



## **Why Should I Study in Russia?**

### **A Brief Guide to Studying in the World's Largest Country**

Russia is a major world economy and thus fosters an increasing number of career opportunities for those with related education and experience. However, Russia is not for everyone – those who have spent any amount of time in the country will tell you that it is not the easiest in which to live, study, and/or work. These very challenges are recognized by international employers and thus there is an appreciation for those who have not just studied abroad, but have taken on greater than average challenges – from a complex (level 3) language to daily survival in a transition economy where even native Russians struggle to keep up with change.

The differences in the Russian language and culture pose special challenges to people from English-speaking countries. We can guarantee you will experience culture shock. You will encounter frustration, confusion, and at least once, probably wonder why you came. Yet, if you are anything like the thousands of Americans and Western Europeans currently living, working, and/or studying in Russia, this is exactly why you will love Russia.

Russia is for those who like challenge, who want to have their world-views questioned and forcibly expanded, who want to feel that they have truly earned their accomplishments, and who want to prove that they can deliver under pressure. It is also for this reason that Russia can provide career opportunities for those willing to learn and experience the country and all it entails – Russia can prove that you are the type of employee that most businesses, government agencies, and academic institutions are looking for.

This short guide is written as frankly and briefly as possible to help you decide if Russia is right for you.

## **Academic Concerns**

### **When should I study abroad?**

We recommend a summer introduction to Russia after your first year of study, followed by a semester or year of intensive study abroad during your third year. This schedule not only provides intensive vocabulary development at appropriate stages of your Russian language career, but also provides you with experiences that will shape your studies ahead. And we can't overlook the obvious idea that you might want to see firsthand if you really love Russia enough to build your academic and professional career in that direction.

### **What About Credit Transfer?**

All SRAS programs are eligible for transfer credit. However, the decision of whether or not to award that credit is solely at the discretion of *your home institution*. You should contact your academic advisor at home to discuss any requirements and restrictions. All official certificates and transcripts are issued by the host university in Russia. These are supported by any documentation necessary from SRAS. The student is responsible for obtaining prior approval for credit transfer before departing for Russia.

### **How Much Credit Can I Get?**

Russian universities run on academic hours, which are equal to about 40-45 minutes. Language courses are often run in back-to-back blocks of these hours (so that each class is about 1½ hours). American universities usually award one credit per 15 academic hours (contact hours), but make sure you check with your particular institution about any requirements and restrictions.

### **Can I Study in More Than One Location?**

Because of visa and logistical restrictions, it is not recommended that students enroll in more than one location per semester. If staying longer than one semester, SRAS can customize a program for you that may encompass multiple locations in Russia and/or Central Asia.

### **What is the Academic Calendar?**

Start and stop dates are listed on RSL and FSA programs. Students opting for Direct Enrollment will find that semesters generally run, with variation from university to university, roughly according to the RSL schedule, although the spring semester tends to run a few weeks longer than fall. Semesters can usually be shortened to fit your needs by a few weeks. Contact an SRAS representative for more info.

### **What about Deadlines?**

They are listed on each program page for FSA, RSL, and DE programs. If you have missed a deadline, contact an SRAS representative immediately. Late applications can sometimes be accepted, although late fees may apply.

## Health, Safety, and Living Conditions

**Russia is not the world's safest destination.** Its legal and justice systems are still underdeveloped by most standards and its developing economy means that standards of living are lower than in most Western countries and rates for certain types of crimes are higher. However, it is in part because of its transitioning systems and additional challenges that Russia is a much more valuable study abroad destination than Western Europe. Study abroad in Russia stands out on resumes not only as a unique experience, and indicates an applicant that can take challenges head-on. SRAS takes measures to educate each student about possible dangers and how to avoid them – and we have more than a decade of experience in doing so.

**Racism** is a problem. So is violence in general. However, although the Western media usually portrays the two as intimately linked, foreigners and Russians of all ethnicities and appearances have experienced the random violence of "fight club" type gangs. However, there is little anti-American sentiment specifically; most Russians who dislike the policies of the American government do not associate those policies with America's citizens. Most tourists and students from the States never experience violent intolerance and are often more apt to remember the kindness of Russians who befriended them.

**The police** can request documentation from anyone on the street. Make sure you can point out where your visa and registration are in your passport. Make sure you read the information available from the SRAS website (under "Guide to Russia" on our home page) under "required reading" to find out more. If you feel you are being harassed, remain calm and respectful (confrontation will not help!), but take out a cell phone (free with most SRAS programs in Moscow and soon in St. Petersburg) and call your embassy at 8-495-728-5000. Usually, the phone and the word "embassy" are enough to clear up unfounded charges. The main issues are: don't be rude and be confident.

**Insurance** is included with most SRAS programs and offered as an option to purchase with select programs if you do not have your own. Offered through Cultural Insurance Services International, the policy covers treatment at the many English-speaking clinics now open in Moscow and St. Petersburg (eg. AmericanClinic.ru; EMCMos.ru). It includes prescription assistance (although we recommend that medicines be brought from home - while most are now available in Russia, they often have different names and pharmacists rarely speak English). Outside of major cities, English-speaking care is harder to find, but for every location, SRAS has a contingency plan for students who require English-speaking care (someone from the university international office will be available to accompany the student and translate). Download the full brochure in PDF [here](#).

**Immunizations** are recommended for diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and tetanus. Immunizations against hepatitis A and typhoid and immuno-globulin injections are also recommended. For travelers to Siberia, ask your doctor about precautions against tick-borne encephalitis and lyme disease. For more information, contact the center of Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for International travelers at 1-877-394-8747 or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

**Water** It is not advisable to drink straight tap water anywhere in Russia. Bottled water is readily available, as are modern water filters (like Brita) in almost all Russian cities. In Petersburg, it is advisable to use bottled water to brush your teeth. Don't panic, these are just precautions; instances of students getting sick from the water are quite rare and usually result from not following these guidelines.

**Food** in Russia tends to be high in fat. Many Russians still believe that this is healthy (as Americans did maybe 50-100 years ago). Bringing stomach medication to help you acclimate to the amount of fats and oils you will ingest is recommended. That said, it is advisable to simply acclimate and eat less if you are concerned about your figure (that's what Russians do, and you will be surprised how few are obese). To not at least try the food you are offered is considered offensive.

**Housing** in dorms, home stays, or hostels will provide you with a very small amount of personal space often in soviet-era architecture. Dorms will all have fire safety rules (no hot plates or smoking, etc.) and evacuation plans posted. You should make note of where the fire extinguishers are and ask the floor attendant for any other fire safety rules or regulations. For those who are willing to pay, more expensive western-style apartments can be found in Moscow and Petersburg.

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