



General information

Russia occupies about 1/3 of the territory of the Eurasian continent, where about 23% of the country is located in Eastern Europe and about 76% of the area is in the northern part of Asia. Thanks to the huge areas and a great distance from the sea, Russia has mostly continental climate, which is characterized by four seasons with distinct summer and winter. The country covers 11 time zones. Russia's population is about 145 million people. Different ethnic groups inhabiting it use more than 190 languages.

Russia occupies several climatic zones: subtropical (Black Sea coast), moderate and continental (most of Russia), arctic and subarctic (islands of the Arctic Ocean). The summer season is characterized by diversity – from the cool in northern regions to the hot in the south. Winters are cold and snowy.

Weather in September

Moscow: +15°C

Ekaterinburg: +11°C

Time zones

Moscow: UTC+03:00

Ekaterinburg: UTC+05:00



Currency and taxes

Russian law allows you to bring in under \$10,000 (or its equivalent in any currency) in cash.

These restrictions pertain to cash only, there is no limit to the amount you can bring in on credit/debit cards. The currency exchange is provided in banks and special bank branches only. Each bank sets its own currency exchange rate, based on the Central Bank rates and Moscow international exchange rates. The Central Bank rates are published online daily on its website. The currency exchange in any bank will differ from the official CB rate – up to 10% difference is allowed. It is possible that the difference in currency cost may become more beneficial when exchanging larger sums. Small sums (up to 40,000 rubles) can be exchanged without a passport, but it's best to always have your documents on you. When exchanging currency, the client will be given a receipt indicating the amount of foreign currency, the sum in rubles and the commission rate (if there is one).



ATM cash withdrawals

Another way of obtaining rubles is through ATM cash withdrawals. Not all ATMs will dispense foreign currency. Typically this service is available at ATMs of Russian branches of foreign banks.

Types of currencies

US dollars and euro can be exchanged at any exchange point. You should find out in advance if a certain location will be able to exchange other currency. You can find out this information online.

Bank card payment

Credit card payment is widely available in Russia, especially in large cities. Any product can be purchased with a credit card. The bank will automatically convert the payment into rubles and deduct the sum from the card. This is the most economic payment method, since the currency conversion will be done according to the bank's internal rate, which may be better than the currency exchange rate.

Payment systems

In Russia, you can only pay for purchases in rubles. All major types of international cards are accepted in Russia. Information on which cards are accepted at a shopping point can usually be found on stickers by the entrance and by the registers. It's best to find out if a restaurant or cafe accepts cards prior to placing your order.

Financial etiquette and safety

Basic safety measures should be adhered to when taking cash out of ATMs. Do not tell anyone your PIN code. When entering your PIN in a store or an ATM, try to hide it from other people.



Healthcare

Insurance

Insurance against accidents is obligatory for entry into Russia, and without such insurance you may not be issued with a visa. If you are coming from a country that does not require a visa, you still require insurance. Standard insurance includes medical costs for outpatient and inpatient treatment, costs for emergency dental aid and medical transport, as well as transport costs for the return of children to their homeland if their relatives have been hospitalized or have passed away.

Bringing medicine to Russia

Foreign citizens can bring medicine (even the kind not registered in Russia) for personal use with no limits as long as they do not contain narcotic or psychoactive substances. If your medicine contains highly potent, narcotic or poisonous substances, but you wish to bring it, you will need to provide a notarized recipe or medical records proving the requirement, along with a notarized translation to Russian. These items need to be declared at customs. You can leave the country with all kinds of medicine (except narcotics), dietary supplement and herbs – these items have no restrictions.

How to find a pharmacy

Every pharmacy usually has a green cross sign, situated above the entrance or next to the store's sign. Usual working hours for a pharmacy vary, but the standard range is from 8am to 10pm. The workday of some municipal pharmaceutical institutions includes a lunch break, which usually lasts up to an hour and is between 1pm to 2pm, or from 2pm to 3pm. Most of pharmacies in Russia are open seven days of the week, although hours differ.



Smoking

The list of places where smoking is prohibited in Russia:

- territories of educational institutions, as well as sports and cultural facilities;
- areas of hospitals, rehabilitation centers and sanatoriums;
- airplanes, buses, and other forms of public transport, including river boats;
- underground stations, railway stations, airports, sea and river ports, as well as the territory near the entrances (in a distance of less than 15 meters);
- state authorities and local governments;
- offices, work areas;
- elevators;
- playgrounds and beaches;
- hotels.

Smoking is permitted in specially equipped places.



How to stay connected

Most popular mobile plans in Russia are pay-as-you-go. Set-up packages (a SIM card and instructions) are sold in most malls, many supermarkets and hypermarkets, airports, train stations and in shops near subway stations. Staff at airport mobile shops generally speak foreign languages (primarily English). There are operator-owned shops and general mobile shops, which sell SIM cards of most major mobile service providers. In order to purchase a SIM card, one has to produce personal ID (such as one's passport or driver's license). This is dictated on the Russian law "On Connectivity" and it conforms to international practices. One should not buy second-hand SIM cards – only purchase from official mobile and operator shops and stalls are recommended.

The SIM cards sold by vendors already has a credit balance, usually 100 to 200 rubles, which equals to or exceeds the cost of the package, which may be reduced as a promotional offer.

There are five major mobile carriers in Russia: MTS, Beeline, MegaPhone, Tele2 and Yota. These companies offer comparable services: for example, a plan with 3 to 5 Gb data and 300 to 500 minutes (and typically free in-carrier calls) and a couple of hundred SMS costs around 500 rubles. It is advisable to read contracts thoroughly: typically, free bundles have limitations. For example, even with a free SMS package costs may be incurred for sending text messages to numbers registered in other cities (5 to 12 rubles); text messages sent to international numbers cost extra. Carriers offer special packages for international calls, with fees as low as 5 to 10 rubles per minute when calling European and American numbers.

There are also special plans for mobile routers (Wi-Fi hot-spots), typically offering 5 to 15 Gb of data for 300 to 500 rubles per month.



As most mobile plans are pay-as-you-go, typically service halts when the phone account balance reaches zero. Carriers offer USSD commands for clients to check the balance free of charge, as well as other options, such as SIM menu commands or an automatic hotline with programmed English and Russian languages. A SIM card which has not been used for 60 to 180 days (depending on the carrier and contract) is blocked automatically. It's very easy to top up a mobile account. The first option is to pay directly through the carrier's website with a plastic card. ATMs of almost every bank also offer this service and typically do not charge commission. One can top up with cash at carrier-specific or general mobile shops, but this option typically has a minimum of 300 to 500 rubles per transaction. Payment terminals is another cash option: although they are located almost everywhere, from transport hubs to remote residential areas, they charge a high commission (12 to 15 percent).

Russian mobile carriers employ GSM/EDGE in frequencies of 900/1800 MHz. This is compatible with networks used by European carriers, but not North American. 3G/HSPA+ networks are also supported in Russia, typically at 2100 or 900 MHz. LTE and LTE-Advanced networks mostly use 2600 MHz (FDD Band 7), as well as 800 MHz (Band 20) and 1800 MHz (Band 3). American carriers use different LTE bands, and most European smartphones are limited to Band 3 LTE. However, most modern devices are sold with multiregional support, thus they are capable of working on at least one band available in Russia, either 3G or 4G.



Wi-Fi

Open Wi-Fi networks, to which one can connect freely and start using them immediately are usually limited to smaller hotels and cafés. In most cases you are required to pass authorization, usually bundled with a commercial message.

If a network has restricted access, such as those found in hotels or business lounges at airports, the login information may be requested from an administrator.



Shopping and eating

Most of grocery stores are start to work from 8-10 am and close at 19-22 hours. Manufactured goods shops usually open a little bit later - with 10-11 and close at 19-20 hours. Malls close about an hour later. Chain Supermarkets, usually work around the clock. All central shops and large malls work without breaks and weekends.

In Russia, as in many countries, sale of alcohol and tobacco is restricted. Specifically, alcohol and tobacco sale is prohibited to those under the age of 18. The vendor has a right to demand a customer's ID (any official document containing a photo of the customer, and their date of birth).

Alcohol can also only be sold during specific hours. The federal law in general allows retail sale during the hours 8am to 11pm; however, regional governments are allowed to impose further restrictions. In Saint-Petersburg alcohol sale is prohibited from 10 pm to 11 am; in Kazan, Samara and Kaliningrad the 'dry hours' are between 10 pm and 10 am. It is also prohibited to sale alcohol at any time of day in locations of festivities and sporting events, including football matches. Serving of alcohol in dining establishments is regulated separately and is only limited by patron age, but not time of day.

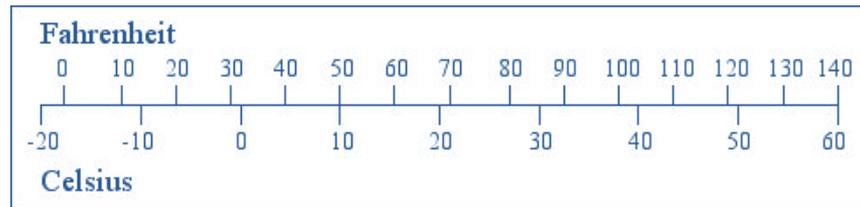
Tobacco advertisement is prohibited under Russian law. This includes display of cigarette packaging. Thus these items are not openly displayed in stores, but are sold on request at the cash register, or over the counter. Tobacco products are not subject to discounts, sales or loyalty programs.



Household conditions

Temperature unit

Degree Celsius is used to measure the temperature in Russia (symbol: °C).



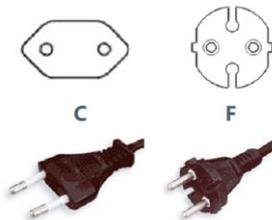
Metric system

Таблица соотношения мер длины
Conversion table, length

| Единица/Unit | м/m | см/cm | фут/ft | дюйм/in |
|----------------------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| метр/meter | 1 | 100 | 3,28 | 39,37 |
| сантиметр/centimeter | 0,01 | 1 | 0,0328 | 0,3937 |
| фут/foot | 0,3048 | 30,48 | 1 | 12 |
| дюйм/inch | 0,0254 | 2,54 | 0,083 | 1 |

Таблица соотношения мер веса
Conversion table, weight

| Единица/Unit | кг/kg | г/g | унция/oz | фунт/lb |
|--------------------|--------|----------|----------|---------|
| килограмм/kilogram | 1 | 1000 | 35,27 | 2,2046 |
| грамм/gram | 0,001 | 1 | 0,03527 | 0,0022 |
| унция/ounce | 0,0283 | 28,35 | 1 | 0,0625 |
| фунт/pound | 0,4536 | 453,5926 | 16 | 1 |



Electricity supply standards in Russia

Mains voltage - 220V, frequency - 50 Hz.

Different standards of electrical sockets and plugs has different constructive shape and size. According to the publication of the international electrical committee, each type is indicated by the letter.

Types C and F is used in Russia.