

RUSSIA (*Rossiya*)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 142,355,415

Area: 17,098,242 sq. km (1.8 times the size of the US)

Capital: Moscow (12.17 million)

Languages: Russian (official) 85.7%, Tatar 3.2%, Chechen 1%, Other 10.1%

EDUCATION

The education system in Russia has experienced numerous reforms over the past two decades. It currently has a compulsory 11-grade education system for ages 6-17. Grading is on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 4=good, 3=acceptable, 2=unacceptable). The literacy rate for 15 and older is 99.6%. Traditionally greater emphasis has been placed on rote-learning rather than inquiry-based or critical thinking and exams are typically oral. Most students attend public schools, private education accounts for only 1%.



Updated: 6/7/2017

Russian children in folk dress

The Russian Federation is the largest country in the world, extending from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific in the east. After centuries of Mongol rule, Ivan III of Muscovy defeated the Golden Horde. His grandson, Ivan IV "the terrible" declared Moscow a Third Rome, home of Orthodox Christianity, and named himself a Caesar (Tsar). The Tsars of Russia, especially Peter the Great and Catherine II, greatly expanded Russia's borders and transformed Russia into a Great Power. However, the trauma of WWI led to a successful revolution by Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks in 1917. The Communist Party ruled in Russia (Soviet Union) until its collapse in 1991.

RELIGION

There is no official state religion, however the Russian Orthodox Church has been the dominant religion since the 10th century. Current estimates of practicing worshipers put Russian Orthodox at 15-20%, Muslim at 10-15% and other Christian at 2%. There is a large population of non-practicing believers due to repression during Soviet rule. There has been a strong revival of the church since independence and little tolerance for other religions.

ETHNICITY

Russian can imply a nationality, ethnicity or language and not all citizens are ethnic Russians. While Russians make up 78% of the population, the remainder is comprised of Tatar, Ukrainian, other Slavs, Central Asians and Caucasians (from the Caucasus). There is tension between ethnic Russians and minorities and racial profiling by police is common. Russia has the second highest immigration rate globally after the U.S.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Due to tradition as well as social and economic factors, Russian youth tend to live with their parents through their education and after marriage. Grandparents often play a significant role in the upbringing of grandchildren. "Thank you" and other polite words commonly used by Americans are reserved for more formal exchanges. Their omission by Russians should not be perceived as impolite. Flowers are a common gift, given in odd numbers for auspicious occasions and even for sad occasions. Russians never interact over a door threshold and are hesitant to sit on the floor. Some major holidays include: Orthodox Christmas (January 7 according to the Julian calendar), Women's Day (March 8), Orthodox Easter, Labor Day (May 1 and 2), Victory/Memorial Day (May 9) and Russia Day (June 12).



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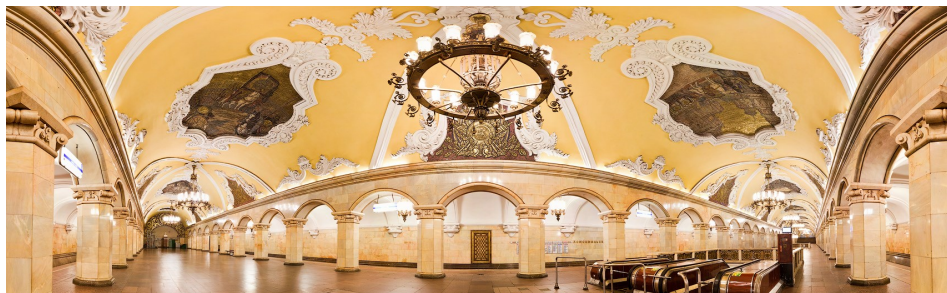


CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Russia is the largest country to emerge from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since independence Russia has experienced considerable political, social and economic transition along with multiple wars in the Caucasus. Following a chaotic and turbulent decade in the 1990s, the situation stabilized in the 2000s under President and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. While the 90s are often hailed as a period of democratic growth and prosperity by the West, and the 2000s as a retreat toward authoritarianism, this feeling is not shared by most Russians. Quite the opposite, many Russians credit Putin with restoring a sense of pride in the country, winning the wars in the Caucasus and establishing order.

US-Russian relations have become increasingly confrontational in recent years. Russian policymakers watched nervously as NATO and the EU extended eastward towards Russia. After protests in Ukraine (known as “Euromaidan”) forced pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to flee Kyiv, Russia began to provide military and economic aid to separatist militias in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. In March 2014, after a controversial referendum, Russia annexed Crimea, an act that was widely condemned by the international community. In September 2015, Russia intervened in the Syrian Civil War in support of the Syrian government, which had been fighting against US-supported opposition groups.. Allegations that Russia interfered in the 2016 US presidential election have also complicated relations between Washington and Moscow. Russia has also been accused of interfering in elections throughout Europe, including the 2017 French presidential election.

The Russian economy has declined in recent years, due to low oil prices and international sanctions. The President of Russia is Vladimir Putin and the Prime Minister is Dmitry Medvedev, both representing the United Russia party.



Moscow metro station

RUSSIANS IN THE USA

While the first wave of Russian immigrants came in the late 19th Century, Russian settlers had been in Alaska and as far south as Ft. Ross, California since 1812. Immigration increased rapidly from 1881 onward primarily for religious freedom purposes (Russian Jews, Molokans and Old Believers). The next wave followed the October Revolution and Civil War (1917+) and brought the “White Émigrés” or more highly educated immigrants. Emigration slowed during the Soviet Union, but picked up in 1987 with *Perestroika* and mass Jewish emigration. With the collapse of the USSR, another wave of immigrants arrived including many scientists and engineers. It is important to note that there are numerous diverse Russian communities in the U.S. Peaceful Valley, WA has the highest percentage (12%) of Russian-born residents in the USA.



The flag is comprised of three equal horizontal bands of white, blue and red, with no official meaning assigned to the colors.



Church of the Transfiguration, Karelia, Russia

NAMES

Russian first names often originate from the Orthodox faith. Last names can have both masculine or feminine versions with the latter designated by the ending *-a*. Patronymics (ending in *-ich* or *-na*) are often used in lieu of family names when addressing teachers or in formal or professional situations. Due to transliteration from Cyrillic, there can be variation in spelling.

FAMOUS RUSSIANS

A few famous Russians include: Sergey Brin (co-founder of Google), Anna Kournikova (tennis), Alexander Ovechkin (hockey), Mikhail Baryshnikov (dancer), Nastia Liukin (gymnast). Many more famous Americans have Russian ancestry including: Leonardo DiCaprio, James Franco, Joaquin Phoenix, Sean Penn and Liv Tyler.

RUSSIAN WORDS

Hi	<i>Privet</i>
Bye	<i>Poka</i>
Good morning	<i>Dobrye utra</i>
Yes	<i>Da</i>
No	<i>N'et</i>
Please/You're welcome ..	<i>Pazhalsta</i>
Thank you	<i>Spasibo</i>
How are you?	<i>Kak dela?</i>
I do not understand	<i>Ya ni ponimaju</i>
Do you understand?	<i>Vy ponimayete?</i>
What is your name?	<i>Kak vas zavut?</i>
My name is	<i>Minya zavut...</i>
Where are you from?	<i>Vy otkuda?</i>

USEFUL LINKS

- [World Factbook: Russia](#)
- [BBC Russia Profile](#)
- [National Geographic Russia Guide](#)
- [The Moscow Times](#)