities. More than 50,000 pharmaceutical kiosks are also available, although large villages usually have only one pharmacy. Residents may have to stand in line all day to get medications, if they are available. The high cost of medicine also prevents many people from obtaining it.<sup>54, 55</sup>

## Education

Russia's education system, organized and controlled by the state, has produced nearly 100% literacy.<sup>56</sup> By law, Russian students attend school 34 weeks a year for 27–38 hours a week. The academic year runs from the beginning of September until the beginning of June.<sup>57</sup> General education in Russia consists of 11 years of schooling. Primary education (grades 1–4) and basic general education (grades 5–9)



*Students attend class in a new school*  
Flickr / United Nations Development Programme in Europe and CIS

are compulsory for all students. Secondary education (grades 10–11) is not mandatory. Kindergartens are available but attendance is not compulsory.<sup>58, 59</sup> After secondary school, students must pass state-administered final examinations to continue on to university or vocational higher education options.<sup>60, 61</sup> Nearly half of the nation's university students study social science, business, or law. About 25% study science, mathematics, or engineering.<sup>62</sup>

Underfunded public schools and poor infrastructure have resulted in about 30% of schools operating without indoor running water and 46% without indoor sewer connections. There is a sufficient number of schools, but they are small. The average number of students in urban primary schools is 607 and 497 in secondary schools.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup>

Although the right to an education is a constitutional guarantee, variations in quality lead parents to try to enroll their children in preferred schools. In 2012 the Supreme Court enacted a rule that gives preference to students living near a school, to orphans, and to students from poor families, making it difficult for students outside a district to enroll in a preferred school. Parents may try to secure spots at some of the 250 private schools in Moscow (700 nationwide), but because of the high cost of private schools, few children can attend them.<sup>66, 67</sup>

## Restaurants and Marketplace

### *Restaurants*

Dining out is not a Russian tradition, although people eat in restaurants to celebrate special occasions. But dining out is gaining popularity, even though some still regard it as an insult to be invited to eat in a restaurant rather than in someone's home.<sup>68, 69</sup>



In Russian cities, restaurants offer a range of choices, including international cuisines, and eating styles. Local restaurants usually offer traditional Russian food including *pelmeni* (meat dumplings), *piroshky* (meat-filled fried rolls), and *blini* (pancakes stuffed with fish or caviar). Typical drinks include *chai* (sweet tea), different varieties of vodka, and an assortment of wines flavored with fruit, herbs, leaves, or flowers.<sup>70, 71</sup>

*Restaurant dining*  
*Flickr / Dave Sag*

**Exchange 14:** What type of meat is this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What type of meat is this?	kakoye eta myaasa?
<b>Local:</b>	Lamb.	baaRaaneenaa

**Exchange 15:** I would like coffee or tea.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like coffee or tea.	yaa bvy Khatyel kofye eelee chaay
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	kanyeshna

Russia has a variety of eating establishments. The *kafe* (cafe) generally has cheaper fare, and the *kofeyna* is an upscale cafe that serves pastries, although light meals are occasionally available. The *zakusochnaya* has a limited menu and varies from a simple eatery to a disreputable bar. The *ryumochnaya* is usually a dive bar specializing in vodka shots. A more recent style of eatery is the simple Asian diner known as a *poznaya*. The *stolovaya* (canteen) is the most popular choice among ordinary Russians. Located in public areas near universities or bus stations, these establishments offer cheap alternatives to restaurant dining.<sup>72, 73</sup>

**Exchange 16:** Are you still serving breakfast?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you still serving breakfast?	mozhna pazaftRaakaat?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

Russians do not split the bill and expect the person making the invitation to pay for everyone. When eating in cafeterias or office canteens, diners are expected to pay for their own meals.<sup>74, 75</sup>

**Exchange 17:** Can I have my total bill, please?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I have my total bill, please?	mozhnoo mnye schyot, pazhaalooystaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes sure!	daa, kanyeshna!

Tipping about 10% is generally expected in restaurants, even if a service charge has been included in the bill.<sup>76, 77</sup>

## Marketplace

Russia has a wide variety of shops and stores, ranging from large shopping malls filled with Western goods, and open 24 hours a day, to smaller traditional Soviet-style shops that continue to operate even though their selections are smaller. Kiosks offer a limited selection of goods of variable quality. For the most part, prices in Russian markets are fixed and bargaining is not possible. The one exception is at agricultural markets, where individuals sell food they have produced.<sup>78, 79, 80</sup>



*Market in Saratov*  
*Flickr / Tatters* 

**Exchange 18:** May I examine this close up?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I examine this close up?	mozhnoo pasmatRyet pableezhye?
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	kanyeshna

Buyers also need to be aware that taking arms, artwork, and antiques out of the country is not allowed without permission from the Ministry of Culture.<sup>81</sup>

Food is available at numerous street stalls in the cities. Patrons can buy dried fruit, fried doughnuts, Russian pancakes, snacks, tea, and other products from these outdoor eateries. The prices at such informal places are fixed and cash is required. According to a regulation put into effect by Putin in 2007, only Russians can operate food stalls, thus barring immigrants who formerly managed stalls from such work. As a result, the prices at food stalls have risen because wages are higher for Russian vendors than for immigrant workers.<sup>82</sup>

**Exchange 19:** How much longer will you be here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How much longer will you be here?	skoolka yeshchyo vy boodyetye zdyes?
<b>Local:</b>	Three more hours.	yeshchyo tRee chaasaa

## Money and ATMs

The ruble (RUB) is the official currency; in October 2015 USD 1 equaled about RUB 62.<sup>83, 84</sup> Legally, all transactions must be made in rubles, even if vendors state prices in U.S. dollars or in euros. When exchanging money in banks, bills must be in good condition or tellers are likely to reject them. U.S. bills must also be the newer style redesigned after 2003, with the latest security features.<sup>85, 86</sup>

*Credit!*

*Flickr / Svetlana Tyukhteneva*



### Exchange 20: Do you accept U.S. currency?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you accept U.S. currency?	vy pReeneemaayetye dool-laary s-shchaa?
<b>Local:</b>	No, we only accept rubles.	nyet, mvy pReeneemaayem talko Rooblee

In many establishments, proprietors prefer cash for transactions, although some shops accept credit cards. Travelers can exchange foreign currency at certain banks and change bureaus.<sup>87</sup> A buyer should carry small-denomination bills because vendors may not have change for larger bills.<sup>88, 89</sup>

### Exchange 21: Can you give me change for this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you give me change for this?	vy moozhyetye sdaat mnye sdaachoo?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nyet

ATMs are widely available in Russian cities. One may also use credit cards to get a cash advance at many banks.<sup>90, 91</sup>

## Transportation and Traffic

The Soviets developed Russia's transportation system to serve the country's economic development and promote the rapid expansion of heavy industry. Planners designed a system to transport the maximum volume of products and people at the lowest cost, with little thought for convenience. Today the system, while extensive, is in a state of poor repair.<sup>92</sup> Most major cities have a variety of public transportation options that are

*View of the  
Moscow beltway  
Flickr / Oscar W. Rasson*

usually cheap, but that can be unreliable. Public transport in major cities is heavily used. Tram and metro networks are often the safest and most efficient ways to navigate major cities.<sup>93, 94</sup>



*Difficult driving conditions  
Flickr / Anton Novoselov*

Driving a private car in Russia is not a preferred means of travel. The vast distances make travel by car somewhat impractical. In some parts of the country, there are no roads and severe winter weather can make driving difficult. If possible, avoid driving at night. Urban roads are frequently in disrepair and manhole covers are often uneven with the road. Drivers are required to have insurance. A U.S. driver's license and a notarized Russian translation allow drivers to operate vehicles for 60 days. International Driving Permits are also acceptable. Persons with a business, residence, or employment visa must carry a valid Russian driver's license.<sup>95, 96</sup>

Severe deterioration affects many roads throughout the country, and several roads are unpaved or unsafe—impassable in winter or during spring thaw. In the cities, traffic is heavy, gridlock is common, and drivers ignore traffic laws. The mix of crowded vehicles and aggressive driving is a continual problem.<sup>97, 98, 99</sup>

**Exchange 22:** Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	yest zayes nyedaalyeko KhaRosheey myeKhaaneek?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

**Taxis**

Metered taxis are available in large cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Taxi service caters to well-to-do passengers and budget travelers, and taxis are marked with distinctive colors or brightly lit signs. Registered taxis must be called beforehand and



cannot be hailed on the street. Unregistered taxis, sometimes called “gypsy taxis,” are more plentiful but should be avoided. There have been reports of passengers being assaulted and robbed. Avoid getting into any taxi that already has a passenger. Before entering any taxi, check the backseat to make sure nobody is hiding. Although official taxis are generally safe, exercise particular caution when using them after dark.<sup>100, 101, 102, 103, 104</sup>

*A taxi in Russia*  
Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov

### Exchange 23: Can I share this cab with you?

Soldier:	Can I share this cab with you?	gdye yaa magoo fzyaat taaksee?
Local:	No, wait for another.	taam

### *Metros, Trams, and Trolleys*

In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, well-designed metro (subway) systems operate with trains arriving every 2–3 minutes during nonpeak hours.<sup>105, 106</sup> The Moscow Metro is one of the world’s largest subway systems, and many consider it to be the most efficient way to travel long distances in the city.<sup>107, 108, 109</sup> Kazan, Nizhniy Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Samara, Vologda, and Yekaterinburg have smaller metro systems.<sup>110, 111</sup> But travelers should take care because terrorists have targeted the subway, and attacks have killed several people in recent years. In addition, the subway is a prime area for pickpockets and petty criminals.<sup>112</sup>



*Moscow Metro*  
Flickr / Christopher Michel

Buses are available and provide the cheapest way to travel throughout the country. In cities, buses are reliable but tend to become less so as the distance from the city center increases. Newly popular *marshrutkas* are minibuses that travel along major bus routes, and although they are more expensive, they can be more convenient.<sup>113, 114, 115, 116</sup> Public transportation in Moscow and Saint Petersburg includes trams and trolleys (both of which are inexpensive and run from early morning until after midnight).<sup>117, 118</sup>

**Exchange 24:** Will the bus be here soon?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will the bus be here soon?	aaftoboos skooRo pReedyot?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

### Rail

Russian Railways (RZD) runs one of the most extensive rail networks in the world. Long-distance trains can be booked in advance and offer comfortable travel options. Travel by rail, although not the fastest way to get around, is inexpensive, and trains are generally reliable and punctual. *Elektrichka* (suburban trains) provide local service between major urban centers and outlying communities.<sup>119, 120</sup> The Trans-Siberian Railroad connects western Russia to Vladivostok on Russia's east coast and is perhaps the most well-known rail journey in the country. It now connects with several other railroad lines and is an important means of transportation for both passengers and freight. The direct line between Moscow and Vladivostok is 9,289 km (5,771 mi) in length; in 2002 authorities completed electric service for the entire line.<sup>121, 122</sup>



Russian Railways  
Flickr / Alex Polezhaev

**Exchange 25:** Is there a train station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a train station nearby?	Ryadom yest vookzaal?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nyet

## Air

Because of the country's size, air travel is a reasonable alternative. The smaller regional airlines, particularly those in Siberia, have the poorest safety records. Security on such airlines is questionable, and there have been recent reports of bombs being smuggled on board after terrorists bribed officials. On the other hand, Aeroflot Russian Airlines has a decent safety record and complies with international safety standards. The domestic carrier, Transaero, also has a consistent flight safety record. Be aware that authorities frequently cancel flights if they are less than 70% filled.<sup>123, 124, 125</sup>



Air travel

[Flickr / Swerz](#)

## Street Crime and Solicitations

### Urban Crime

In Russian cities, crime—often linked to poverty—is widespread. Westerners are frequent targets of violent and nonviolent crimes such as theft and physical assault. Pickpocketing, often practiced by young children, is a commonly reported crime. It may occur in crowded areas such as train or metro stations, tourist areas, and markets. Vehicles are often burglarized. Criminals have robbed people after slipping drugs into their drinks, rendering them unconscious. Robbers may also pose as police officials or taxi drivers to gain access to their targets.<sup>126, 127, 128, 129</sup>

Terrorism poses additional threats to personal safety, particularly in the Northern Caucasus regions. Terrorists have targeted the Moscow subway several times in recent years. Public transportation remains vulnerable to attacks, which appear to be on the increase.<sup>130</sup> Attacks by various extremist groups have targeted minority group members, including U.S. citizens. African Americans, Asian Americans, and those perceived as being of Middle Eastern descent are often targeted, not only by skinhead groups, but also by police.<sup>131, 132, 133</sup>



Poverty in the streets  
[Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov](#)

## Dealing with Beggars

Begging is legal in Russia as long as panhandlers do not harass their targets. Many beggars live and work in Russia's cities, particularly around the metro stations. They may be people from poor, rural areas who have moved to the cities in search of jobs, but who find themselves begging as a profession when they cannot find employment.<sup>134</sup> In some cases, beggars are professionals or belong to organized crime groups. Beggars may include women with children, although it is illegal to involve minors in begging.<sup>135, 136</sup>

**Exchange 26:** Give me money.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Give me money.	dyenyeg daaytye
<b>Local:</b>	I do not have any.	oo myenyaa nyet dyenyeg

**Exchange 27:** Please, buy something from me.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Please, buy something from me.	pazhaaloystaa, koopeetye oo myenyaa shto-neebood
<b>Local:</b>	Sorry, I have no money left.	eezveeneetye, dyenyeg bolshye nye ostaaloos



Working the traffic  
Flickr / Adam Baker

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# Overview

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## Chapter 4 Assessment

1. The death rate in Russia is one of the highest in the world.

**TRUE**

Only 10 nations have a higher death rate than Russia, where average life expectancy for men is about 65 years.

2. Unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

**FALSE**

Urban unemployment is significantly lower than rural levels.

In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the two largest cities, unemployment is negligible.

3. Moscow is one of the most densely populated cities in Europe.

**TRUE**

Moscow is one of Europe's most densely populated cities, which has helped fuel a serious housing crisis along with traffic jams and pollution.

4. Bargaining is common in most Russian markets.

**FALSE**

For the most part, prices in Russian markets are fixed, and bargaining is not possible. The one exception is in agricultural markets, where people sell individually produced food.

5. Russia's education system is still struggling to achieve an adequate literacy rate.

**FALSE**

Russia's education system has produced nearly 100% literacy. The system continues to emphasize technology and science and remains relatively strong in these areas.



## CHAPTER 5

*Rural village*  
Flickr / Ravil Ahmedov

# Rural Life

## Introduction

Russia has experienced a dramatic shift from a predominantly rural to an urban country. Thousands of small villages have disappeared, although some rural ethnic groups, such as Muslims, Chechens, and others who live in the North Caucasus, have experienced rapid population growth.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup> Since 1998, migration and deaths have decimated the Russian countryside.<sup>6, 7</sup> Rural life has been transformed from rural collectives for farming into a more market-based system of household plots. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet system has made healthcare delivery and school systems more local and frayed, if not corrupt.<sup>8</sup> The standard of living in the countryside has fallen

since 1991. The transition to a more market-based economy has hurt farms and villages. Rural incomes are far lower than those in urban areas, and the general living conditions are worse.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup> The rural economy has diversified beyond farming, and farmers strive to be more efficient, despite confusion over land tenure.<sup>12, 13</sup>

## Land Tenure

During the Communist Revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks nationalized all lands and abolished private ownership of land.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup> Beginning in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government of the Russian Federation began redistributing collective and state farmlands to individuals. Other land reforms followed. By 1993, individuals had the constitutional right to sell their agricultural lands. Governmental authorities have the first right to purchase land from collectives. Small plots of land from family members can be aggregated into larger farms.<sup>17, 18</sup> By 2000, private individuals owned nearly 8% of Russia's land.<sup>19</sup> In 2015, most agricultural land was leased by large enterprises—the same state collective farms existing during the Soviet era. Some suggest that all private agricultural land will eventually be absorbed.<sup>20</sup> New reforms in 2003 gave the federal government a preemptive right on all land sales, and regional governments gained the right to limit the



*Kupanskoe*  
Flickr / sovraskin

concentration of land owned by a single individual. The government made it illegal for foreign agencies to own agricultural land.<sup>21</sup>

**Exchange 28:** Do you own this land?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you own this land?	vy vlaadyelyets etoy zyemlee?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

Russia only partially privatized land ownership. The government divided state-owned properties into virtual plots of equal size, and each adult who had previously worked on the collective received one land share, designated by a piece of paper representing a virtual plot of fractional ownership in the collective. Individual "owners" could choose to keep the share as part of joint agricultural efforts or withdraw to create an individual business. Under this system, lands are neither wholly owned by the individual nor the state. But nearly 60% of agricultural lands are now privately held, about half of which are

in land shares. Private shares, on the other hand, are actual physical plots of land owned by individuals. Less than 10% of farm land falls in this category.<sup>22</sup> Russia's 2001 land code fully privatized the ownership of urban and commercial land, leaving rural and agricultural lands untouched. Foreign individuals or agencies can own nonagricultural land.<sup>23</sup>

## Rural Economy

Russia's rural economy and demographics are changing, and in some regions much of the economy has collapsed. Rural unemployment is much higher than in urban areas (8.1% vs. 5.1%).<sup>24</sup> In 2011, rural wages, particularly in agriculture, were only about 52% of the national average.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the rural population is aging. Many young people are migrating to the cities, and the share of agriculture's contribution to the economy is dropping. In 1990, only 1 year before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, collective farms employed 86% of the rural population. By 2006 that number represented one-third of the population. Many rural residents now work in other sectors, including manufacturing, trade and consumer services, and social services.<sup>26, 27</sup> In rural Russia, the main source of income (32%) comes from farming; other employment (30%) and pensions (28%) are significant income sources.<sup>28, 29</sup>



*Rural Russia*  
Flickr / Евгений Сухарников

## Agriculture

Despite Russia's vast size, only 13% of the nation's land is used for agriculture.<sup>30</sup> The main agricultural products are grains, including wheat, barley, rye, and oats. Other products include sunflowers, sugar beets, flax, and potatoes. Despite privatization of land ownership, many farmers continue to work as part of cooperatives. Such farms suffer from inefficient management, and their ability to create profits relies largely on their access to urban markets.<sup>31</sup> Years of neglect related to technological innovation and investment have contributed to reduced yields, higher production costs, and inefficiency.<sup>32</sup>



*Working the wheat*  
Flickr / Sally

**Exchange 29:** Where do you work, sir?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where do you work, sir?	kyem vy Raabotaayetye?
<b>Local:</b>	I am a farmer, sir.	yaa RaaznaRaabocheey

To help rejuvenate agriculture and increase output, the government launched a number of programs and pumped considerable funds into the agricultural sector between 2008 and 2012. The year 2011 was excellent for agriculture because of record yields of sunflower seeds, sugar beets, soybeans, potatoes, and other vegetable crops. Since 2006, Russian agricultural competitiveness has increased, with total production up nearly 30%. The livestock and poultry industries grew, mainly because of the construction of more livestock facilities and the upgrading of existing ones. According to Russia's agriculture minister, the nation has achieved food security in grains, sugar, potatoes, vegetables, and poultry.<sup>33, 34</sup> International sanctions have created a problem for Russian agriculture. Russia has banned agricultural exports and Russian agriculture is not yet able to make up the difference. Experts estimate it could take 5 years before Russia is able to increase productivity enough to make up for lost food imports. In January 2015, the government committed increased funding support for the sector but that support may be insufficient to meet stated agricultural targets.<sup>35, 36</sup>

**Exchange 30:** Do you know this area very well?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know this area very well?	vy KhaRasho znaayetye etoo myestnast?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

*Fishing, Lumber, and Forestry*

Fishing is important to the economy of Russia, which has access to both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. In addition to Russia's larger marine fleets, smaller-scale ventures operate in the Sea of Azov and in the Black and Caspian seas. Freshwater fishing from Russia's many rivers is not as lucrative as it once was because pollution and reduced river flows have severely depleted fish populations. Fish farming, however, is becoming increasingly popular.<sup>37, 38</sup>

Russia has the world's largest forest reserves, and lumber, pulp, and paper products are important to the rural and national economies.<sup>39</sup> But the industry remains seriously



*Sawing logs, Kuzminskogo*  
Flickr / Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky

underdeveloped even though investments in recent years have modernized and improved pulp and paper mills.<sup>40, 41</sup> Illegal logging has raised concerns. The EU Timber Regulation came into effect in 2013. Its laws require timber importers to ensure that timber is harvested legally. After the first year on its implementation, the regulation seems to indicate that Russia's timber industry is now in compliance with the standard.<sup>42, 43</sup>

## Rural Transportation

Driving in Russia is challenging, but since most rural areas have poorly developed public transportation systems, driving may be necessary. Roads are often unpaved and in disrepair, and reliable road connections may not exist between small villages and mid-sized towns. Severe weather negatively affects rural roads, leaving them so muddy or full of potholes that they become impassable. Traveling at night is not recommended outside of Russia's major urban centers. Many cars have no brake lights and some have only one headlight.<sup>44, 45</sup>

Gas stations and repair shops are scarce on many of the newer roads. Drivers should carry extra fan belts, fuses, and other spare parts because these may be hard to obtain outside urban settings. In small towns, regional bus service is usually available.<sup>46</sup>

The Soviets laid thousands of miles of railroad track, spanning the country's vast reaches

from west to east. The government used railroads predominantly for cargo traffic, but they have remained an important means of passenger travel into remote areas. Although the railway system accounts for nearly half of Russia's passenger travel, the density of railway routes varies and is higher in western and central Russia than in Siberia.<sup>47</sup>

Russian Railways (RZD) is the state-owned rail monopoly that operates Russia's railway network. Different kinds of trains and levels of passenger train service are available, from first class through fourth class. The least expensive (fourth class) train service is likely to be slow, and the carriages may be uncomfortable. Many consider train travel relatively safe, since one or two conductors are on each carriage for 24 hours a day managing the service.<sup>48, 49, 50</sup> Traveling by air is the only way to reach some destinations, such as remote parts of Siberia.<sup>51, 52</sup>



*A car after a drive on a muddy road*  
Flickr / Anthony Kolesov

## Rural Health

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, the healthcare system declined, particularly in rural parts of the country. The central state stopped providing needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas, leaving many villages without any healthcare infrastructure. Since local governments did not have funding to procure medical essentials, they attempted to patch together their own healthcare systems.<sup>53, 54</sup> Many people in towns or villages, some of which have no public transportation, must travel more than 20 km (12 mi) to reach a healthcare facility.<sup>55</sup>



*A health clinic*  
Flickr / Peretz Partensky

Despite constitutional guarantees of the right to free medical care, patients must provide bribes and extra fees for doctors, most of whom earn barely a subsistence income unless they charge outside their approved fee structure.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup> Few rural patients can afford these out-of-pocket costs, and according to one nongovernmental medical organization, more than half of Russia's citizens are not receiving necessary medical help.<sup>59</sup> The majority of these people live in remote, rural parts of the country.<sup>60, 61</sup> Increasingly marginalized, rural Russians are also experiencing growing rates of drug addiction and alcoholism.<sup>62, 63</sup>

Today, rural health posts provide basic health checks and are capable

of handling routine exams and minor injuries. Each post covers about 4,000 residents. For larger rural populations (up to 7,000), there are health centers with a broad range of primary care services. These facilities, typically staffed with nurses, a pediatrician, a therapist, and a midwife/gynecologist, are also able to perform minor surgeries.<sup>64</sup> Often there is a single pharmacy in each large village. Residents may have to stand in line all day to get medications, if they are available. The high costs of such medications are outside the reach of many.<sup>65, 66</sup>

**Exchange 31:** Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	zdyes yest pableezastee balneetsa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there.	daa, von taam

## Rural Education

As with most other services, the quality of education declined after the Soviet Union collapsed and state-sponsored services were no longer available. The government enacted educational reforms during the transition period to a free market economy. High-quality job training and advanced education in Russia are generally available only in the larger cities, where universities are located. Furthermore, in rural Russia,

the number of schools and kindergartens for children has declined, partly because of lower fertility rates.<sup>67</sup>



*Rural school*  
Flickr / Dongfeng EQ2220AX

Although villages and towns in rural Russia are small, most have a basic or primary school. About 88% of Russian villages, accounting for 32% of the rural population, have fewer than 500 residents.<sup>68, 69</sup> Providing social services, including education, is difficult, and access to education is limited. Students may have to spend several hours each day commuting, riding a bus up to 30 km (18 mi) each way. Although 70% of all Russian schools are

located in rural areas, most are small. Two-thirds of rural primary schools have 14 or fewer students; 20% of middle-level schools have 40 or fewer students; and over 50% of secondary schools have fewer than 200 students. The average rural school has only 113 students.<sup>70, 71</sup> To help alleviate the problem of too few teachers and insufficient schools in some of the most remote regions, Russia is experimenting with distance learning.<sup>72, 73</sup>

**Exchange 32:** Is there a school nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a school nearby?	Ryaadam yest shkola?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

In the late and post-Soviet years, public funding was not available to repair school facilities. Consequently, schools began to rely on private and local funding sources. Overall, school buildings and equipment deteriorated, and textbooks and educational materials were scarce.<sup>74</sup> In 2002, about 42% of rural schools had no indoor running water, and 60% had no indoor sewer connections. In the cold regions of Siberia and the Far East, 51% and 59% (respectively) had no indoor running water and about two-thirds had no indoor sewer connections.<sup>75</sup>

### Exchange 33: Do your children go to school?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do your children go to school?	vaashee dyetee Khodyaat f-shkoloo?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

The structure of the educational process is the same in rural areas as in the cities. School is compulsory for all children through grade nine, at the end of which students receive a general education certificate. To obtain the secondary-level certificate, 2 to 3 years of additional education is required. After secondary school, students must take and pass state-administered final examinations to continue on to university or vocational higher education options.<sup>76, 77, 78</sup>

## Who's in Charge?

Following Putin's election in 2000, he launched a campaign to centralize more power in the hands of the federal government. New laws in 2003 restructured local governments and gave more power to local citizens while at the same time placing those local governments under more federal oversight. As a result, citizens had less autonomy than before.<sup>79, 80</sup> Under these new reforms, local self-governments (LSGs) have a complex organizational and territorial structure. Lower-level municipalities may be either rural

(*selskie poseleniya*) or urban (*gorodskie poseleniya*) and must have at least 1,000 residents. Each municipality has its own municipal budget, though many of the funds no longer derive from local sources. Municipal districts (*munitsipal'nye rajony*), similar to counties, represent a two-tiered local authority that comprises the lower-level rural and urban municipalities. A third, higher-level governance exists in urban areas. In 2006, there were 19,904 rural municipalities.<sup>81</sup> Local councils (*predstavitel'nyj organ*) are directly elected by citizens. Each council is headed by a "head of administration" (*glava administratsii*) or city administrator, who is directly elected.<sup>82, 83</sup>



President Putin at a summit meeting  
Flickr / Bohan\_伯韩 Shen\_沈

## Checkpoints

Military checkpoints are in place along Russia's numerous borders with other countries. Altogether, Russia has more than 400 relatively modern border checkpoints, established in the 1990s. Lines at border crossings tend to be long, and inspections can last from

20–30 minutes to several hours.

Violating border crossing regulations in Russia is a criminal offense that can result in time in prison.<sup>84, 85</sup> Since Russia's annexation of the Crimea, 12 border checkpoints are now fully operational.<sup>86</sup> Ukraine, on the other hand, has closed 23 of its 39 border crossing posts into Russia as of February 2015.<sup>87</sup> Because the situation along Russia's border with the Ukraine is insecure, travelers should check to make sure the crossings are open and violence has not erupted.<sup>88</sup>

Checkpoints along Russia's roads are commonplace, particularly at the outskirts of most cities. The purpose of the checkpoints is to detect narcotics, human trafficking, and firearms violations,



*Checkpoint*  
[Flickr / Maarten](#)

but in some cases such checkpoints allow police to collect "fines" from drivers. If this occurs, a driver should record the officer's name, badge number, patrol car number, and time and date and report the incident to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General.<sup>89, 90, 91</sup>

## Landmines

Russia is one of several countries that continue to produce landmines and refuse to sign the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The Russian government acknowledges the utility of antipersonnel mines for its national security. Russia has produced at least 10 types of antipersonnel mines since 1992, although the government claims to have ended production of blast mines in 1997. The government reports that there are about 26.5 million antipersonnel devices stockpiled, but the government is scheduled to destroy 23.5 million of these devices by 2015. Russian troops have planted thousands of mines in some of its republics and along its borders with Georgia and Tajikistan.<sup>92</sup> There

have been reports of Russian troops placing landmines in the Crimea regions, but those reports have not been independently verified.<sup>93</sup>

Thousands of landmines are located in the region of Chechnya (just north of Georgia), which has had a long history of rebellion. After Chechnya declared its independence, Russia invaded in 1994, and periods of warfare have since followed. Both Chechen rebels and Russian forces have planted landmines regularly. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines reported that landmines either injured or killed around 6,000 people in Chechnya in 2003, and the casualty rate is one of the highest in the world.<sup>94, 95</sup>



*A Russian TM-46 anti-tank blast mine  
Courtesy of the U.S. federal government*

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# Overview

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## Chapter 5 Assessment

1. The standard of living in Russia's countryside has increased steadily since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

**FALSE**

The standard of living in the countryside has fallen since 1991. The transition to a more market-based economy has hurt farms and villages. Rural incomes are far lower than those of their urban counterparts and the general living conditions are worse.

2. The Russian government has privatized land ownership in Russia, although many people own virtual rather than actual plots of agricultural land.

**TRUE**

The government divided state-owned properties into virtual plots of equal size, and each adult who had previously worked on the collective received one land share; that is, a piece of paper representing a virtual plot of fractional ownership.

3. In the Soviet era, the government put minimal effort into building a road infrastructure.

**TRUE**

The effects of this policy continue today, especially in rural areas, where the roads are often unpaved and in disrepair. Reliable road connections may not exist between small villages and mid-size towns.

4. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the central state continued to provide needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas.

**FALSE**

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, the healthcare system declined, particularly in rural parts of the country. The central state stopped providing needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas.

5. Because many villages have had to merge services, the majority of schools in rural areas are large.

**FALSE**

Although 70% of all Russian schools are located in rural areas, most are small. The average rural school has only 113 students.



## CHAPTER 6

*Family*  
Flickr / Andrey

# Family Life

## Introduction

For decades, Russia's fertility rates declined, reaching below-replacement levels and bringing profound social and cultural changes. But in recent years birthrates have increased, in part because of new family policies that include financial incentives for having a second child, childcare benefits, and improved maternity leave. Still, with smaller numbers of women entering their childbearing years, it is unclear whether the trend is sustainable.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup>

There have been major shifts in family structure and family values since 1991. According to recent surveys, more than 90% of Russians say their primary goal is to start a family

and raise good children. Nearly half believe that the ideal family includes a lifelong marriage, a stay-at-home mother, and respect for elders. But in reality, many people are falling short of these goals.<sup>6</sup> Russians are waiting longer to marry. Today, only about one in five marriages is between people under the age of 24. The majority of Russians are likely to postpone marriage until they are between the ages of 25 and 34.<sup>7,8</sup> Nearly half of Russian marriages fail, resulting in one of the highest divorce rates in the world.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Russia's birthrate is on the rise after years of being at below-replacement levels. But many of these children (23%) are born out of wedlock, particularly in Siberia and the Urals.<sup>12,13,14</sup> These trends, along with other changes in Russian society, have led to more family breakups and weakened ties.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Typical Household and Family Structure

Russian families are patriarchal. Russians regard men as the family breadwinners and often leave domestic and childcare responsibilities to women. Even though younger couples show an increasing preference for a more equitable distribution of responsibilities, traditional gender roles, in which stay-at-home wives are a status symbol, persist.<sup>17,18,19,20</sup>

**Exchange 34:** How is your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How is your family?	kaak seemyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	They are doing fine, thank you.	fsyo Kharaasho, spaseeba

**Exchange 35:** Does your family live here?

*A family in  
Grafovka village  
Flickr /  
Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky*

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your family live here?	zdyes zheevyot vaashaa syemyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa



The average number of children born per woman declined dramatically from 7.5 in 1920 to 1.6 in 2015.<sup>21,22</sup> As many as 3 in 10 married couples are childless.<sup>23,24,25</sup> An average Russian household has between two and three members. Rural households consist of three persons, only slightly bigger than urban households (2.71). Rural households have more children and retirement-age persons. Among families with children, rural families are more likely than urban families to have two or more children (21% vs. 13%). Older individuals are more likely to head rural households than urban households. More than half of all households in Russia have a female head-of-household, a number that is slightly higher in rural areas (54.2% vs. 51.1%).<sup>26</sup>

**Exchange 36:** Is this your entire family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your entire family?	eta fsyaa vaashaa syemvyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

## Status of Women, Children, and the Elderly

### Women

The social status of women, which was influenced by the communist ideology of gender equality, has changed since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 and subsequent economic turmoil. Patriarchal traditions are resurging. Traditional views suggest that

women should stay home and care for their families. Women continue to bear the major responsibilities for the home, even if they work. Women are being encouraged to stay at home and to have more children. New policies have been enacted to increase maternity leave benefits and to financially help families with two or more children.<sup>27, 28</sup>

Women are often disadvantaged in the economic sector, in which they are paid less than their male counterparts. About 32% of women are unemployed.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup> Although women are more likely to live in poverty and to have to cope with the effects of economic disruptions, they appear better able to deal with these problems. Women are healthier and happier than Russian men, a state that has been attributed to their social connections outside the workplace.<sup>32, 33, 34</sup>



*Mother and son*  
Flickr / Dmitry Ryzhkov

Domestic violence against women in Russia is a serious problem. Domestic abuse is still widely regarded as a private issue, with many holding the view that a women brings ill treatment upon herself. Data suggest that as many as 14,000 women die annually from family violence, and that nearly 65% of homicides are related to domestic violence.<sup>35, 36, 37, 38</sup>

**Exchange 37:** Did you grow up here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did you grow up here?	vy vyRaslee zdyes?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

## Children

In spite of the low fertility rate and small family sizes, Russians value families, parenthood, and children. Children often hold positions of honor and privilege in a family, and parents and grandparents indulge them. Russians are quick to come to the aid of children and often take on the role of parents, praising or scolding children who are not their own.<sup>39</sup>



*Children playing in the street*  
Flickr / Obakeneko

The national constitution protects the rights of children. But poor coordination among various legal, federal, and local agencies results in a disconnect between reality and constitutional protections. The poor economic conditions have added to the problems, with authorities failing to implement many proposed programs because of budgetary constraints. Children under the age of 18 may work, but the government restricts the nature and type of work. Russian children typically get a job around the age of 16. The burdens of bureaucracy and paperwork required to hire minors have made employers reluctant to hire children for any kind of work. Agriculture is an exception, and farmers often call children out of school to help with the harvests, usually without pay and without registering the children as laborers of the agricultural cooperatives.<sup>40, 41, 42</sup>

Criminal organizations sell and illegally traffic children in Russia, many for sexual exploitation or as slave labor. Nearly 70,000 young women and children are trafficked annually. Russian law in the arena of human trafficking is complicated and contains a series of loopholes placing children at risk.<sup>43, 44</sup>

**Exchange 38:** Are these your children?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these your children?	eta vaashee dyetee?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

## The Elderly

The elderly in Russia have historically occupied an important position in the extended, interdependent rural household. Charged with caring for children and helping with household chores, grandparents were appreciated for contributing to the younger generations' needs and sharing in family life.<sup>45</sup> Families were traditionally responsible



*Russian elderly entrepreneur*  
Flickr / Paul L Dineen

for elder care, and few elderly persons went to nursing or retirement homes. Even today, many associate going to such a facility with a sense of shame and humiliation. Many elderly Russians refuse to go to nursing homes, viewing them as places of loneliness and unhappiness.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, changing attitudes and values in the Russian family mean that much of the care of the elderly is now provided by professional agencies rather than by family members.<sup>47</sup>

The role of grandparents has diminished because large numbers of young people are leaving the countryside. Many rural elderly have been left on their own, living alone without access to transportation or healthcare. They may have to walk long distances to the nearest town to obtain supplies or medications. Some may have a small pension, and they supplement their diet with food they grow in their own gardens. Many are in ill health. Several succumb to alcoholism, which is rampant among Russia's rural population, including the elderly.<sup>48, 49</sup>

#### Exchange 39: Do you have any brothers?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any brothers?	oo vaas yest bRaatyaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

Because the life expectancy of men in Russia is lower than that of women, many villages consist almost entirely of elderly women. The rate of alcoholism is much lower among women. Observers believe that this factor alone contributes significantly to women's longer life spans; researchers believe alcoholism is responsible for a high number of male deaths in Russia. In some villages, a social worker may periodically visit to offer basic assistance to the residents, and family members from out of town may visit occasionally.<sup>50</sup>

## Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

### Marriage

Recent studies show that a large majority of Russians still believe in the institution of marriage and value both the institution and family relations. An overwhelming 93% of Russians view marriage as necessary for women.<sup>51, 52</sup>

In spite of the value placed on family, recent demographic changes and



*The bride and her family*  
Flickr / Dmitry Boyarin

modernization have taken a toll on families in the Russian Federation. Approximately 22% of Russian households are single-member households, and single mothers head nearly 23% of all households. Households without children account for 28%, as more couples choose to remain childless. Russians are increasingly choosing to cohabit rather than to marry, and fewer of those couples eventually marry.<sup>53, 54, 55</sup>

**Exchange 40:** Are you married?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you married?	vy zhyenaaty?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nyet

**Exchange 41:** Is this your wife?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your wife?	eta vaashaa zhyenaa?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	daa

### *Divorce*

Attitudes toward divorce, once unheard of, have changed in recent years. There is no longer a stigma attached to divorce, and only 12% of Russians feel that couples must save their marriages regardless of the cost.<sup>56</sup> Russia has one of the world's highest divorce rates, and it is continuing to rise.<sup>57, 58, 59, 60</sup> Both parties have the right to seek a divorce in Russia, although men may not institute divorce proceedings while a wife is pregnant or for one year after the birth of a child. Russians file uncontested divorce requests with the registry office, pay about USD 12, and within a month authorities dissolve the marriage if there are no minor children. Otherwise, a marriage court must hear the case. By law, each spouse is entitled to half the property unless one party takes the other to court.<sup>61, 62</sup>

When authorities grant a divorce, whichever parent is no longer living in the household is required to pay child support. An ex-wife is entitled to claim spousal support if she is pregnant or raising a young child (under 3 years of age). If either spouse is disabled or close to retirement, after a long marriage, that spouse qualifies for support.<sup>63</sup> Although both parents have equal parental rights, many divorced noncustodial fathers rarely see their children once the divorce is final. Some fathers have resorted to kidnapping their children, an action that is legal in Russia.<sup>64</sup>

### *Birth*

Babies are a welcome addition to most Russian families, especially because of the population decline. Approximately 23% of children are born to unmarried women.<sup>65, 66</sup> Medical care and services for pregnant women are among the most poorly developed in Russia's health industry. Many women suffer from anemia and poor nutrition, which can cause problems during birth, and only about 20% of children are born healthy.<sup>67</sup>



Butusovsky Park  
Flickr / Evgeny Pavlov

Even though skilled healthcare professionals attend virtually all births, maternal death rates are relatively high in Russia.<sup>68, 69, 70</sup>

The highest rates are in the North Caucasus, Siberia, and the far eastern part of the country. The lowest rates are in the central and northern European regions.<sup>71, 72</sup>

The government plans to create more and better birth centers, designed to raise birthrates and decrease infant and maternal mortality rates.<sup>73, 74</sup>

Until recently, Russian women tended to have their children in their early to mid-twenties, but there is a developing trend to delay pregnancy. In 2010, the average age of a first-time mother was nearly 27. To encourage women to have more than one child, the

government offers a number of incentives. One of the most important is a significant cash incentive for a second or third child. The programs appear somewhat successful, and the Russian birthrate has risen slightly since 2008.<sup>75, 76, 77, 78</sup>

New parents often keep their babies in relative isolation for the first month or so following the birth. About 40 days after the birth, parents may hold a party, or *smotriny*, inviting friends and relatives to see the newborn. Guests commonly bring gifts for the baby and money, which they place under the newborn's pillow.<sup>79</sup>

## Family Social Events

### Weddings

The most popular time for Russian weddings is from the end of Orthodox Easter through the end of summer. Slavic pagan rites are combined with official church rites to form a complicated ritual that often takes place on a grand scale, and for which families often borrow money, even taking out bank loans. Brides wear elaborate white dresses with long veils. Couples invite as many friends and relatives as possible, adhering to the belief that the more guests there are, the longer and happier the marriage will be.<sup>80, 81, 82</sup>



*A lovely wedding*  
Flickr / Un Bolshakov

At the conclusion of the ceremony, guests shower the newlyweds with seeds, hops, or coins. Couples must register marriages, whether civil or religious, with the registry office. Church weddings are becoming increasingly popular, and many believe church weddings are particularly blessed. Because Russians regard church weddings as a serious commitment, many wait until years after their civil wedding before having their religious ceremony.<sup>83, 84, 85</sup>

**Exchange 42:** I wish you both happiness.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I wish you both happiness.	zhelaayoo vam schaastya
<b>Local:</b>	We are honored.	mvy vaam oochen pReeznaatyelne

Following the church service, and before the reception, tradition dictates that the couple pays its respects at an important historical or cultural site such as the Kremlin, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, or the statue of Peter the Great.<sup>86</sup> The reception commonly takes place in a restaurant, a large hall, or a private home. The groom's parents receive the couple, and the groom's mother often gives the newlyweds bread and salt. The bride and groom eat the bread together, and Russians playfully assume that the person who eats the larger portion will be head of the household.<sup>87</sup>

**Exchange 43:** Congratulations on your wedding!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Congratulations on your wedding!	pazdRavlaayoo s-bRakaasochetaneeyem!
<b>Local:</b>	We are honored you could attend.	pachtyom zaa chyest vaashye pRe- esooststveeye

### *Funerals*

Modern funeral traditions vary but most follow certain rituals. Family members gather around the deathbed. A priest hears the last confession and offers Communion. If a person dies before confessing, the priest performs *panikhida*, which is an abridged funeral repeated on the 3rd, 9th, and 40th day after death. Families must arrange a requiem at the church.<sup>88, 89</sup>



*A funeral*  
Flickr / Fr Maxim Massalitin

Before burial, the body is washed and dressed in a simple white garment and a belt. The body remains in the home for 3 days before being placed in a coffin. Many Orthodox Russians lay the body with the head facing the icon corner in the home, although Old Believers place the feet facing the icon corner. Before the burial, which normally takes place on the third day after death, family members place items thought to be useful or valuable in the coffin to accompany the soul on its journey.<sup>90, 91</sup> After the ceremony, guests return to the home of the deceased's family to enjoy a feast. They make toasts, usually with vodka, clinking glasses as they toast one another and say farewell. Black bread and vodka are set at a place for the departed.<sup>92, 93</sup>

On the ninth day, Russians believe that the soul has reached God's throne, and they hold a memorial service (*panikhida*). Days 9–40 are a time a judgment, during which the fate of the individual is decided. On the 40th day, the soul receives the preliminary judgment of its fate until the final judgment. Each year on the anniversary of the death, the family holds another *panikhida* to mark the deceased's new birthday in eternity.<sup>94, 95</sup>

**Exchange 44:** I would like to give my condolences.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	yaa bvy Khatyel vyRaazeete svoee cabalyeznavaaneeyaa vaam ee vaashyyee syemye
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you.	spaaseeba

**Exchange 45:** Please be strong.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Please be strong.	dyeRzheetyes
<b>Local:</b>	We will try.	mvy pastaaRaayemsyaa

## Naming Conventions

Russian names consist of three parts. First is the assigned name, or first name (*imya*). The middle (*patronymic*) name (*otchestvo*) consists of the father's first name and a suffix designating gender. If the child is male, parents add *-vich* or *-ovich* to complete the name (as in the name *Ivanovich* for the son of Ivan). If the child is female, they add *-avna* or *-ovna* to complete the name (as in the name *Ivanovna* for the daughter of Ivan). The person's third name is the surname, or family name (*familiya*). The last name does not change for sons but for daughters, the feminine *-a* is added. For example, the son of Vladimir Ivanovitch Smirnov might be named Alexandre Vladimirovich Smirnov while his daughter might be Irina Vladimirovna Smirnova.<sup>96, 97, 98, 99</sup>

In formal situations, acquaintances or business associates should address Russians using all three names. Even in less formal situations, it is polite to address people you do not know well by their first and middle names. Casual friends may use the first and middle names: Russians regard it as a sign of respect to use an individual's first and patronymic names. Only family members and close friends use first names for one another.<sup>100, 101, 102</sup>

After marrying, a husband may choose to take his wife's surname, the wife may take the husband's surname, or both may choose to keep their original surnames. If a woman chooses to take her husband's name, an *-a* is added to the end to become her surname. For example, if a man's surname were Pushkin, his wife's surname would be Pushkina.<sup>103, 104</sup>



*Family generations*  
Flickr / Leonid Mamchenkov

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# Overview

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## Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Russia's government has ignored its shrinking population.

**FALSE**

The government has instituted childcare benefits, better maternity leave, and incentives for couples having second children as policies designed to reverse the problem.

2. Rural families are generally significantly larger than urban families.

**FALSE**

Today, urban and rural households are similar in size and composition. An average rural household consists of three persons, which is only slightly bigger than an average urban household (2.71).

3. The social status of women has increased since the fall of the Soviet Union.

**FALSE**

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the social status of women has declined. Patriarchal traditions are resurging. Employers pay women less than they pay men. Women have higher unemployment rates and remain primary caretakers.

4. The elderly in Russia traditionally occupied an important position in the extended, interdependent rural household.

**TRUE**

Charged with caring for children and helping with household chores, grandparents were appreciated for their contributions to the family's needs and for sharing in family life.

5. Russia has one of the highest divorce rates in the world.

**TRUE**

Russia has one of the world's highest divorce rates, which continues to rise. Nearly half of Russian marriages fail, one of the highest divorce rates in the world.

# Russian Cultural Orientation

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## Final Assessment

1. The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the overthrow of the Russian monarchy and the establishment of a communist state.

**TRUE**

As a result of the revolution of 1917, the long-standing Russian monarchy was deposed and replaced by a communist state, the Soviet Union.

2. The Ural Mountains form Russia's southern boundary with the Caucasian countries of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

**FALSE**

The Greater Caucasus Mountains form Russia's southern border with Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Ural Mountains mark the division between European Russia and the Asian region of Russia known as Siberia.

3. During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Russian ruler Peter the Great initiated a series of reforms to modernize the Russian Empire.

**TRUE**

Using Western models, Peter the Great modernized the Russian state, including its military, government, and education systems.

4. Saint Petersburg is Russia's main port on the Pacific Ocean.

**FALSE**

Saint Petersburg (known as Leningrad from 1924–1991) is Russia's largest seaport and is located northwest of Moscow on the Gulf of Finland.

5. Press freedoms have begun to improve under Putin.

**FALSE**

During Putin's first two terms as president, media freedoms were severely restricted and the independent media declined. Things improved somewhat under Medvedev, but Putin's reelection has created pressure on the media to avoid criticizing the government.

6. Russian Muslims are largely Shi'a.

**FALSE**

Thirty percent of Russia's Muslims identify themselves as Sunni and 6% as Shi'a. The largest group (45%) says they are "just a Muslim," with no preference for a particular sect.

7. As in the Soviet era, the Russian government has distanced itself from the Russian Orthodox Church and from organized religion in general.

**FALSE**

In recent years, the Russian government has embraced the Russian Orthodox Church as an essential element of Russian identity and values.

8. Nearly half of all Russians are members of the Russian Orthodox Church.

**FALSE**

Between 15% and 20% of Russians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, the nation's largest Christian denomination.

9. A Russian law passed in 1997 requires religious organizations to register with the government in order to receive legal recognition and protection.

**TRUE**

The 1997 law recognizes Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Other religious organizations must be established in the country for 15 years before they can register with the government.

10. For Orthodox Christians, Easter is the most significant religious holiday in Russia.

**TRUE**

Observed in late April or early May, Easter is the most important religious holiday for members of the Russian Orthodox Church.

11. Vodka is an appropriate gift when visiting a Russian home.

**FALSE**

Giving a bottle of vodka should generally be avoided because, once opened, Russians often feel obligated to finish it. A bottle of wine is a more appropriate choice.

12. In the Russian culture, even strangers are expected to greet by embracing and kissing on the cheek.

**FALSE**

Greeting people by embracing and kissing on the cheek is only acceptable among family members or close friends.

13. Russians are indifferent to their national identity.

**FALSE**

Russians are extremely patriotic and proud of their history, nation, and culture.

14. Traditionally, the main meal of the day was taken in the afternoon but today, the main meal is frequently eaten in the evening.

**TRUE**

Traditionally, the afternoon meal was the largest, but today, lunches are often a light meal consisting of soup or salad. The evening meal (*uzhin*) is frequently the main meal of the day and may be taken after 8 p.m. among urban Russians.

15. Russians typically dress informally and care little about the latest fashion trends.

**FALSE**

Russians wear contemporary European clothing and appear neat and well-dressed in public. Among some women, wearing the latest fashions is important. Russian dress is normally conservative.

16. Russia's population did not begin to shift to urban areas until the early 21st century.

**FALSE**

Russia's population began to urbanize in the 1930s under Stalin. Stalin's administration centralized the economy around heavy industry, mostly located near densely populated urban areas.

17. Public transportation in major Russian cities is generally unsafe.

**FALSE**

Most major cities have a variety of public transportation options that are usually cheap, but can be unreliable. Public transport in major cities is heavily used. Tram and metro networks are often the safest and most efficient ways to navigate major cities.

18. Russians have a strong tradition of dining out.

**FALSE**

Dining out is not a Russian tradition, although people eat in restaurants to celebrate special occasions. Although the tradition of eating out is slowly gaining popularity, some regard an invitation to eat out rather than in a home an insult.

19. Russia has a universal healthcare system.

**TRUE**

Russia officially provides universal healthcare for its citizens, but in recent years, reduced government expenditures on healthcare have raised prices and reduced services.

20. Foreigners are frequently targeted by criminals in major urban centers in Russia.

**TRUE**

Westerners are frequent targets of both violent and nonviolent crime such as theft, physical assault, and racial or ethnic violence.

21. When the Bolsheviks gained power in Russia in 1917, they banned private land ownership.

**TRUE**

The Bolsheviks adopted a decree that prohibited private land ownership. They codified this further in the 1930s, when state ownership of all land was legally set forth.

22. Foreign investors are prohibited from buying Russian agricultural land.

**TRUE**

Russia's 2001 land code fully privatized the ownership of urban and commercial land, leaving rural and agricultural lands untouched. Foreign individuals or agencies can own land under this code, provided the lands are nonagricultural.

23. The Soviets laid thousands of miles of railroad track, predominantly to accommodate passenger traffic.

**FALSE**

Although the Soviets used railroads predominantly for freight traffic, they have remained an important means of passenger travel into remote areas. The density of railway routes is higher in western and central Russia than in Siberia.

24. Every settlement with more than 1,000 residents has its own elected council and budget.

**TRUE**

A 2006 law broadly increased the decentralization of rural settlements. Every town or village with more than 1,000 residents is an independent administrative unit (*poselenija*) with an elected head (executive), an elected council, and a formal budget.

25. Russia has produced no new landmines or antipersonnel devices since its establishment in 1991.

**FALSE**

Russia has produced at least 10 types of antipersonnel mines since 1992, although the government claims to have ended production of blast mines in 1997.

26. Russian middle names are an adaptation of the father's first name.

**TRUE**

The middle (patronymic) name consists of a name taken from the father's first name and a suffix that designates gender. If the child is male, parents add *-vich* or *-ovich*. If the child is female, they add *-avna* or *-ovna*.

27. Child trafficking is not a major issue in Russia.

**FALSE**

Criminal organizations sell and illegally traffic children in Russia, many for sexual exploitation or as slave labor.

28. Few children are born out of wedlock in Russia.

**FALSE**

Nearly one in four children (23%) are born to unmarried women.

29. Couples are required to register all weddings.

**TRUE**

Couples must register marriages, whether civil or religious, with the registry office.

30. Under certain conditions, a divorced person in Russia is entitled to claim spousal support.

**TRUE**

An ex-wife is entitled to claim spousal support if she is pregnant or raising a young child (under 3 years of age). If either spouse is disabled or close to retirement, after a long marriage, that spouse qualifies for support.

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Further Reading and Resources

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