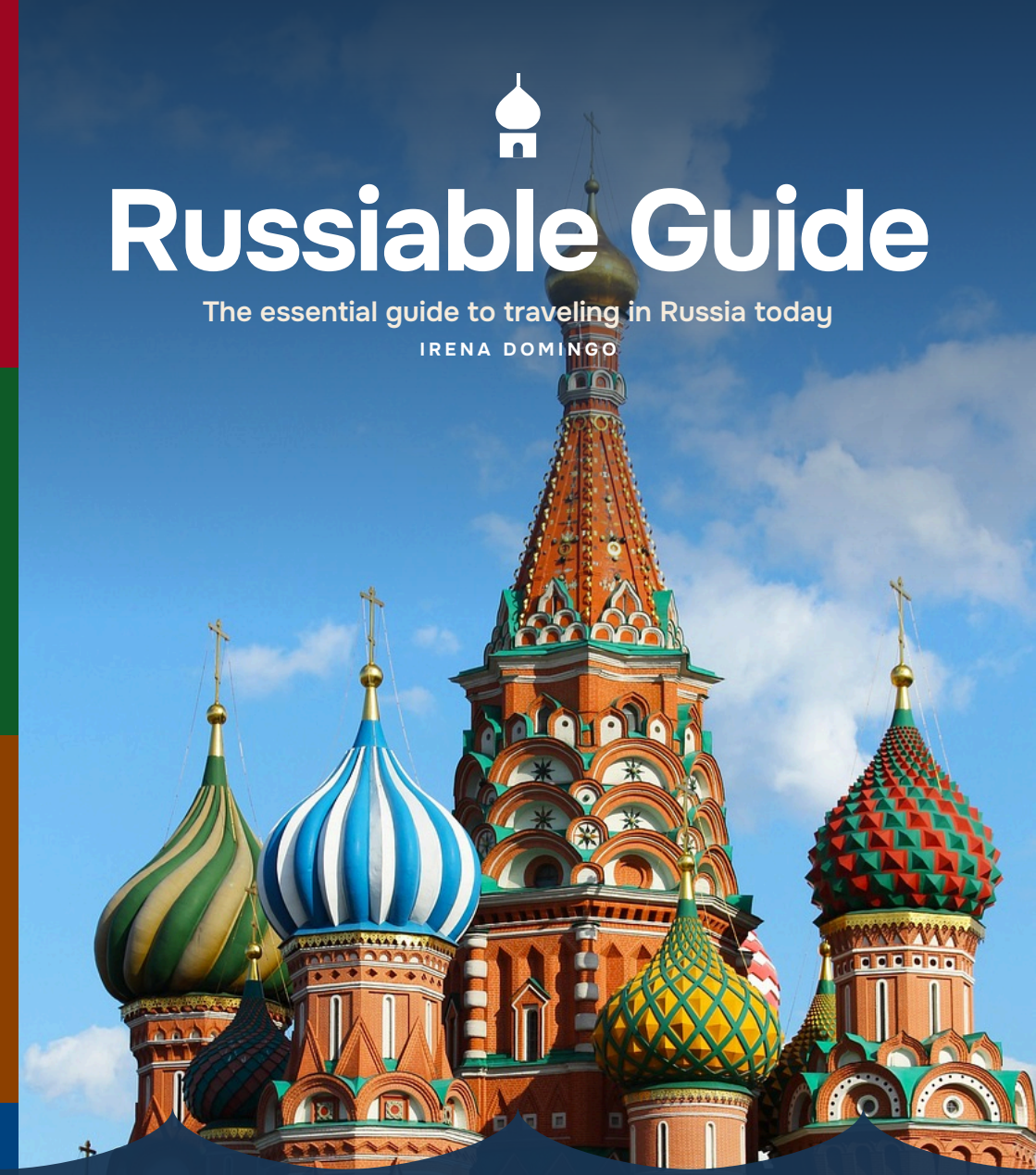
Russiable Guide

The essential guide to traveling in Russia today

IRENA DOMINGO



Up to Date

Visas, payments, borders and the internet in today's Russia.

Step by Step

Planning in ten steps, from home to the day you arrive.

On the Ground

Itineraries for Moscow and St. Petersburg and a Trans-Siberian guide.

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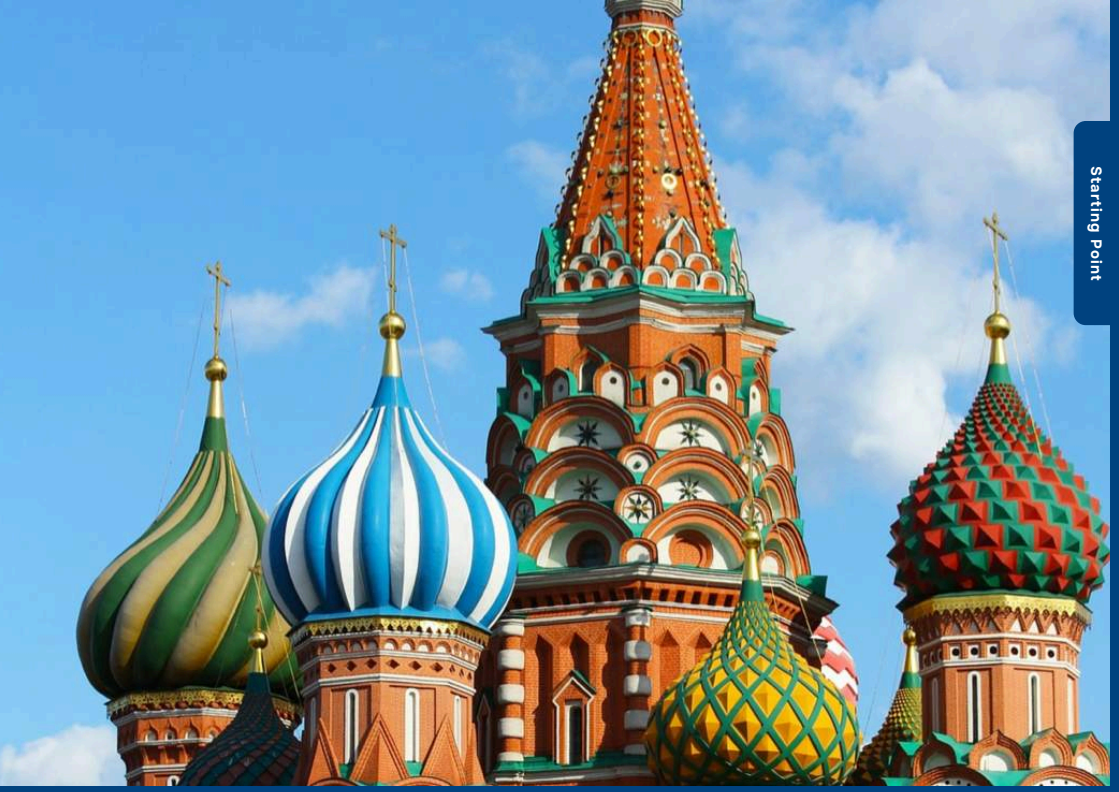
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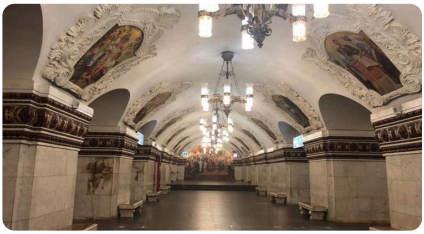
Starting Point

Russia is still the country of St. Basil's domes, of palaces along the Neva and of trains that cross Siberia all the way to the Pacific. What has changed is how you get there, how you pay and how you stay connected. That's what this guide is about: sorting it all out from home, in the right order, so that when you land all you have to do is enjoy it.

The Best of the Trip



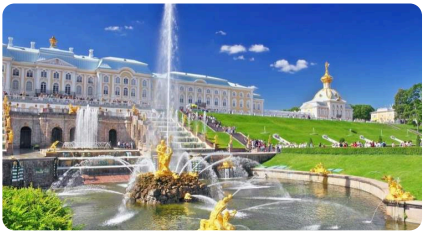
Red Square and the Kremlin (p. 528)
The heart of Moscow and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1990. Day 1.



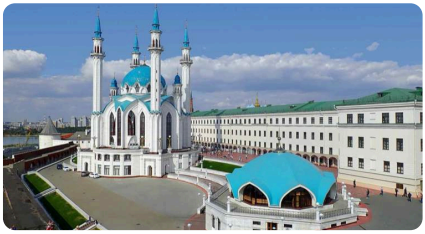
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The Hermitage (p. 718)
One of the world's great museums, in the tsars' Winter Palace. Day 6.



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The largest collection of fountains in the world, at the tsars' summer residence. Day 8.



Kazan (p. 863)
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Lake Baikal (p. 917)
The great jewel of Siberia and, for almost everyone, the highlight of the Trans-Siberian. Stop 4.

Before You Start

1. How to Use This Guide (p. 3): how the guide is organized and where to start, depending on where you are in your planning.
2. Quick Guide to the Current Situation (p. 7): Russia today at a glance, and what readers who have just come back say.

How to Use This Guide

- Start Wherever You Are
- The Guide in Five Parts
- Three Formats, One Trip
- Write to Me

Russia can be visited today. What has changed is not the country, but the way you get there, pay and stay connected. With this guide you sort all of that out from home, in the right order, so that when you land all you have to do is enjoy it.

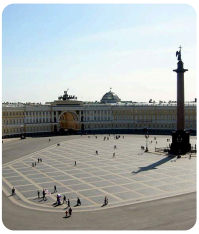
Start Wherever You Are

If...	Go to...
You're still deciding whether to go	Quick Guide to the Current Situation (p. 7), the next chapter
You've decided and have dates	Part I (p. 24): start with Step 1 (p. 26) and follow the timeline
You want to know what has changed lately	Recent Important Updates, in the web version of the guide
You're already in Russia	Part II (p. 460): open the day you're on
You're going to take the Trans-Siberian	Part III (p. 838)

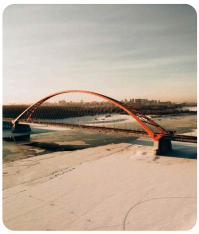
The Guide in Five Parts



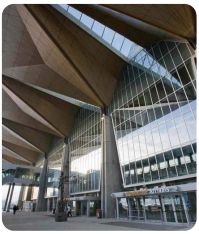
Part I. Trip Planning (p. 24)
Ten steps with a timeline, from 90 to 10 days before you leave: borders, flights, insurance, visa, accommodation, money and internet.



Part II. Moscow and St. Petersburg (p. 460)
A ten-day itinerary, hour by hour, starting with your arrival at the airport.



Part III. The Trans-Siberian (p. 838)
From Moscow to Vladivostok, with stops in Kazan, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and Lake Baikal.



Part IV. The Return (p. 938)
Leaving the country, the checks and customs, and ideas for your next trip.

Quick Guide to the Current Situation

- Russia today, at a glance
- 1. Can You Travel to Russia Now?
- 2. Is It Safe to Travel to Russia, or Is It Dangerous?
- 3. Visa: eVisa, Regular Visa or Visa-Free
- 4. How to Get to Russia: Flights and Land Borders
- 5. What Happens When You Arrive in Russia: Airport, Customs and Registration
- 6. Travel Medical Insurance: A Mandatory Requirement
- 7. Letter of Invitation: Only for the Regular Visa
- 8. Money, Payments and Cards: How It Actually Works
- 9. Internet, Mobile and Social Media
- 10. Getting Around Russia
- 11. Accommodation: How to Book with a Foreign Card
- 12. Guided Tours and Excursions
- 13. Language, Culture and Practical Tips
- 14. What to See: Itineraries and Destinations
- 15. To Wrap Up: Is Russia Worth Visiting Now?

Russia today, at a glance

If you only have five minutes, this page is for you: what has changed, what you need to do and where each thing is in the guide. The rest of the chapter then goes into it calmly.

Topic	The essentials	In the guide
Can you travel?	Yes. Visas are being issued, tourist borders are open and life in the cities is normal. **Follow the ten-step plan.**	Part I (p. 24)
Safety	Low risk for tourists who stay away from the regions bordering Ukraine. **Reasonable precautions are enough.**	Section 2 of this chapter
Visa	e-Visa for EU citizens and many other nationalities; US, UK, Canadian and Australian citizens need a regular visa; some nationalities travel visa-free. **Choose according to your passport and length of stay.**	Step 5 (p. 164)
Flights	No direct flights from the EU, the UK or North America: you fly with a stopover. **Book through an intermediary that accepts your card.**	Step 3 (p. 134)
Land borders	Some crossings are open, with	Step 1 (p. 26)



I

PART I

Trip Planning

Planning a trip to Russia takes a bit more preparation than other destinations, but if you follow a logical order it's a simple process. This first part brings together the ten steps worth taking before you leave, from checking the state of the borders and choosing the best time to travel to getting your visa, booking accommodation and preparing your payment methods.
Each step includes practical recommendations based on the country's current situation and on the experience of thousands of travelers who have already made this journey, along with how far in advance to do each task, so you can follow them like a checklist.

The Ten Steps

Step	What to do	How far in advance
Step 1 (p. 26)	Check the state of the borders	First of all
Step 2 (p. 113)	Decide your route: season, length and itinerary	90 days
Step 3 (p. 134)	Buy your plane tickets	60–90 days
Step 4 (p. 146)	Buy travel medical insurance	40–60 days
Step 5 (p. 164)	Apply for your visa	30–90 days
Step 6 (p. 240)	Book your accommodation	30–45 days
Step 7 (p. 273)	Buy your domestic transportation	45 days
Step 8 (p. 307)	Get your rubles and payment methods ready	30 days
Step 9 (p. 360)	Make your online bookings in advance	15–30 days
Step 10 (p. 400)	Get your internet, eSIM and apps ready	10 days

Taking some time for this planning will allow you to enjoy your trip without worries, with all the important details sorted out before you board the plane.

4 The Border Interview: Who Gets It, What They Ask and How Long It Takes

- What the "interview" is and how it differs from a normal check
- The data: what you've told me, crossing by crossing
- Where you cross
- Your passport and profile: as important as the crossing, or more
- What they ask
- Do they check your phone during the interview?
- How long it takes and what happens next
- How to prepare so it goes quickly

No, the Russian border interview isn't something everyone gets, and it isn't pure luck either. A lot depends on who you are: the odds go up sharply if you're British, American or Canadian, if you have any link to Ukraine or a Russian partner, if you travel to Russia very often, or if you're the only foreigner on the bus or the flight. And a lot depends on where you cross: at Koidula and Luhamaa, the crossings in southern Estonia, almost every foreigner gets one, while at St Petersburg's Pulkovo airport most people are through in minutes.

I went through the accounts of more than 90 readers and around 80 reports from Telegram groups to see what keeps repeating: who gets interviewed, what they're asked, how long it takes and whether they check your phone. It isn't a study with any statistical value, just a sample of real experiences, but the patterns are quite clear.

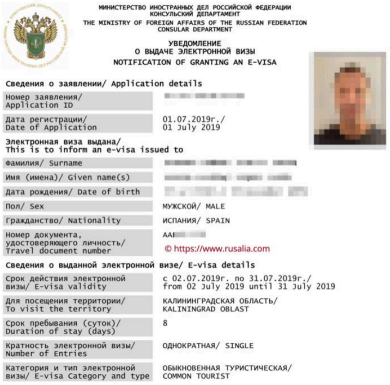


It's probably the question I get most from readers: "Will they interrogate me?" Fair enough, because the accounts you send me show every kind of case: a Spanish reader spent three and a half hours in a back room at Ivangorod, while

1 Electronic Visa (e-Visa)

- The e-Visa at a glance
- 0. The introduction of the e-Visa system in Russia
- 1. Preliminary questions about the electronic visa
- 2. Steps to obtain the Russian electronic visa (e-Visa)
- 3. Problems when applying for the e-Visa (and how to solve each one)

Applying for the e-visa (or unified electronic visa) to Russia is quick and easy: you only need your passport, a digital photo, and travel medical insurance. However, it is only available to citizens of 64 countries. Since August 1, 2023, this electronic visa has been valid throughout all of Russia. Below I'll explain step by step how to obtain the Russian e-visa easily and affordably (AED 238, about US$65 / €58).



МИНИСТЕРСТВО ИНОСТРАННЫХ ДЕЛ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ
КОНСУЛЬСКИЙ ДЕПАРТАМЕНТ
THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
CONSULAR DEPARTMENT

УВЕДОМЛЕНИЕ
О ВЫДАЧЕ ЭЛЕКТРОННОЙ ВИЗЫ
NOTIFICATION OF GRANTING AN E-VISA

Сведения о заявлении/ Application details

Номер заявления/ Application ID	[redacted]
Дата регистрации/ Date of Application	01.07.2019г./ 01 July 2019

Электронная виза выдана/ This is to inform an e-visa issued to

Фамилия/ Surname	[redacted]
Имя (имена)/ Given name(s)	[redacted]
Дата рождения/ Date of birth	[redacted]
Пол/ Sex	МУЖСКОЙ/ MALE
Гражданство/ Nationality	ИСПАНИЯ/ SPAIN
Номер документа, удостоверяющего личность/ Travel document number	AA[redacted]

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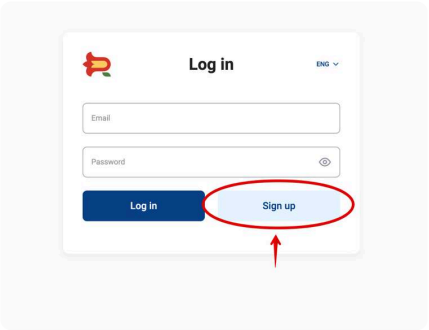
Сведения о выданной электронной визе/ E-visa details

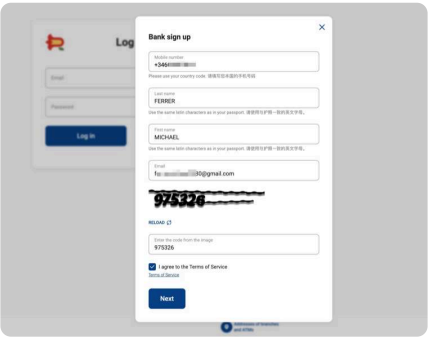
Срок действия электронной визы/ E-visa validity	с 02.07.2019г. по 31.07.2019г./ from 02 July 2019 until 31 July 2019
Для посещения территории/ To visit the territory	КАЛИНИНГРАДСКАЯ ОБЛАСТЬ/ KALININGRAD OBLAST
Срок пребывания (суток)/ Duration of stay (days)	8
Кратность электронной визы/ Number of Entries	ОДНОКРАТНАЯ/ SINGLE
Категория и тип электронной визы/ E-visa Category and type	ОБЫКНОВЕННАЯ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКАЯ/ COMMON TOURIST

The e-Visa at a glance

- **Who can apply:** citizens of 64 countries, among them the whole European Union, China, India, Japan, Mexico and Turkey. Not the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.
- **What it costs:** AED 238 (about US$65 / €58), paid by card at the end of the application. No consular fee for children under 6 (they only pay about 2 USD in gateway charges). It is never refunded, not even if the visa is refused.
- **How long it takes:** up to 4 calendar days. The day you submit the application does not count.
- **When to apply:** at the earliest 86 days and at the latest 4 days before the date you plan to enter Russia.
- **What you need:** a machine-readable passport valid for at least 6 months, a digital photo and travel medical insurance covering your whole stay. No invitation, no hotel booking, no flight tickets.
- **How long you can stay:** 30 days from the day you enter, within the 120 days the visa is valid. It is single entry, and both the day of arrival and the day of departure count in full. A reform is in progress to change this to 45 days from the date of issue, but it isn't law yet (I explain it in section 1.7).
- **Where to apply:** only on the official portal, evisa.kdmid.ru. No agency is needed. And do not confuse it with the RuID app, which is for those entering Russia without a visa (see the chapter "Visa-Free Russia"): with the e-visa you

A login screen opens in English: press **Sign up**, the button on the right, and fill in your details





Next it will ask you to create a password, and from there you can request a free Russian virtual MIR card.

Is Pay in Russia right for you? The quick answer

Your situation	Is it right for you?
You have a Visa or Mastercard from the UK, the US, Europe or anywhere else	Yes, with either version
You're a Chinese citizen and use WeChat or Alipay	Yes, with either version
You live in Hong Kong and use Alipay HK	Yes, with either version
You'd rather top up with USDT	Yes, with either version
You need to withdraw cash from ATMs	No: for that, a physical MIR card

What Pay in Russia doesn't do is give you cash: it doesn't work at ATMs. That's why it's worth combining it with **cash** in immaculate banknotes and, if you're going to need ATMs, with a physical MIR card: the YooMoney one, which you can order before you leave and which is posted to you (chapter "4. YooMoney (p. 337)"), or the T-Bank one, which you get once you're in Russia (chapter "5. T-Bank (p. 343)").

What is Pay in Russia?

Pay in Russia is a **virtual prepaid card** on the Russian payment system **MIR**, the only one that works normally inside the country. It's issued by Promselkhozbank, a Russian bank regulated and licensed by the Central Bank of Russia.

Registration and card creation both happen in the browser, whether you're on a computer or on your phone. You install the app afterwards, on your phone, and that's what you'll use to pay during the trip. The key point for a tourist: **you don't need a Russian bank account, you don't need to travel to Russia, and you don't need a Russian SIM** to start using it. And you top it up from home with **your usual bank card**.



10

STEP 10 · TRIP PLANNING

Internet, eSIM, and Essential Apps

10 days in advance

90 d — 60 d — 30 d — 10 d — departure

Many Western apps and websites are blocked in Russia, and getting a Russian SIM is complicated for a tourist. The practical thing is to have everything sorted at home: an eSIM that works there, a VPN installed and tested, and the Russian apps you'll need. And, while you're at it, your phone ready in case it gets checked at the border.



1

DAY 1 · MOSCOW AND ST. PETERSBURG

Moscow: Red Square and Surroundings

Your first day in Moscow, in the heart of the city: Red Square, the Kremlin, GUM, St. Basil's Cathedral and Zaryadye Park, and in the evening the Bolshoi and Tverskaya Street. Before you start, two chapters to get your bearings and to get around.

AT A GLANCE

- **Where:** the whole day in the historic center, around Red Square and the Kremlin.
- **Watch the closing days:** the Kremlin closes on Thursdays; St. Basil's, on the first Wednesday of every month.
- **Buy in advance:** your Kremlin tickets, and avoid weekends and public holidays if you can. For the Bolshoi, see "Opera and Ballet (p. 368)" (Step 9).
- **Bring rubles in cash:** St. Basil's official website only accepts MIR cards; at the box office you pay in cash.
- **Free:** Red Square, GUM and Zaryadye Park with its floating bridge.
- **Offline:** GPS often fails in the center. Have Yandex Maps downloaded.



Map of the Kremlin grounds with the entrances marked

eas of the grounds are closed to the public.

- It's home to one of the **most important museum complexes in the world**: the Armory Chamber, the cathedrals of Cathedral Square, the Patriarch's Palace and the Ivan the Great Bell Tower.

It has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1990, together with Red Square. And one important thing: the Kremlin **is not Red Square**. A lot of people get the two confused. Red Square sits right next to it, separated by the Kremlin wall, and it's a free public space.

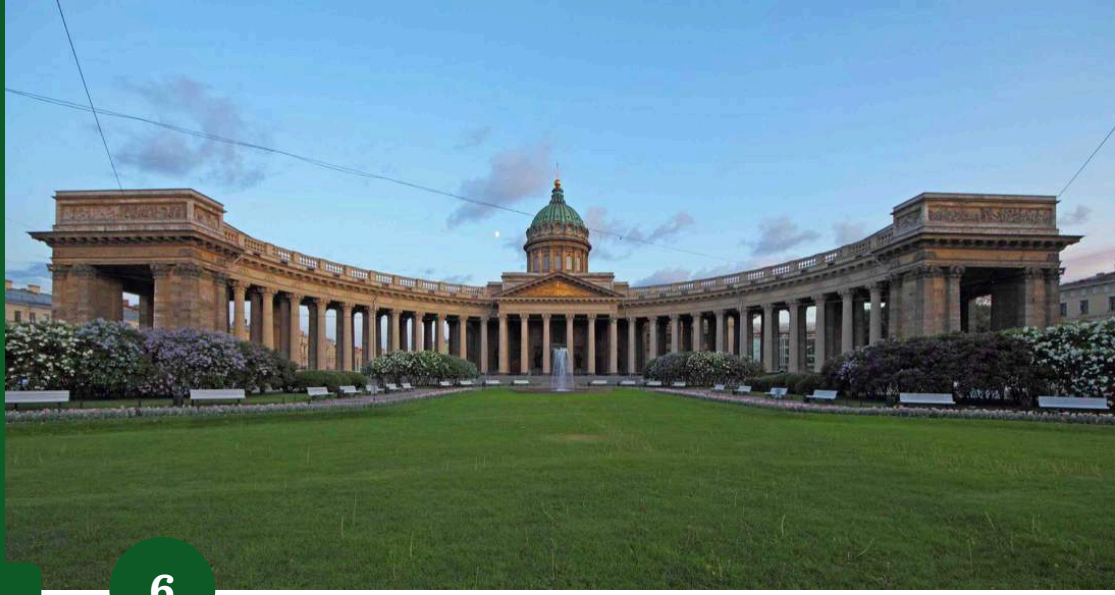
2. What real visitors say

Before getting into the detail, here's the map with real reviews from Yandex Maps (Russia's equivalent of Google Maps), where you can read reviews in Russian and translate them with your browser. **The Kremlin has a 5.0-out-of-5 rating with nearly 28,000 ratings** and over 2,000 written reviews:

Map
Moscow Kremlin
Open in Yandex Maps

A summary of what visitors say

- **The most positive comments**: the atmosphere, the architectural grandeur, the ancient icons in the cathedrals, the Tsar Cannon and Tsar Bell, the views, the Tainitsky Garden with its roses and fountain.
- **The most common complaints**: the ticket prices, the queues during peak season, the strict security (you can't walk just anywhere – guards blow whistles if you step off the marked



6

DAY 6 · MOSCOW AND ST. PETERSBURG

St. Petersburg: The Hermitage, the Cathedrals, and the Canals

Your first day in St. Petersburg: Palace Square, the Hermitage, the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood, Kazan Cathedral and a canal cruise. Before you start, two chapters to get your bearings and to get around.



III

PART III

The Trans-Siberian

The Trans-Siberian is Russia's great train journey: 9,288 kilometers from Moscow to Vladivostok, across the Urals, Siberia and Lake Baikal to the Pacific. This part of the guide is for travelers who want to go beyond Moscow and Saint Petersburg and ride the route, in full or in stages.

The first five chapters explain how to prepare it: which routes run today, how to plan the itinerary, which train and class to choose, how to buy tickets, what to sort out before boarding and what life on board is like. The chapters that follow cover the main stops, from west to east: Kazan, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk and Lake Baikal with Ulan-Ude, and Vladivostok.

Many of the practical matters (the visa, insurance, money, getting online) are the same as for any trip to Russia and are explained in Part I. Here the guide points you to those chapters and only goes deeper into what changes when the trip is the Trans-Siberian.

Where to try it: there's a chain called *Kystyby Tatar-food* (with a branch on Bauman Street) that reimagines it as fast food, with creative fillings and colored dough. For the classic version: any spot in the Tugan Avylym complex or Dom Chaya. Between 90 and 250 rubles depending on the place.



3. Peremech (перемяч): the round, fried cousin

If echpochmak is triangular and baked, peremech (also called *belyash* in its Russian version) is its round, flat, deep-fried cousin. Minced meat and onion on the inside, fluffy dough on the outside, a small hole in the center and a little pocket of hot juice inside. Fresh out of the fryer, it's one of the best street snacks in the country.

A practical note: peremech is very greasy (it's deep-fried), so if you're not used to it, don't overdo it. Two is plenty to feel completely full. And watch out when you take the first bite — the juice inside is boiling. Local trick: bite a small piece off the edge first to let the steam out before biting properly.

Where to try it: the street kiosks on Bauman Street, without exception. They're fried right in front of you. Price: 100–150 rubles.



4. Elesh (өлеш): the round chicken pastry

Elesh means "portion" in Tatar. It's a round baked pastry, similar to a sealed empanada, typically filled with chicken and potato. It's the alternative to echpochmak for anyone who doesn't eat red meat, and it's also usually served alongside a hot broth. Juicier than echpochmak, with slightly thinner dough.

Where to try it: any Tatar café will have it. Dom Chaya at Bauman 64 does a version with homemade broth for around 280 rubles.



5. Toqmaç (токмач): homemade noodle soup

Toqmaç is the traditional Tatar soup: a chicken or beef broth, clear and clean, with hand-rolled noodles (cut very thin, almost like egg pasta) added at the end and boiled for just a couple of minutes. It sounds simple, and it is — but getting the noodles right is an art that only lifelong Tatar grandmothers truly master.

That was just a glimpse

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The Author
Irena Domingo has lived between Russia and Spain, and that double belonging is where this guide comes from.

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