



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Off the Beaten Path St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg, 5 Days

Table of contents:

Guide Description 2

Itinerary Overview 3

Daily Itineraries 5

St. Petersburg Snapshot 14

Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: St. Petersburg is a city rich with museums, parks, and historical artifacts, ensuring that there are plenty of places that are off the regular tourist circuits. The city is cut up into a series of islands and canals, providing a unique and fascinating cityscape.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - St. Petersburg

DAY NOTE: Start out the day north of downtown in the Summer Garden, a pristine and romantic place to spend the morning wandering along its many paths. After, walk through downtown to grab a blini at Teremok, and visit the Grand Choral Synagogue, which has had massive reconstruction done in the past 10 years, and is beautifully painted. Then take a stroll down Nevskii Prospekt, which has been the city's main thoroughfare for hundreds of years, to view the amazing architecture (and for some people-watching). End up at Nevskii for a traditional Russian dinner. The Pushka Inn is not devoid of tourists, but is small, comfortable, quaint, and perfectly located. Breakfast is good, so you can fill up before venturing out to explore the city.

 **Letnyi Sad (Summer Gardens)**
Elegant and relaxing gardens by the Neva

 **Teremok**
Blinis fast and hot

 **Edmond J Safra Grand Choral Synagogue (The)**
Europe's second-largest synagogue

 **Nevskii Prospekt**
Massive-scale and bustling main street

 **Nevskii**
Popular cafe in popular place

 **Pushka Inn**
Views of the Moyka

Day 2 - St. Petersburg

DAY NOTE: Take the train west out of town for the day to Lomonosov. Much of the palace complex has been repaired and reconstructed in the past two years, and the Chinese palace alone is reason enough to journey out to this beautiful location.

 **Oranienbaum / Lomonosov**
Former Tsarist summer residence

 **Pushka Inn**
Views of the Moyka

Day 3 - St. Petersburg

DAY NOTE: Start out your morning with a trip to the Museum of Ethnography to see the Siberian exhibit, a look at a different and older part of Russian history. Then, take a tour of the Cruiser Aurora, the oldest commissioned ship in the Russian Navy. Spend the rest of your afternoon wandering the Kuznechy Market to the east, full of dazzling sights, smells, and free samples. Dinner may not be necessary after this, but in case it is, spicy curries from Tandoor (downtown) would provide a tasty end to the day.

 **Etnograficheskii Muzei (Museum of Ethnography)**
Colorful and fascinating diversity

 **Kreiser Avrora (Cruiser Aurora)**
The ship that launched the revolution

 **Kuznechny Market**
Fruit, vegetables, cheese, caviar

 **Tandoor**
Some like it hot

 **Pushka Inn**
Views of the Moyka

Day 4 - St. Petersburg

DAY NOTE: A beautiful place to spend a morning, the Botanical Garden is the oldest and one of the largest in Russia. In the afternoon, take a train out to Pavlovsk to explore the majestic palace and grounds, which have largely been historically preserved. Back in town, enjoy a modern Russian dinner at Restoran to end the day.

 **Botanicheskii Sad (Botanical Garden)**
Park and tropical hothouse garden

 **Pavlovsk**
Site of the Great Palace

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife



Restoran

Mixing old and new



Pushka Inn

Views of the Moyka

Day 5 - St. Petersburg

DAY NOTE: Head northeast of downtown to visit an important piece of recent Russian history, the somber yet beautiful Piskarevskoe Cemetery, which memorialized those who died during the Siege of Leningrad and the rest of World War II. There is an eternal flame burning near the entrance and two exhibits of documents and pictures related to the siege. Come back into downtown to grab a fast yet delicious Russian lunch at Laima Bistro, then walk a bit north to explore the Fields of Mars, a huge park that was previously the site of military drills and parades. There is also an eternal flame burning here, to commemorate the people killed during the 1917 February Revolution.



Piskarevskoe Kladbishche (Piskarevskoe Cemetery)

Sorrowful result of the WWII siege



Laima Bistro

Quick and around-the-clock



Marsovo Pole (Fields of Mars, The)

Park named after the God of War



Pushka Inn

Views of the Moyka

Day 1 - St. Petersburg

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: +7 812 314 0374

location:
Letnii Sad
St. Petersburg 191186

hours:
Daily 10a-7p

1 Letnyi Sad (Summer Gardens)

DESCRIPTION: This is the place to rest on a bench after a day of visiting museums, or to escape from the crush of city sidewalks -- or to imagine how Peter the Great spent his summer afternoons. The lush greenery (at least for a few months of the year) almost makes you forget that these gardens were entirely planned, designed for Peter's pleasure walks and adhering to the city's rules of classicism. Peter brought in marble Renaissance-era statues from Italy to give the park a more European feel. He and his successors threw grand receptions here with dancing, drinking, and fireworks under the endless sun of the White Nights. The statues and fountains serve as landmarks in case you get disoriented. The shrubbery was once carefully trimmed but now its groomers allow trees to take on more abundant forms. The Summer Palace is open to visitors, its rooms re-created as they would have been in Peter's time. The small two-story building was not heated, so it was a summer treat. Glance inside the Coffee House and the Tea House, too. The park closes for a few weeks in spring, usually in April, for a "drying out" period as the slush melts. © Frommer's

contact:
<http://www.teremok.ru/places.phtml>

location:
Vladimirsky Pr. 5
St. Petersburg

hours:
Daily 9am-11pm

Teremok

DESCRIPTION: Fast food style restaurant with delicious blinis, Teremok is a local favorite. Blinis are served fast and hot -- this is a great choice for a quick breakfast or lunch.

contact:
tel: 812/714-1153

location:
Lermontovskii Prospekt 2
St. Petersburg 190068

hours:
8a-6p M-Su

2 Edmond J Safra Grand Choral Synagogue (The)

DESCRIPTION: The Edmond J Safra Grand Choral Synagogue is the second largest and second most architecturally elegant synagogue in Europe, its cupola reaching a height of some 47 meters. It was built in Arabesque-Mauritanian style between 1880 and 1883 under Professor I.I. Shaposhnikov and architect Viktor Aleksandrovich Shreter and consecrated in 1893. The synagogue was shelled during WWII but not seriously damaged. The main prayer hall holds 1200 and has women's galleries on three sides. There are also smaller halls. © wcities.com

contact:

<http://www.nevsky-prospekt.com/>

location:

Nevsky Prospekt
St Petersburg St Petersburg

hours:

Daily 24 hrs

3 Nevskii Prospekt

DESCRIPTION: On a map of the city center, this grand-scale thoroughfare forms a spine with the many canals appearing as spindly but graceful ribs. On the ground "Nevskii" is the city's vital artery, heaving with people from well before dawn until well after dusk. The street's western end lies at The Admiralty, and from there it runs three miles all the way to the Alexander Nevskii Monastery. The street is a dizzying and sometimes exhausting mix of hectic traffic, street poverty, high fashion and eye-turning architecture. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: 7 812 311 3093

location:

Nevskii Prospekt, 71
St. Petersburg

hours:

Noon-midnight M-Su

Nevskii

DESCRIPTION: This restaurant has hosted a few prestigious guests, including former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. There are more than 200 soups, salads, main meals and desserts on offer. wcities particularly recommends the chicken fillet stuffed with apricots. Don't worry if you're not a meat-eater - vegetarian meals are available. The restaurant can be booked out for special occasions. In such cases, the cafe will work beyond normal opening hours. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 7 812 312 0913 / 7 812 312 0957

fax: 7 812 312 0913

<http://www.pushkainn.ru/>

location:

14 MOIKA RIVER
EMBANKMENT
St. Petersburg
Leningradskaya 191186

4 Pushka Inn

DESCRIPTION: Tourists can't ask for better accommodations in this magnificent historical city. Located in the heart of St. Petersburg, this charming hotel is walking distance from the Hermitage and Palace Square. All the rooms have an old world charm, but at the same time are equipped with modern amenities such as LCD screens and Wi-fi. If you want to surprise that special someone, make sure you book the room with hand-made furniture and a balcony offering spectacular view of the Moyka river. Pushka Inn Restaurant and Bar serves authentic Russian delicacies and a buffet breakfast. In addition, the hotel offers a guide service and air and railway ticket bookings. © wcities.com



Hotels.com

Day 2 - St. Petersburg

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Take the train west out of town for the day to Lomonosov. Much of the palace complex has been repaired and reconstructed in the past two years, and the Chinese palace alone is reason enough to journey out to this beautiful location.

contact:
tel: +7 812 422 4796

location:
Prospekt Lunovo Lenina 48
St Petersburg 189510

hours:
11a-5p W-M, closed Tu

1 Oranienbaum / Lomonosov

DESCRIPTION: This is one of the lesser known of the former tsarist resorts. It is situated 41 kilometers from St. Petersburg on the Finnish Sea Gulf. Sitting on a hill and overlooking the sea gulf, the main palace looks impressive. The vast park is dotted with smaller palaces and pavilions that can be visited. The most beautiful sight of Oranienbaum is the Kitaiskii Dvoretz (Chinese Palace) in the south-west of the park. The Chinese Palace is closed from October to the end of April. Entrance to the park is free. You have to pay for each palace or pavilion separately: Chinese Palace; Palace of Peter the III; Katal'naia Gorka, Grand Palace, Kitaiskaia Kukhnia (Pavilion), Kamennoe Zalo © wcities.com



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contact:
tel: 7 812 312 0913 / 7 812 312 0957
fax: 7 812 312 0913
<http://www.pushkainn.ru/>

location:
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Hotels.com

Day 3 - St. Petersburg

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contact:
tel: +7 812 576 6094
<http://www.ethnomuseum.ru/>

location:
Inzhenernaia Ulitsa 4/1
St Petersburg

hours:
11a-6p Tu-Su

1 Etnograficheskii Muzei (Museum of Ethnography)

DESCRIPTION: Though initially you enter this museum via the royal ostentation of its magnificent marble hall, the rest of your wanderings will give you an intriguing glimpse of less opulent ways, as you tour exhibits modeling peasant lifestyles from across the huge former Soviet Union, just as they were at the turn of the twentieth century. Kazakhs thickly clad in goat-hair look rugged compared to the neat Georgians with their swish pantaloons and trim beards. Also on display are scaly Caucasian toys and ornaments of upright Tuvans on horseback. Many people may have presumed Russia was an ethnically homogeneous region during the Cold War period, but this museum startles with its revelation of the sheer diversity of the peoples of the Soviet Union. © wcities.com



Etnograficheskii Muzei

contact:
tel: +7 812 230 8440
fax: +7 812 328 2701
<http://www.aurora.org.ru/>

location:
Petrogradskaia
Naberezhnaia, 4
St Petersburg 197046

hours:
Tu-Th, Sa-Su 10:30a-4p

2 Kreiser Avrora (Cruiser Aurora)

DESCRIPTION: The history of the cruiser Aurora is firmly intertwined with the 20th Century story of St. Petersburg. During the Communist period it was proudly revered as the ship that (allegedly) fired the shot that (allegedly) signaled the start of the October Revolution. The 7600-ton ship has been a museum since 1956, moored before the Nakhimov Naval Academy on a tributary just to the north of the Neva itself. Inside there is a reasonably interesting selection of photos, maps and uniforms as well as information about the ship's history. Admission is free. © wcities.com



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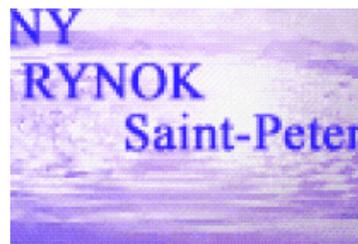
contact:
tel: +7 812 312 4161
<http://www.kuznechrin.sp.ru/>

location:
Kuznechny Per. 3
St. Petersburg 191002

hours:
Mon-Sat 9am-7pm

3 Kuznechny Market

DESCRIPTION: The pandemonium of smells, color and sound of this central market will enthrall the intrepid traveler. Here you will find fruit and vegetable vendors from all over the former Soviet Union loudly offering you their goods. Fresh food, cheese and caviar are popular purchases at this large, newly restored indoor market in the heart of the city.



Kuznechny Market

contact:

tel: 7 812 319 9133

location:

Voznesenskii pereulok 2
St. Petersburg 190000

hours:

Noon-11p M-Su

4 Tandoor

DESCRIPTION: What better way to fight off the evil sub-zero chill of the Russian winter than consuming copious amounts of spicy food? This is St. Petersburg's best-known Indian restaurants, situated a short stroll from St Isaac's Cathedral. Kitted out in the usual Indian fashion with Hindu figurines and such it is a pretty low-key affair. Prices are mid-range. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 7 812 312 0913 / 7 812
312 0957

fax: 7 812 312 0913

<http://www.pushkainn.ru/>

location:

14 MOIKA RIVER
EMBANKMENT
St. Petersburg
Leningradskaya 191186

5 Pushka Inn

DESCRIPTION: Tourists can't ask for better accommodations in this magnificent historical city. Located in the heart of St. Petersburg, this charming hotel is walking distance from the Hermitage and Palace Square. All the rooms have an old world charm, but at the same time are equipped with modern amenities such as LCD screens and Wi-fi. If you want to surprise that special someone, make sure you book the room with hand-made furniture and a balcony offering spectacular view of the Moyka river. Pushka Inn Restaurant and Bar serves authentic Russian delicacies and a buffet breakfast. In addition, the hotel offers a guide service and air and railway ticket bookings. © wcities.com



Hotels.com

Day 4 - St. Petersburg

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: A beautiful place to spend a morning, the Botanical Garden is the oldest and one of the largest in Russia. In the afternoon, take a train out to Pavlovsk to explore the majestic palace and grounds, which have largely been historically preserved. Back in town, enjoy a modern Russian dinner at Restoran to end the day.

contact:
tel: +7 812 234 1764

location:
Ulitsa Professora Popova 2
St Petersburg 197376

hours:
11a-4p Sa-Th

1 Botanicheskii Sad (Botanical Garden)

DESCRIPTION: Founded at the Botanical Institute, on Petrogradskaia Storona, the Garden is open to the general public. A park laid out in the open air presents hundreds of plant species from various corners of the world; from Northern America to China. Three big hothouses host rare collections of tropical plants: orchids, cactuses, palm trees and many more. It is the oldest and largest collection in St. Petersburg. You can also buy some of the exotic plants for home decoration. © wcities.com



wcities

contact:
tel: +7 812 470 6536
<http://eng.gov.spb.ru/culture/museums/pavlovsk>

location:
Ulitsa Revoliutsii 20
St Petersburg 189000

hours:
10a-5p Sa-Th

2 Pavlovsk

DESCRIPTION: The town is situated near Tsarskoe Selo roughly 25 kilometers from St. Petersburg. The central attraction is the Great Palace. It was a royal residence given by Catherine II as a present to her son Pavel. The palace grounds have a natural, rolling geography which makes it very attractive. The beauty of the landscape combines with some interesting architectural constructions: columns, pavilions and bridges. You can find about 200 marble and bronze sculptures made by famous masters of the past. Excursions around the park take place daily from May to October and last for two and a half hours. Closed first Monday of each month © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Pavlovsk

contact:
tel: 7 812 327 8979

location:
Tamozhennyi pereulok, 2
St. Petersburg

hours:
Noon-midnight M-Su

3 Restoran

DESCRIPTION: Next to the infamous Kunstammerand not far from the Twelve Colleges building lies this very stylish restaurant. Noted style-man Andrei Dmitriev was responsible for the interior - the pale, undecorated walls, metallic toilet doors decorated with pictograms of Mars and Venus, and the 'high-tech' toilets. The strange combination of sparse old Russia with modernist touches takes a bit of getting used to, but it's ultimately quite appealing. The food is a similar mix of old and new: fairly traditional Russian cuisine but spun with refreshingly new twists: pelmeny (basically Russian ravioli) with Turkey inside for example. Fish dishes are a speciality. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 7 812 312 0913 / 7 812 312 0957

fax: 7 812 312 0913

<http://www.pushkainn.ru/>

location:

14 MOIKA RIVER

EMBANKMENT

St. Petersburg

Leningradskaya 191186

4 **Pushka Inn**

DESCRIPTION: Tourists can't ask for better accommodations in this magnificent historical city. Located in the heart of St. Petersburg, this charming hotel is walking distance from the Hermitage and Palace Square. All the rooms have an old world charm, but at the same time are equipped with modern amenities such as LCD screens and Wi-fi. If you want to surprise that special someone, make sure you book the room with hand-made furniture and a balcony offering spectacular view of the Moyka river. Pushka Inn Restaurant and Bar serves authentic Russian delicacies and a buffet breakfast. In addition, the hotel offers a guide service and air and railway ticket bookings. © wcities.com



Hotels.com

Day 5 - St. Petersburg

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Head northeast of downtown to visit an important piece of recent Russian history, the somber yet beautiful Piskarevskoe Cemetery, which memorialized those who died during the Siege of Leningrad and the rest of World War II. There is an eternal flame burning near the entrance and two exhibits of documents and pictures related to the siege. Come back into downtown to grab a fast yet delicious Russian lunch at Laima Bistro, then walk a bit north to explore the Fields of Mars, a huge park that was previously the site of military drills and parades. There is also an eternal flame burning here, to commemorate the people killed during the 1917 February Revolution.

contact:
tel: +7 812 576 6094

location:
Nepokorennih Prospect 74
St Petersburg 199999

hours:
10a-6p M-Su

1 Piskarevskoe Kladbishche (Piskarevskoe Cemetery)

DESCRIPTION: This cemetery is situated in the north part of the city. It is a very important place for the people of the city, being the burial place (in mass graves) of those who died during World War II. The cemetery is a harrowing reminder of the horrors of that era. A wide alley runs between the common graves; too many people died for individual burial to be possible. The only identification provided is by granite blocks inscribed with the year of death. At the far end of the cemetery stands a memorial to the Motherland including a statue of Mother Russia. Admission is free. © wcities.com



wcities

contact:
tel: 7 812 315 5545
fax: 7 812 449 1870

location:
Kanal Griboedova, 30/16
St. Petersburg 191011

hours:
Daily 24 hrs

2 Laima Bistro

DESCRIPTION: This is a hectic, around-the-clock bistro cafe, very conveniently-located, with a reliable menu consisting of familiar but high-quality Russian food. Living up to the title bistro, you shouldn't have to wait longer than ten minutes for your main course. The decor is bright with small high round tables and lower rectangular tables. This place has two tiers with more seating and a large video screen on the upper-tier. This is an excellent place to fill up if your sight-seeing itinerary is in danger of getting the better of you. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +7 812 576 6094

location:
Dvortsovaya Emb. and
Sadovaya Ul
St Petersburg 190000

hours:
Dawn to dusk M-Su

3 Marsovo Pole (Fields of Mars, The)

DESCRIPTION: The land included under the name of Marsovo Pole includes the Summer Gardens, Mikhailovskii Gardens and the grounds of the Marble Palace among others. The heart of the ensemble is The Field of Mars itself, named after the Roman god of war. It got this name because military parades and training exercises were held there in Peter the Great's time. Marsovo Pole covers an area of 25 acres and is a popular summer hang-out. An eternal flame dedicated to the revolution still burns in the middle of the park. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 7 812 312 0913 / 7 812 312 0957

fax: 7 812 312 0913

<http://www.pushkainn.ru/>

location:

14 MOIKA RIVER

EMBANKMENT

St. Petersburg

Leningradskaya 191186

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Hotels.com

St. Petersburg Snapshot

Local Info

St. Petersburg might have changed names over the years. But whether it's called Petrograd, Leningrad or St. Petersburg, this planned city founded by Peter the Great is both historic and romantic. Its boulevards, canals and churches give it the dreamy feel of Venice but its landmarks and monuments steeped in history make it distinctively Russian. So whether you're admiring the Russian Classic Style architecture of St. Isaac's Cathedral with its golden dome or taking a boat trip along the Neva River or watching the Kirov Opera and Ballet at the Mariinsky Theater, you'll experience the best of all worlds.

Sights

Every visit to St. Petersburg should start with a tour of The Hermitage Museum, home to a whopping three million exhibits that are sure to make every art lover swoon. The museum is located in The Winter Palace grounds, which borders the Palace Square, home to the Alexander Column and the Palace Bridge. Navigating Nevsky Prospect, the three-mile-long city street is like taking a walk through history. Highlights of the street include Kazan Cathedral, the mosaic panels of the Resurrection of Christ Church, and the many buildings and shops that boast a stunning variety of architectural styles. And if you're in the neighborhood, don't forget to check out the Peter and Paul Fortress, an ancient prison that used to house some of the city's most famous residents.

Dining

For fine dining, your options are endless. Top spots include Noble Nest, Russian Vodka Museum, L'Europe and The Old Customs House. If you want a taste of Russian pie called stolle, head to the Stolle Café near the Resurrection of Christ Church for your fill. If you fancy pancakes or blini, check out tasty and cheap Blini

Domik. For that rare vegetarian meal in Russia, The Idiot is definitely worth a try.

Shopping

Looking for a Russian nesting doll – or matryoshka – to remind you of your trip? Nevsky Prospect is not only the city's best-known street, it is also the main shopping haunt. Don't be fooled by the look of Gostiny dvor – go straight inside and be prepared to shop to your heart's content at the hundreds of stalls there. If you're looking for more than just trinkets and kitsch, you won't be disappointed. St. Petersburg's luxury shopping is almost on par with Moscow, boasting plenty of French and Italian haute couture aimed squarely at the nouveau riche.

© NileGuide

History

The statue of the Bronze Horseman depicts a strident Peter the Great atop a rearing horse. His finger is thrust forward, pointing out the city's glorious history. St Petersburg's beginnings are inseparable from the historically and physically huge figure of Tsar Peter. Ambitious, optimistic and uncompromising, he conceived this northern capital while still at war with Charles II of Sweden. St Petersburg was to be both a "window to Europe" and a progressive antidote to the conservative and backward Holy Russia (symbolized by the city of Moscow) which Peter hated so intensely. For a while, Peter lived rough (by Tsarist standards) in a log cabin known as Peter's Cabin in order to personally oversee the construction of the Peter and Paul Fortress—the city's first major building.

Building a city in such harsh physical conditions proved difficult: countless prisoners-of-war carved the city out of marshland in unimaginably torrid conditions. Thousands perished as a result.

When Peter finally defeated the Swedes at Poltava in 1709, a future for St Petersburg was secured. By 1712, construction was

well underway and the Imperial family and much of the government had transferred to this strange new city, still afflicted by the threat of flood and the danger of marauding wolves.

Peter died in 1725, having given Russia an ambitious new capital and, incidentally, a radically redesigned Russian state. In Petersburg itself we can thank Peter for tourist attractions like the country palace of Peterhof, the Summer Gardens and the Kunstkammer museum.

After numerous fairly ineffective rulers, the next great figure in St Petersburg's history was Catherine the Great, who was second only to Peter the Great in the shaping of modern St Petersburg. A voracious reader and enthusiastic scholar, she conducted extensive correspondence with Voltaire and hosted many scholars from western Europe, including the philosopher Diderot. Smolnyi Cathedral was largely her doing, and the Hermitage—now one of the world's greatest museums—was comprised of Catherine's own art collection in the Winter Palace.

By the 19th Century the Empire was increasingly subject to both internal and external pressures. Nicholas I took over the reigns after the failed Decembrist uprising and promptly set out on a reign characterized by harsh repression and extreme political conservatism. The flip-side of this political conservatism was the growth of a dissident intelligentsia (the word itself is of Russian origin) who began whispering of revolution. The great Russian writer Dostoevskii was a member of the Petrashevskii circle of St Petersburg dissidents, a crime for which he was later sent into Siberian exile.

Despite the relative liberalism of Alexander II's rule (which included the emancipation of the serfs) the forces of revolution continued to gain steam. A political demonstration was held before the Kazan Cathedral in 1876. In 1881, the Tsar was assassinated by the revolutionary terrorist group the "People's Will," and the Saviour on

St. Petersburg Snapshot continued

Spilled Blood Cathedral was erected in his memory.

Towards the end of the 20th Century, Russia finally embarked upon a period of significant industrialisation but the conservative Tsar Alexander III(1881-94) was even less inclined than his predecessor to political change. This was a potentially explosive situation, especially as Russia's intelligentsia had already begun soaking up Marxist theories on the revolutionary potential of the emergent working class. On St Petersburg's Vasilevskii Island, the workers' slums and the potentially radical student population(which was located in close proximity) was a volatile combination.

Alexander III died in 1894 and power was duly passed to his son Nicholas II. In 1905, a minor revolution of sorts took place. St Petersburg played host to the bloody and entirely unnecessary slaughter which took place on what came to be known as Bloody Sunday, when government forces fired on what was by all accounts a peaceful protest in front of the Winter Palace. This action sparked a wave of mutinies, strikes and uprisings which were threatening enough to force Nicholas II to create a pseudo-democratic parliament(the Duma) and provide the people with a guarantee of basic civil rights. This largely placated the country's stormy mood until the start of the First World War.

World War I proved utterly disastrous for Russia – incompetent leadership and huge casualties proved troubling to a population already suffering wartime hardships. This discontent only fueled revolutionary fires and by March 1917, Nicholas' position was untenable. He abdicated, and after his brother Mikhail wisely refused to take over, Nicholas and his family were shipped off to the town of Ekaterinburg beyond the Urals where the Romanov dynasty was consigned to the past. By the end of the year, the precarious new bourgeois state had collapsed and was replaced by a communist regime that would last over 70 years. During the tumultuous events of the October revolution, Lenin and his

cohorts used the Smolnyi Institute as an administrative base.

The years leading up to the World War II were marked by major upheaval and mass repression under Stalin. As the capital city, the newly-named Leningrad bore the brunt of Party purges. The city's great 20th-century poet Anna Akhmatova lost numerous friends and family and was herself condemned as "half-nun, half-whore" but she survived until 1966.

During World War II the city suffered more than any other in the world. For three years the Germans besieged Leningrad, starving up to one million of its population to death. Although today the number of blokadniks(survivors of the blockade) is dwindling rapidly, the siege is still firmly embedded in the city's collective consciousness. A Victory Monument stands in the middle of Moskovskii Prospekt and elsewhere there is a Blockade Museum as well as the Piskarevskoe Cemetery, a solemn place where many of the dead were buried in mass graves.

After the destruction caused by the war, Leningrad had to go through a period of extensive reconstruction. Some buildings—like St Isaac's Cathedral—still bear scars of wartime bombardment.

Russia experienced something of a political and cultural thaw after the death of Stalin in 1953, but that was quickly followed by a period of stagnation under the complacent Brezhnev. When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the USSR was in dire need of renovation and Gorbachev sought to achieve this through the twin motors of glasnost(openness in public discourse) and perestroika(economic reconstruction). However, by the end of the 1980s the entire system was looking untenable and by 1990 things were beginning to come apart. By June 1991 Leningrad had been renamed St Petersburg in defiance of Gorbachev's wishes.

When Gorbachev was sidelined by a conservative coup, hundreds of thousands of people massed on Palace Square as they awaited the result of events in Moscow. In the end, the coup broke down

and with it any future for the Soviet Union. The post-Communist era had begun.

Modern St Petersburg has undergone a radical transformation and differs greatly from what it looked like at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union. The central thoroughfare Nevskii Prospekt is a cluster of new entertainment venues, expensive restaurants and upscale shops. However, beneath the glittering new look lies both brand new poverty and St Petersburg's eternally thriving cultural life.

©

Hotel Insights

The state of accommodation in St Petersburg reflects the post-Soviet history of the city. After the fall of Communism, big money was spent on only a handful of hotels to bring them up to scratch. Other hotels have not been lucky enough to be injected with Western cash. While most are more than adequate in their level of service, some of the cheaper options are mired with problems, mainly ill-kept rooms and indifferent staff. Careful selection is a must when choosing your hotel.

Central

Undisputedly at the top-end of the scale stand three hotels – the Grand Hotel Europe, the Astoria and the Nevskij Palace. Of these three, only the last is completely new. Both the Grand Hotel and the Astoria were premier Soviet hotels with a long history behind them, re-modernized and renovated with Western dollars to accommodate the post-Soviet influx of corporate travelers and discerning tourists. They are all situated in or around the city center.

The Grand Hotel Europe is about as central as you can get, standing just off the main stretch of Nevskii Prospekt and right beside Arts Square. It's normally the first choice of visiting celebrities and top-end officials, attracting an occasional bustle of media and security outside. Inside, the styling is Art Nouveau, the ambience is elegant and the service is excellent.

St. Petersburg Snapshot continued

The Astoria is one of the Grand Hotel's close competitors. Standing in the shadow of the gargantuan St Isaac's Cathedral, it is in the center but sufficiently far removed from the buzz of Nevskii Prospekt to give it a definite air of exclusivity. The Nevskij Palace is a thoroughly modern hotel sitting on the strictly commercial section of Nevskii Prospekt. It offers very modern services including excellent conferencing facilities.

The Oktiabrskaja is the most central of the mid-range hotels, located just off Nevskii's Ploshchad' Vosstaniia. It is however a little shabby and unaccommodating. A better option up the road is the Moskva, a vast Soviet effort situated near the Alexander Nevskii Monastery and a good choice for foreigner visitors due to its uncomplicated access to the city center (the metro station is right next door). Their wide experience with foreign guests dates from Soviet times and visitors should feel comfortable here.

The cream of the crop when it comes to backpackers lodging is undoubtedly the St Petersburg International Hostel. Not far from the center, it's got rooms of three to six beds, and the prices are quite reasonable. The staff are helpful, efficient and English-speaking, while the rooms are immaculately kept. The travel service affiliated with the hotel, Sinbad, will help you plan your future movements to Moscow and beyond.

Vasilievskii Island

On Vasilievskii Island to the northwest of the city center, the king of hotels is undoubtedly the Pribaltiiskaia, a giant Swedish-Soviet effort from the 1970s located a fair distance from the city center but affording an excellent panorama (if you get a western-facing room) over the Gulf of Finland. Like the Moskva, they are more than used to foreign clientele here.

The Petrograd Side & the Kirov Islands

The rooms here tend to be cheaper to compensate for its awkward location. Further to the east but still well south of the city center you'll find the Mir, which is located close to Victory Park and many interesting cafes. The Hotel Leningradskiy Dvoretz Molodezhi (LDM) used to target

a young crowd, but now hosts a more universal group of travelers. There are four bars to choose from and an exquisite restaurant.

South & West of Nevskii

There are plenty of great hotels to choose from that lie outside the city center. The Matisov Domik for example, is a small family-run affair lying west of the Mariinskii Theatre. There are many public transportation options nearby. The Pulkovskaia is a tentatively refurbished Soviet contribution that is distinguished by its location next to the thoroughly impressive Victory Monument.

Also, there's the Holiday Hostel. It's not far from the Finland Station on the north side of the Neva and as such is perhaps slightly remote, especially in summer when you'll have to contend with the bridge-opening timetable. Still, rooms are cheap and in good condition.

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Restaurants Insights

St Petersburg's current restaurant scene is unrecognizable compared to that of ten years ago. Old Soviet-style cafés and canteens selling meat of questionable origin are still around but further up the scale the city offers an amazing variety of cuisines from around the world. While things slowed down a bit after the economic crisis of 1998, today a new wave of openings is well underway, with new restaurants and bars appearing with even greater frequency. Also, there is the inevitable selection of standard international chains—McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut can all be found here.

The quality of service normally corresponds to price although generally speaking, Western service culture is conspicuously absent. Indifferent staff and inexplicable delays are a common feature of many establishments. This tends to be mitigated the higher up the price scale you go. Many places haven't got the hang of serving courses in the correct order and don't be surprised if you wait for three-quarters

of an hour before your starter and main course appear simultaneously. Who said predictability was interesting?

Central

A perennial favorite of visitors to the city has to be the famous Kafe Idiot. It's mid-priced, vegetarian, nearly always busy and a relaxing place to be. Located in the city center, the Kafe Lagidze specializes in Georgian cuisine, while Valhall is a Viking-themed restaurant offering a mixture of Russian and European dishes. Known for its modern take on the traditional Russian "meat and potatoes" approach to dining is the lively Pushka Inn Restaurant and Bar located in the city center.

Both St Petersburg and Moscow have their fair share of immigrants from former Soviet republics. Georgian food is particularly popular, with several fine outlets in St Petersburg: the Kavkaz Café and Restaurant for example, is reasonably-priced and centrally located. European cuisine comes in all varieties and at all prices. Italian is predictably well represented, from the bustling Patio Pizza on Nevskii Prospekt.

Mama Roma is famous for its superb business lunch, while Federico Fellini's Cinema Restaurant is a film fan's dream. One of the city's Irish bars, the aptly named Mollie's Irish Bar, is a popular ex-pat hangout that isn't far from Nevskii Prospekt. Burgers, juicy steaks and apple pie can all be had at California Grill or else you could try the reasonably new frontier-style Fort Ross Bar just off Nevskii Prospekt. The City Bar also offers a Western-style menu as most of its clientele are ex-pats.

If Oriental food is what floats your boat, and you have money to burn, you could try out Chopsticks in the Grand Hotel Europe. Other options include the decent Krasnyi Terem (a surprisingly inexpensive option on Nevskii Prospekt), and the Zolotaia Panda Cafe.

Vasilievskii Island

The dining options become a bit thin West of the city center. Most of this district is taken up with residences and

St. Petersburg Snapshot continued

sporadically placed, privately-owned shops. Coming here to eat is well worth it, however. The gem of the bunch is Staraia Tamozhnia, one of the few restaurants on Vasilievskii Island. It is an upscale restaurant frequented by wealthy businessmen and those looking to have an enjoyable, extravagant meal. The menu is filled with decadent options and exquisite wine selections. There is also live jazz from a local band in the evenings.

The Petrograd Side & the Kirov Islands

The Golden Dragon serves an abundant mix of Asian cuisine: the menu lists over 100 items. This is a good place for families or couples, as the interior is comfortable and inviting. Sharovnia na Aptekarskom is a sports club and restaurant where you can go and shoot pool or bowl. The rustic interior makes it a great place to spend a relaxing evening. Picasso is named for the legendary Spanish artist, and serves food inspired by his country of birth. The dishes on the menu here are named for his paintings. There is also live music to keep things energetic. The meat-centric Miasorubka serves expertly-spiced Mongolian dishes. The interior is comforting and warm.

©

Nightlife Insights

St Petersburg has always been renowned for its vibrant cultural life; music and drama have long been an integral component of the city's identity. Today, such traditional entertainment has been offset by the more hedonistic pleasures of the city's burgeoning club scene. Additionally, a wide range of cinemas show movies ranging from old Soviet classics to modern Hollywood blockbusters.

Classical Music: Opera, Ballet, Symphony

This is a city of countless great composers—including Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Shostakovich—and possibly the most famous ballet troupe in the world: the Kirov Ballet. In the financially uncertain world of post-Soviet Russia, the city's cultural life

has been hard-hit and many of its music ensembles make money by heading out of Russia to cash in on their excellent reputation. That said, St Petersburg remains one of the greatest cities in the world for lovers of classical music.

Foreigners may have some problems purchasing tickets for events, especially in more popular venues like the Mariinskii Theatre for which a dual-price system is in operation (visitors have to pay more than twice the amount Russians do). Formerly known as the Kirov, this theater is the jewel in the crown of the city's cultural life. Luxuriously outfitted, it hosts several major premieres every year and affluent tourists flock to catch showings of major Russian pieces such as Swan Lake and The Nutcracker as well as performances of major works from the European canon.

For opera and ballet, your next best bet is the Mussorgsky Theatre on Arts Square, not quite as luxurious or prestigious as the Mariinskii but still worth a visit. Elsewhere, the Oktiabrskii Kontsertnii Zal ("October" Concert Hall) hosts performances in its large Soviet-era hall, but these are only a recorded soundtrack.

Symphony concerts can be attended at a variety of excellent venues, among them the Philharmonia on Arts Square and the Glinka Kapella just off Palace Square.

Smaller venues such as the Iusupov Theatre and the Hermitage Theatre (both former private theatres for the Imperial elite) offer more intimate performances.

The recently renovated Smolnyi Cathedral also hosts classical music performances.

Theater

St Petersburg has a grand dramatic tradition and takes the theatrical arts very seriously. There are a huge variety of venues to visit, offering a wide range of performances.

The premier venue is the Bolshoi Drama Theatre on the Fontanka canal, whose repertoire takes in a broad range of Russian material plus the occasional interpretation of Western works.

Located in a beautiful Rossi-designed auditorium, the Aleksandrinskii Theatre draws on the full canon of Russian and Soviet works.

The Mali Drama Theatre is another popular option as is the Komissarzhevskaja Drama Theatre just off Palace Square. Both show mainly Russian works, the latter with a much more classical bent.

The Baltiiskii Dom hosts a number of the city's more progressive and innovative drama groups as well as a number of rock and pop concerts.

Clubs

The club scene in St Petersburg is a lively affair. From low-end discos to glitzy strip-bars (of which there are many), there is a plethora of options to suit the tastes of any clubber.

For techno/dance music you can head for the underground chill of Griboedov or the sparkling expanse (and expense) of Metro. There's also the huge Port nightclub and the smaller hangout Fish Fabrique.

For live music your best bets are Manhattan, Zoopark or Money Honey.

The city has a few gay venues, by far the most popular of which is Club 69—a hedonistic and expensive mix popular among clientele of all sexual orientations.

Jazz has a long history of popularity here and the city boasts both a string of well-known bands and a devoted and knowledgeable following. There are numerous venues: the Jazz Philharmonic Hall is something of an establishment and charges the highest prices. JFC Jazz Club is a small and nearly always packed venue notable for the enthusiasm of its crowd and the variety of music played: dixieland, Latin jazz, acid jazz...it's all here. There's also the seemingly underground Jimi Hendrix Blues Club, which caters to fans of blues music as well as straight jazz, plus the Neo Jazz Club, a smaller venue near the Summer Gardens.

The numerous strip clubs also deserve a mention: Tribunal Bar, Sahara,

St. Petersburg Snapshot continued

Marshall...the list goes on and on. They all offer varying degrees of...well, maybe it's best to find out for yourself.

Cinema

The Russian film industry is in a state of some disorder. Though it has produced the odd blockbuster in recent times such as *The Barber of Siberia* or the *Brat* movies, mainstream cinemas are Hollywood-dominated. The most obviously blockbuster cinema is the shiny Crystal Palace on Nevskii Prospekt (just follow the smell of popcorn). *Barrikada* shows pretty much the same range of films, but in a decidedly more elegant and spacious environment.

At the opposite end of the scale, *Spartak* is the best of the art-house bunch, showing both contemporary and older Russian movies along with art-house foreign imports.

Dom Kino is housed in an impressive *Style Moderne* building and shows both major Russian and Western films, as do the *Khudozhestvennyi*, (which means "art"), and the *Parisiana*.

If you're looking to catch up on some classics, you could try the *Molodezhny* or the *Leningrad* cinema.

The bar/nightclub *Fish Fabrique* has also started showing films on a frequent basis, complete with English translation on headphones.

©

Things to Do Insights

Several of these self-guided tours begin at the romantic heart of the city—Palace Square. It's a majestic setting, lying between the magnificence of the Winter Palace and the pale yellow sweep of the General Staff building. Not more than five minutes away lies the thriving commercial street Nevskii Prospekt, while beyond the Winter Palace lies a panoramic vista across the Neva river.

Nevskii Prospekt

Nevskii Prospekt is St Petersburg's main street, stretching for more than four kilometers (two miles) from the Admiralty across the arc formed by the Neva within the city. It is St Petersburg's busiest thoroughfare, with a history almost as old as the city itself. After the foundation of St Petersburg in 1703, shipyard carts carried all manner of materials along the Novgorod road to the shipyards at the Neva. The original thoroughfares were not intended for heavy traffic and so a decision was eventually made to carve out a main road through four kilometers (two miles) of marsh, meadow and forest, enabling easy movement from the Novgorod road to the Admiralty on the Neva. By the mid-18th Century this thoroughfare had already become the city's main street and commercial center, and many cathedrals, palaces, mansions and public buildings were erected along it. From the Palace Square you can slip on to Nevskii Prospekt along the Moika canal. Look out for the newly renovated *Kapella* building just over the canal off the square and the popular ex-pat hangout *City Bar* tucked away in the same courtyard. Having reached Nevskii Prospekt, you can see the 18th-century *Stroganov Palace* (1753-1754) on the opposite side of the street. This is an elaborate but rather jaded creation of the Italian architect *Rastrelli*. A little further up the road (again on the south side) stands *Kazan Cathedral*, designed and erected in 1801-1811 by the architect *Andrei Voronikhin*. The cathedral with its semi-circular Corinthian colonnade comprised of 96 13-meter (42-foot) high columns is the dominant feature in one of the most elegant areas of the city. Opposite *Kazan Cathedral* stands the city's major book store *Dom Knigi*, a building with a polished granite façade, crowned with a globe atop a glass tower. Built in 1907, before the Revolution this building belonged to the *Singer Sewing-Machine Company*. Stretching away from *Kazan Cathedral* on the other side of the street is *Kanal Griboedova*, at the visible end of which stands the *Saviour on Spilled Blood Cathedral and Museum*, an elaborate and colorful domed building erected on the

site where Alexander II was assassinated by members of the revolutionary terrorist organization "People's Will" on March 1, 1881. *Kanal Griboedova* also plays host to a number of cafés and restaurants—try out *Laima Bistro* for some Russian fast food.

Russian Museum

Once you have swept around the back of the *Saviour on Spilled Blood Cathedral*, take your first left along *Inzhenernaia Ulitsa* and you'll reach *Arts Square*. Designed by architect *Carlo Rossi*, it's an elegant area surrounded by a cornucopia of cultural attractions—three museums and three theaters, including the famous *Russian Museum*, the *Apartment-museum of the poet Blok*, the *Mussorgsky Opera and Ballet House* and the *St Petersburg Philharmonia*. Each owner of a plot of land on the square had the right to build a house of his own choice, but only on the condition that the façade overlooking the street or the square conformed to *Rossi's* standard project. In 1957, a statue of *Pushkin* was erected in the center of the square's public garden. From here you can nip back onto *Nevskii Prospekt* via *Mikhailovskaia Ulitsa*, with the prestigious (and expensive) *Grand Hotel Europe* appearing on your right-hand side. At this point you emerge onto the bustling heart of *Nevskii*. Across the road stands the vast shopping complex that is *Gostinyi Dvor*, a two-storied colonnaded quadrangle built by architect *Jean-Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe* from 1761 to 1785. Opposite *Gostinyi Dvor* is another of the largest and most famous department stores in the city: *Passazh* (meaning "passage" or "arcade"). Walking along the southern side of the street (you can cross via several underground passages at this point), continue along *Nevskii* and on the right you'll come across *Ostrovskii Square*, in the center of which stands a *Monument to Catherine The Great* built in 1973. She is shown in an ermine robe, holding a scepter, and surrounded by her associates at the foot of the high granite pedestal. Further along *Nevskii*, past the *Anichkov Palace* and colonnaded *Kabinet* building of *Alexander I*, you'll come to the elegant *Anichkov Bridge* spanning a broad sweep

St. Petersburg Snapshot continued

www.taxi-spb.ru/). The metro provides quick long distant transportation while trams, buses, and trolley buses are better for shorter distances.

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Fun Facts

St. Petersburg
Country: Russia

St. Petersburg by the Numbers:

Population: 4,030,000 Annual Rainfall: 538 mm/21.2 in Annual Snowfall: 140 mm/5.5 in
Average January Temperature: -6.6°C/20°F
Average July Temperature: 17°C/63°F

Quick Facts:

Electricity: 220 V, 50 Hz, two pin thin
European plugs Time Zone: GMT+3
Country Dialing Code: 7 Area Code: 812

Did You Know?

St. Petersburg was known as Petrograd from 1914 to 1924 and Leningrad from 1924 to 1991.

It was designed by Peter the Great in 1703 and intended to foster trade with Europe.

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