

# St Petersburg

## Essential information

The Hermitage Museum offers extended hours on Wednesday and Friday, and free entry on the first Thursday of every month.

### Best time to visit

*September to October  
(to avoid the crowds)*

### Time zone

UTC+3

### Useful sites

[WWW.HERMITAGEMUSEUM.ORG](http://WWW.HERMITAGEMUSEUM.ORG)

[WWW.VISIT-PETERSBURG.RU](http://WWW.VISIT-PETERSBURG.RU)

[WWW.FABERGEMUSEUM.RU](http://WWW.FABERGEMUSEUM.RU)



Russia's cultural heart, St Petersburg's frozen-in-time opulence is garnished with an enthusiastic helping of contemporary eclecticism

Under the unruly northern sky, St Petersburg stares out across the Baltic Sea. Founded by Peter the Great in 1703 as a 'window into Europe', and designed by a slew of celebrated architects, today it's Russia's chameleonic second city. Effortlessly modern, it has lost none of its old-world grandeur.

The Palace Square makes a powerful first impression, the backdrop to some of Russia's most poignant events, from the Bloody Sunday massacre to the October Revolution. At its centre, the Alexander Column stands, commemorating the 1812 victory over Napoleon.

The green-and-white Winter Palace flanks the square's northern end – its Rococo exterior festooned with larger-than-life statues. Formerly a royal residence, it's now one of six buildings comprising the world-famous Hermitage Museum. The second-largest museum in the world, the sprawling complex spans 360 rooms, housing a selection of the collection's three million items.

Just across the Neva River lies the comparably modest Summer Palace, its grounds studded with impressive Italian sculptures imported by Peter the Great. Nearby, at the Field of Mars, a sombre flame burns for victims of the Russian revolutions of 1917.

Instantly recognisable, the pure-gold dome of St Isaac's Cathedral dominates the skyline and the huge square around it. Beyond its enormous doors remains elaborate stained glass and soaring columns of lapis lazuli and malachite. While its lavishly decorated dome looms large over the interior – which can hold 14,000 worshippers – its colonnaded walkway reveals panoramic views over the city for those willing to brave its 262 steps.

Just across the water, housing the tombs of Russia's imperial family, along with a Baroque cathedral and scalable fort, the Peter and Paul Fortress offers a glimpse into the city's storied past – constructed in 1703, it was one of St Petersburg's first buildings.

Continuing through history, literary buffs can walk the streets that inspired some of the greatest poems and prose ever written – from Alexander Pushkin's apartment to Catherine Canal, where scenes from Crime and Punishment unfold. There is also the FM Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum, as well as the Stray Dog Café, a literary hangout frequented by the likes of Leo Tolstoy and Anna Akhmatova.

Come nightfall, the Mariinsky Theatre calls. St Petersburg's most impressive venue, it may be the epitome of ornate grandeur, but its ballet and opera credentials are unparalleled.

