



CONTENT PROVIDED BY



CLOSE UP: ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

Conceived in the soul of a visionary emperor, St. Petersburg is Russia's adopted child. With its strict geometric lines and perfectly planned architecture, so unlike the Russian cities that came before it, St. Petersburg is almost too European to be Russian. And yet it's too Russian to be European. The city is a powerful combination of both East and West, springing from the will and passion of its founder, Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725), to guide a resistant Russia into the greater fold of Europe, and consequently into the mainstream of history. That he accomplished, and more. Being almost at sea level, the city appears to rise straight up from its embracing waters. Water weaves its way through the city's streets as well. Incorporating more than 100 islands and crisscrossed by more than 60 rivers and canals, St. Petersburg is often compared, except for its northern appeal, to that other great maritime city, Venice.

SIGHTS

State Hermitage Museum. (Gosudarstvennyy Ermitazhnyi Muzei; \$). As the former private art collection of the tsars, this is one of the world's most famous museums, virtually wallpapered with celebrated paintings. In addition, the walls are works of art themselves, for this collection is housed in the lavish Winter Palace, one of the most outstanding examples of Russian baroque magnificence. Possibly the most prized section of the Hermitage—and definitely the most difficult to get into—is the first-floor's **Treasure Gallery**, also referred to as the Zolotaya Kladovaya (Golden Room). This spectacular collection of gold, silver, and royal jewels is well worth the hassle and expense of admission. ☒2, *Dvortsovaya Pl.*, enter through the main gates on Palace Sq.

Alexander Nevsky Lavra (\$). The word *lavra* in Russian is reserved for a monastery of the highest order, of which there are just four in all of Russia and Ukraine. This monastery was founded in 1710 by Peter the Great and given *lavra* status in 1797. Prince Alexander of Novgorod (1220–63), the great military commander, became a national hero and saint because he halted the relentless eastward drive for Russian territory by the Germans and the Swedes. In 1724, on Peter's orders, Nevsky's remains were transferred to the monastery that was founded in his honor. ☒1 *Pl. Alexandra Nevskovo*.

Dvortsovaya Ploshchad. One of the world's most magnificent plazas, the square is a stunning ensemble of buildings and open space, a combination of several seemingly incongruous architectural styles in perfect harmony. It was across Palace Square in October 1917 that Bolshevik revolutionaries stormed the Winter Palace in a successful attempt to overthrow Kerensky's Provisional Government, an event that led to the birth of the Soviet Union. Almost 75 years later, during tense days, huge crowds rallied on Palace Square in support of perestroika and democracy. Today, the beautiful square is a bustling hubbub of tourist and marketing activity, lively yet seemingly imperturbable as ever. Horseback and carriage rides are available for hire here. ☒ *City Center*.

Egyptian Sphinxes. On the landing in front of the Repin Institute, leading down to the Neva, stand two of St. Petersburg's more magnificent landmarks, the famous Egyptian Sphinxes. These twin statues date from the 15th century BC and were discovered during an excavation at Thebes in the 1820s. ☒ *Universitetskaya nab., Vasilievsky Island*.

Gosudarstvennyy Russky Muzei (\$). In 1898 Nicholas II turned the stupendously majestic neoclassical Mikhailovsky Palace (Mikhailovsky Dvorets) into a museum that has become one of the country's most important art galleries. The collection at the museum, which is sometimes just referred to as the Russian Museum, is four times greater than Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery, with scores of masterpieces on display. ☒4/2 *Inzhenernaya ul.*

Isaakiyevsky Sobor (\$). Of the grandest proportions, St. Isaac's is the world's third-largest domed cathedral and the first monument you see of the city if you arrive by ship. Some consider the massive design and highly ornate interior to be excessive, whereas others revel in its opulence. Tsar Alexander I commissioned the construction of the cathedral in 1818 to celebrate his victory over Napoléon, but it took more than 40 years to actually build it. ☒1 *Isaakiyevskaya Pl.*

Khram Spasa na Krovi (\$). The highly ornate, old-Russian style of this colorful church seems more befitting to Moscow than St. Petersburg, where the architecture is generally more subdued and subtle. The interior is as extravagant as the exterior, with glittering stretches of mosaic from floor to ceiling (70,000 square feet in total). Stone carvings and gold leaf adorn the walls, the floors are made of pink Italian marble, and the remarkable altar is constructed entirely of semiprecious gems and supported by four jasper columns. ☒2a *Kanal Griboyedova*.

Marsovo Pole (Field of Mars). The field acquired its current name around 1800, when it began to be used primarily for military exercises. Shortly after 1917 it was turned into a burial ground for Red Army victims of the revolution and ensuing civil war. The massive granite Monument to Revolutionary Fighters was unveiled here on November 7, 1919,

with an eternal flame lit 40 years later, on the revolution's anniversary. ☒ *City Center*.

Muzy Kvarтира Alexandra Pushkina (\$). After fighting a duel to defend his wife's honor, the beloved Russian poet Alexander Pushkin died in a rented apartment in this building on January 27, 1837. Although few of the furnishings are authentic, his personal effects and those of his wife are on display. A moving tape-recorded account leads you through the apartment and retells the events leading up to the poet's death. ☒ *12 nab. Moika*.

Nevsky prospekt. St. Petersburg's own Champs-Élysées was laid out in 1710, making it one of the city's first streets. Just short of 5 km (3 mi) long, beginning and ending at different bends of the Neva River, Nevsky prospekt starts at the foot of the Admiralty building and runs in a perfectly straight line to the Moscow Station, where it curves slightly before ending a short distance farther at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra.

Peterhof (Petrodvoret). This vast complex of gardens and residences 18 miles west of St. Petersburg was masterminded by Peter the Great, who personally drew up the plans in the early 18th century. Half-encircled by the sea, filled with fountains and other water monuments, and with the Marine Canal running straight from the foot of the palace into the bay, Peter's palace was intended as a tribute to the role of water in the life, and strength, of his city. It includes the **Great Cascade** (Bolshoi Kaskad, with 3 waterfalls, 64 fountains, and 37 statues) and the sumptuous **Bolshoi Dvoret**, Peter's original house, altered and enlarged by his daughter, Elizabeth. The Peterhof complex stood in ruins after World War II, and its renovation will continue for many years to come. ☒ *18 miles west of St. Petersburg on the southern shores of the Gulf of Finland*.

Petropavlovskaya Krepost (\$). The first building in Sankt-Peter-Burkh, as the city was then called, the fortress was erected in just one year, between 1703 and 1704, to defend this location in the Great Northern War against Sweden. The date on which construction began on the fortress is celebrated as the birth of St. Petersburg; in 2003 the city held extensive celebrations to mark its 300th anniversary. The main attraction of the fortress is the **Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul** (Petropavlovsky Sobor), constructed between 1712 and 1733 on the site of an earlier wooden church. It's highly unusual for a Russian Orthodox church. Instead of the characteristic bulbous domes, it's adorned by a single, slender, gilded spire whose height (400 feet) made the church for more than two centuries the city's tallest building. Starting with Peter the Great, the cathedral served as the burial place of the tsars. ☒ *3 Petropavlovskaya Krepost, Petrograd side*.

Smolny (\$). The centerpiece of the beautiful baroque church and convent is the magnificent five-domed Cathedral of the Resurrection, which was designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli and which is, some historians say, his greatest creation. At first glance, the highly ornate blue-and-white cathedral seems to have leaped off the pages of a fairy tale. Its five white onion domes, crowned with gilded globes supporting crosses of gold, convey a sense of magic and power. ☒ *3/1 Pl. Rastrelli*.

Strelka. The Strelka ("arrow" or "spit") affords a dazzling view of both the Winter Palace and the Peter and Paul Fortress. This bit of land also reveals the city's triumphant rise from a watery outpost to an elegant metropolis. Seen against the backdrop of the Neva, the brightly colored houses lining the embankment seem like children's toys—the building blocks of a bygone aristocracy. They stand at the water's edge, seemingly supported not by the land beneath them but by the panorama of the city behind them. ☒ *Vasilevsky Island, at the north end of Dvortsovy Most (Palace Bridge), Vasilevsky Island*.

Summer Garden (Letny Sad; \$). Inspired by Versailles, the Summer Garden was one of Peter the Great's passions. Today it's a popular park accessible to everyone, but you'll have to imagine the first formal garden, for it's no longer there. Just inside the southeastern corner is Peter's original Summer Palace, Letny Dvoret. As you walk through the park, take a look at some of its more than 80 statues. ☒ *City Center*.

Winter Palace (Zimny Dvoret). With its 1,001 rooms swathed in malachite, jasper, agate, and gilded mirrors, this famous palace—the residence of Russia's rulers from Catherine the Great (1762) to Nicholas II (1917)—is the focal point of Palace Square. The palace houses the State Hermitage Museum, and three other celebrated portions are the Gallery of the 1812 War, where portraits of Russian commanders who served against Napoléon are on display; the Great Throne Room, richly decorated in marble and bronze; and the Malachite Room, decorated with columns and pilasters of malachite. ☒ *Dvortsovaya Pl.*

Yusupovsky Dvoret (\$). On the cold night of December 17, 1916, this elegant yellow palace, which belonged to one of Russia's wealthiest families, the Yusupovs, became the setting for one of history's most melodramatic murders. Prince Yusupov and others spent several frustrating hours trying to kill Grigory Rasputin, who had strongly influenced the tsarina, who in turn influenced the tsar. To their horror, the courtiers found the "mad monk" nearly invincible. On display in the palace, which is set on the bank of the Moika River, are the rooms in which Rasputin was (or began to be) killed, as well as a waxworks exhibit of Rasputin and Prince Yusupov. They are visible only on an organized tour given once daily in the late afternoon. ☒ *94 nab. Moika*.

SHOPPING

The central shopping district is Nevsky prospekt and the streets running off it. Don't expect too many bargains, however, because prices for items such as clothes and electronic goods are just as high as in the West, and in the chic stores in hotels they are even higher. Versace, Hugo Boss, Gucci, Kenzo, Prada, Armani—are fully stocked in the international boutiques around the city. Kiosks, street tables, and impromptu markets sell a colorful jumble of junk most of the time. You'll see women lined up selling socks, scarves, and who-knows-what near Sennaya Ploshchad, and if you're lucky you might pick up some great old books (watch in particular the corner of Nevksy and Fontanka, across the street from the Palace of Prince Beloselsky-Belozersky).

