

RUSSIA (*Rossiya*)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 142.5 million

Area: slightly 1.8 times the size of the US

Capital: Moscow (10.5 million)

Languages: Russian (official), many minority languages

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 over 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: 1/13/14

Russian children in folk dress.

The Russian Federation is the largest country in the world and is comprised of 21 republics. While ethnic Russians constitute a majority (80%) of the population, there are also numerous non-Slavic minorities. As a result of rural flight, Russia is now 73% urban. 20 years of economic and political transition have resulted in a government and population that is skeptical of Western institutions and interventions. Vladimir Putin is popular for restoring Russia's pride and position in international politics. Russia is the world's leading oil producer and second largest producer of natural gas.

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%. Jewish?. Islam has been growing...

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 79% 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 US.

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 and “paradok”.

While many Americans identify “loose nukes” as their primary concern regarding Russia today, Russians view “loss of identity to the West” as the major concern and threat to their country. While in high demand 20 years ago, the proliferation of Western brands from clothing to music, food and entertainment has received some pushback in recent years.

Despite being only second to the US globally for immigration, Russia’s population has continued to contract at an average of 700,000 annually since 1991 due to a sharp decline in birthrates and dramatic rise in mortality rates, especially among men. Heart disease, accidents, and suicides attributable to alcohol abuse are the leading causes of death among men. While malnutrition, poor healthcare and a reliance on abortion for birth control have pushed up rates of maternal and infant mortality. Putin has pursued social policies increasing incentives for having more children.



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 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 US. 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

First names, or given names often originate from the Orthodox faith. Surnames 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), Vladimir Zworykin (inventor of TV), 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	Privet
Bye	Poka
Good morning	Dobraye utra
Yes	Da
No	N’et
Please/You’re welcome ..	Pazhalsta
Thank you	Spasibo
How are you?	Kak dela?
I do not understand	Ya ni ponimaju
Do you understand?	Vy ponimayete?
What is your name?.....	Kak vas zavut?
My name is	Minya zavut...
Where are you from?	Vy otkuda?

USEFUL LINKS

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