Tips for Travelers to Russia
(From www.travel.state.gov)

Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs
Publication 10844
May 2001

General Information
Travel and living conditions in Russia can contrast sharply with those in the United States. This brochure offers advice to help you avoid inconveniences and difficulties. The Department of State and the U.S. Embassy and consulates in Russia offer a wide range of services to U.S. citizens. U.S. consular officials meet regularly with local authorities to promote the safety of U.S. citizens in the country.

In advance of your trip, learn as much as you can about your destination. Your travel agent, local bookstore, public library, the Internet and the embassy of the country or countries you plan to visit are all useful sources of information. Another source is the Department of State’s Background Notes series, which features a pamphlet on each country. You may obtain Background Notes from the State Department home page at (http://www.state.gov.)

IMPORTANT: This information in this booklet is subject to change. Please consult the latest Consular Information Sheet for the most recent information on each country that you plan to visit.

Know Before You Go
As you travel, keep abreast of local news coverage. If you are in an area experiencing civil unrest or natural disaster, or if you are going to a place where communications are poor, you are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate through the State Department’s travel registration website. Registration takes only a few moments, and it may be invaluable in case of an emergency. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare or whereabouts may not be released without your expressed authorization. Remember to leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers or copies of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.
Here are some other useful precautions:

• Leave a detailed itinerary and the number of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.
• Carry your photo identification and the name of a person to contact with you in the event of serious illness or other emergency.
• Keep photocopies of your passport, visa, airline or other tickets and a list of your traveler’s checks with you in a separate location from the originals and leave copies with someone at home.
• Leave things like unnecessary credit cards and expensive jewelry at home.
• Use a money belt or concealed pouch for your passport, cash and other valuables.

Consular Information Program
Before traveling, obtain the Consular Information Sheets for all the countries you plan to visit. You should also check to see if the Department of State has issued a Travel Warning or Public Announcement for the country or countries you will be visiting.

Travel Warnings are issued when the Department of State decides, based on all relevant information, to recommend that Americans avoid travel to a certain country.
Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about relatively short-term and/or regional conditions that could pose significant risks to the security of American travelers.

Consular Information Sheets are available for every country in the world. They include such information as the location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, and drug penalties. A description of political disturbances may be included in the Consular Information Sheet under an optional section entitled “Areas of Instability.” On limited occasions, the Department also restates in this section U.S. embassy advice given to official employees. Consular Information Sheets present information so travelers can make knowledgeable decisions concerning travel to a particular country. Countries where we suggest that you not travel will have Travel Warnings in addition to Consular Information Sheets.

How to Access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements

By Internet
The most convenient source of information about travel and consular services is the Consular Affairs home page on the Internet’s World Wide Web. The web site is http://travel.state.gov. If you do not have access to the Internet at home, work, or school, your local library may provide access to the Internet.

By Telephone
Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings may be heard any time by dialing the office of American Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225 from a touchtone phone.

By Fax
From your fax machine, dial (202) 647-3000, using the handset as you would a regular telephone. The system will instruct you on how to proceed.

In Person/By Mail
Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements are available at any of the regional passport agencies, field offices of the Department of Commerce, U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, or, by writing and sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of American Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818.

Visas and Other Entry Requirements
U.S. citizens must possess a valid U.S. passport and appropriate visas for travel to, or transit through, Russia and many of its neighboring countries, whether by train, car, ship or airplane. Travelers who arrive without an entry visa will be unable to enter Russia and face immediate ordered departure by route of entry, at the traveler’s expense. Visas should be in the United States, because this can be difficult and time-consuming to do in a third country. It is impossible to obtain a Russian entry visa upon arrival into the country. Errors in dates or other information on the visa can occur and it is helpful to have someone who reads the local language check the visa before departing the U.S.

Visas are valid for specific dates. An entry/exit visa reflects two dates written in the European style (date, month, year). The first date indicates the day you may enter Russia; the second date indicates the day you must leave the country. Sometimes, the length of a visa may not correspond to the length of your planned stay. Before starting your trip, be sure your visa is valid for the dates of your planned entry and departure. In Russia, travelers who spend more than three days in the country must register their visa through their hotel or sponsor. It is helpful to make a photocopy of your visa in the event of loss. A copy of your visa will not be sufficient for leaving the country. Russian border officials always ask for the original. Amendment of a visa necessitated by illness or changes in travel plans must be approved in advance by the office that issued your visa. If travelers experience entry and exit visa problems they and/or their sponsor must contact the nearest Russian visa and passport office for assistance. Visitors who overstay their visa’s validity, even for one day, or, who neglect to register their visa will be prevented from leaving. Due to the possibility of random document checks by police, U.S. citizens should carry their original or photocopies of their passports and registered visas with them at all times. Failure to provide proper documentation can result in detention and/or heavy fines.
Business and Transit Visas
A business visa requires a letter of invitation from a business contact in the country to which you are traveling. A transit visa requires a copy of your confirmed ticket and visa, if required, to your onward destination.

Sponsorship for Visas
Russia and many of its neighboring countries issue visas (with the exception of transit visas) on the basis of support from a sponsor, usually an individual or local organization. It is important to know who your sponsor is and how to contact them because, in many of these countries, the law requires that your sponsor apply on your behalf for replacement, extension or changes to your visa. Even if your visa was obtained through a travel agency in the U.S., there is always a Russian legal entity whose name is indicated on the visa and who is considered to be your legal sponsor. The U.S. Embassy cannot act as your sponsor. U.S. citizens should contact their tour company or hotel in advance for information on visa sponsorship.

Exit Visas
An exit visa is usually required to depart Russia. For short stays, the exit visa is issued along with the entry visa and is only valid until the date listed on the visa. In Russia and many neighboring countries, travelers who spend more than three days in the country must register their visa through their hotel or sponsor. Visitors who overstay their visa’s validity, even for one day, or who neglect to register their visa will be prevented from leaving.

How to Obtain More Visa Information
Authoritative and current information on visas can only be obtained from the embassies or consulates of the countries you plan to visit. When you inquire about visas, ask about price, length of validity, the number of entries that are permitted and whether or not you will need an exit visa.

Your U.S. Passport
Thefts of U.S. passports are increasing rapidly. The theft or loss of a passport, especially when the nearest U.S. consular office is hundreds or thousands of miles away, is a major source of inconvenience and expense to travelers. Before your trip, make photocopies of the data page of your passport. A copy of the addresses and telephone numbers of the U.S. embassies and consulates in the countries you will visit may also be helpful. Put one set of the photocopies along with two passport photos in a place separate from your passport. If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, this will make issuance of a new passport faster and easier. Leave the second set of copies and your itinerary with a relative or friend in the U.S. While in Russia and in many countries, you may be asked to turn over your passport to hotel personnel or a tour leader for short periods of time for registration with police or for other purposes. Your passport should be returned within two or three days. However, for U.S. citizens on long-term business or studies, the registration process can often take longer. It is not unusual for sponsors and local authorities to hold on to American passports for as much as several weeks while visas are registered or while exit visas are processed. Be sure to safeguard your passport at all other times, as its loss can cause you delays and problems.

If your passport is lost or stolen, you must apply for a replacement passport at a U.S. embassy or consulate. If possible, bring with you:

- identification, especially photo ID
- proof of U.S. citizenship (a birth certificate, naturalization certificate, Report of Birth Abroad or a copy of your passport)
- two 2” by 2” passport size photos, in color or black and white, and
- the police report that you filed when you notified the local authorities that your passport was lost or stolen.

In most cases, a new passport can be issued quickly. If U.S. passport records must be checked, the process may delay the issuance of a new passport.

In Russia you must also obtain a new or duplicate visa from OVIR (Office of Visas and Registration) if your visa is lost or
stolen. (This office is also known as the “Passport-Visa Service” in some areas.) The passport number on your visa must match that of any new passport. Obtaining a replacement visa takes approximately 10 working days. A police certificate verifying the theft of your visa and passport may be necessary to obtain a new visa.

**U.S. Visas for Foreigners**

Questions regarding U.S. visas for foreigners should be directed to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

**Adoptions**

Russia has well-established procedures governing international adoption; however, adoption laws vary greatly and are subject to change with little prior notice. Prospective adoptive parents should be prepared to go through a lengthy and complicated process before being allowed to adopt a child. For country specific information about current laws and procedures for international adoption, U.S. citizens may contact the Department of State’s Office of Children’s Issues at (202) 736-7000. They can also consult the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ web site at http://travel.state.gov. Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to contact their state’s social services department for assistance in locating an adoption agency specializing in international adoption.

**Travel in Russia**

**Areas of Instability.** Due to continued civil and political unrest throughout most of the Caucasus region of Russia, the Department of State warns U.S. citizens against travel to the areas of Chechnya, all areas bordering Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Stavropol, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya and Kabardino-Balkariya. United States Government personnel are prohibited from traveling to these areas and American citizens residing in these areas should depart immediately as the safety of Americans and other foreigners cannot be effectively guaranteed. Throughout the region, local criminal gangs routinely kidnap foreigners, including Americans, for ransom. U.S. citizens have disappeared in Chechnya and remain unaccounted for. In December 1998, four foreign hostages were decapitated by their captors. Close contacts with the local population do not guarantee safety. The U.S. Government’s ability to assist Americans who travel to the Northern Caucasus is extremely limited.

**Air Travel Within Russia.** After extensive joint reviews with the State Civil Aviation Authority (SCAA), the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has concluded under its International Aviation (IASA) Program that the SCAA oversees and licenses Russia’s air carriers in accordance with international safety oversight provisions. For further information, travelers may contact the Department of Transportation within the U.S. at 1-800-322-7873, or visit the FAA web site at http://www.faa.gov/avr/iasa/. Travelers should note that air travel within Russia, particularly in remote regions, can be unreliable at times. Small local airlines do not have advance reservation systems but sell tickets for cash at the airport. Flights often get cancelled if more than 30% of the seats remain unsold.

**Overland Travel.** When traveling by train or automobile in Russia, it is advisable to bring food and water with you. You cannot rely on the availability or quality of these goods throughout the region. When traveling overland between Central European countries and Russia, be sure that you have visas for all countries through which you will pass. For example, you will need a Belarusian transit visa if you take the train from Warsaw, Poland to Vilnius, Lithuania because the train passes through Grodno, Belarus. Most transit problems can be avoided if you research your routes well.

**Travel By Car.** Driving conditions in Russia and the region are drastically different from those in Western Europe. In some areas, roads are practically non-existent. Throughout the region, service stations are few and far between and the lines are often quite long for the scarce amount of available fuel. Avoid excessive speed and, if at all possible, do not drive at night. Loose livestock can appear at any time. Construction sites or stranded vehicles are often unmarked by flares or other warning signals. Sometimes cars have only one headlight. Many cars lack brake lights. Bicycles seldom have lights or reflectors. This makes for very dangerous driving conditions at night. Be prepared for sudden stops at any time.

If you plan to drive, travelers should adhere to all local driving regulations. These are strictly enforced and violators are subject to severe legal penalties. Learn about your route from an auto club, guide book or a government tourist office.
Some routes have heavy truck and bus traffic, others have poor or nonexistent shoulders and many have animals on the loose. Also, some of the newer roads have very few restaurants, motels, gas stations or auto repair shops. You may not be able to avoid all problems, but at least you will know what to expect if you have done some research. For your safety, have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you travel. It is wise to bring an extra fan belt, fuses and other spare parts.

To avoid highway crime, try not to drive at night and never drive alone during this time. Never sleep in vehicles along the road. Do not, under any circumstances, pick up hitchhikers, who not only pose a threat to your physical safety, but also put you in danger of being arrested for unwittingly transporting narcotics or narcotics traffickers in your vehicle. Your vehicle can be confiscated if you are transporting marijuana or other narcotics.

A valid U.S. driver’s license, a valid international driver’s license or a valid license from the country in which you are traveling are necessary to drive a vehicle in Russia. International driver’s licenses, good for one year, are available through the American Automobile Association. Foreigners who plan to drive in the region for more than six months must have a Russian driver’s license. If you will be there for less than six months, you can use your American driver’s license but need to carry an official translation, into Russian. Moreover, legal residents of Russia are required to obtain a Russian driver’s license. In order to do that one has to take an appropriate exam. An American driver’s license cannot be exchanged for a Russian license. Travelers without a valid license are often subject to prolonged stops by highway police.

**Insurance.** Your automobile should be fully insured under a policy valid for the country in which you are traveling. U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid nor are most collision and comprehensive coverage policies issued by U.S. companies. A good rule of thumb is to buy coverage equivalent to that which you carry in the United States.

**Checkpoints.** Law enforcement checkpoints aimed at detecting narcotics, alien smuggling and firearms traffic are located at various places throughout the region. Many checkpoints are operated by uniformed officials; however, others will not be marked and are manned by police or military officers not in uniform.

**Crime and Safety**

As a visitor to Russia, be alert to your surroundings. Problem situations in these countries may be different from those you are used to and safety regulations and their enforcement are generally not equivalent to U.S. standards.

Crime against foreigners is a problem. In large cities, take the same precautions against assault, robbery, or pickpockets that you would take in any large U.S. city. Be aware that women and small children, as well as men, can be pickpockets or purse snatchers. Keep your billfold in an inner front pocket, carry your purse tucked securely under your arm and wear the shoulder strap of your camera or bag across your chest. Walk away from the curb and carry your purse away from the street. The most vulnerable areas include underground walkways and the subway, overnight trains, train stations, airports, markets, tourist attractions, restaurants, hotel rooms and residences, even when locked or occupied. Groups of children are known to assault and rob foreigners on city streets or underground walkways. Members of religious and missionary groups have been robbed by people pretending to be interested in their beliefs. Foreigners who have been drinking alcohol are especially vulnerable to assault and robbery in or around nightclubs or bars, or on their way home. U.S. citizens are advised to be careful when ordering beverages in local nightclubs and bars, especially at night. Some establishments may contaminate or drug the drinks to gain control over the patron. Victims, who are almost always unaccompanied, have been robbed of personal property and abducted and held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and ATM locations around the city. Robberies may occur in taxis shared with strangers. Travelers have found it safer to travel in groups organized by reputable tour agencies.

**NOTE:** U.S. citizens should avoid providing personal identifying information to individuals not known to them. Information obtained from unsuspecting travelers has been used by individuals to extort money from families in the U.S. by contacting them and fraudulently informing them that a family member has been arrested or requires urgent medical care. The caller gains their confidence by providing this personal information and requests that funds be sent to assist their family member.
Public Transport. Be vigilant in bus and train stations and on public transport. Crime aboard trains has also increased. For example, travelers have been victimized without their knowledge and robbed on the train from Moscow to St. Petersburg. Crimes such as armed robbery have also been reported on trains between Moscow and Warsaw and between Moscow and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. On some trains, thieves have been able to open locked compartment doors. Always watch for pickpockets in these areas.

Streets and Highways. U.S. citizens should never hitchhike or accept rides from strangers. Be wary of persons representing themselves as police or other local officials. It is not uncommon for Americans to become victims of harassment, mistreatment and extortion by law enforcement and other officials. Authorities are concerned about these incidents and have cooperated in investigating such cases. You must, however, have the officer’s name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint. Make a note of this information if you are ever involved with police or other officials.

Skinheads. There have been sporadic attacks on foreigners by “skinhead” groups in some Russian urban centers. Many of these attacks appear to target university students, particularly those of Asian and African origin. Travelers are urged to exercise caution in areas frequented by “skinhead” groups and wherever large groups have gathered.

Crime Against Foreign Businesses and Businesspersons. Extortion and corruption are common in the business environment. Organized criminal groups target foreign businesses in many cities and have been known to demand protection money under threat of serious violence. Many Western firms hire security services that have improved their overall security, although this is no guarantee. Small businesses are particularly vulnerable. Since the mid-1990’s, several American business people have been attacked, kidnapped and even killed. U.S. citizens are encouraged to report all extortion attempts to the Russian authorities and to inform consular officials at the U.S. Embassy or nearest consulate.

Travelers should be aware that in Russia certain activities, which would be normal business activities in the United States and other countries, are still either illegal under the Russian legal code or are considered suspect by the FSB (Federal Security Service.) Americans should be particularly aware of potential risks involved in any commercial activity with the Russian military-industrial complex, including research institutes, design bureaus, and production facilities or other high technology, government-related institutions. Any misunderstanding or dispute in such transactions can attract the involvement of the security services and lead to investigation or prosecution for espionage. Rules governing the treatment of information remain poorly defined. During the last several years, there have been a number of such incidents involving the arrest and/or detention of U.S. citizens. While the U.S. Embassy has had consular access to these individuals, arrested Americans faced lengthy sentences - sometimes in deplorable conditions - if convicted.

Safety Tips
Although officials in Russia have in many cases expressed willingness to cooperate with U.S. officials in emergencies involving U.S. citizens, communications and transportation can be slow and difficult, and the U.S. Embassy or nearest consulate may be more than a day’s travel away. To reduce the risk of becoming a victim of crime, exercise the same precautions that you would in any large city and follow these tips:

- Safety begins when you pack. Leave expensive jewelry, unnecessary credit cards and anything you would hate to lose at home.
- Never display large sums of money when paying a bill. Conceal your passport, cash and other valuables on your person. Do not trust waist packs or fanny packs. Pickpockets have learned that is where the valuables are stored.
- Be vigilant on public transport and at tourist sites, food markets, flea markets, art exhibitions and all places where crowds gather.
- Even slight intoxication is noted by professional thieves. Therefore, if you drink in a public place, do so only with a trusted friend who has agreed to remain sober.
- Avoid hailing unmarked cars as taxis. Although this is a common practice in Russia, foreigners have been robbed
and assaulted by the drivers of such unmarked cabs. Never accept a ride from a driver who already has other passengers.

- Demonstrations are frequently held in front of U.S. embassies and consulates. While these demonstrations are usually peaceful and controlled, it is best to avoid such gatherings.
- If you have been the victim of a crime, immediately contact the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or consular agency. You should also report the crime to the local police immediately.

Useful information on safeguarding valuables, protecting personal security, and other matters while traveling abroad is provided in the Department of State pamphlet, *A Safe Trip Abroad*, which is available on the Consular Affairs web site at http://travel.state.gov and for sale from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

### Medical Care and Health Insurance

**Medical Care.** Medical care is usually far below Western standards, with severe shortages of basic medical supplies. Access to the few quality facilities that exist in major cities usually requires cash payment at Western rates upon admission. The U.S. Embassy and consulates maintain lists of such facilities and English-speaking doctors. Many resident Americans travel to the West for virtually all of their medical needs. Such travel can be very expensive if undertaken under emergency conditions. Travelers may therefore wish to check their insurance coverage and consider supplemental coverage for medical evacuation. Elderly travelers and those with existing health problems may be at particular risk.

**Health Insurance.** Medicare/Medicaid does not cover you when you are outside the United States. If your insurance policy does not cover you outside the United States, it is strongly recommended that you purchase a policy that does. There are short-term health insurance policies designed specifically to cover travel, which can be as low as $50.00 for a trip of 30 days. As part of the coverage, these programs usually offer emergency consultation by telephone. They may refer you to the nearest hospital or call for help on your behalf. They may translate your instructions to a health care worker on the scene. Because conditions in many hospitals are not adequate to ensure recovery, medical evacuation is frequently necessary for illnesses or injuries that could be treated locally in other countries. This is an expensive option. For example, minimum cost from Moscow to New York on a stretcher is more than $15,000. Medical evacuation by hospital aircraft on the same route approaches $130,000. Such services require a substantial down payment before they commit themselves to arranging a flight out of Russia. In addition, medical evacuation from remote areas can be especially long and difficult. Evacuation from the interior of the country, such as Siberia, can take a day to organize and set into motion.

If your travel agent cannot direct you to a medical assistance company, look for information in travel magazines. The names of some companies that provide medical evacuation coverage or services are listed in the publication, *Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad*, on the Internet site http://travel.state.gov under Travel Publications. The U.S. government cannot pay to have you medically evacuated to the United States.

### Potential Health Problems

Health problems sometimes affect visitors to Russia. Information on health precautions can be obtained from local health departments or private doctors. General guidance can also be found in the U.S. Public Health Service book, *Health Information for International Travel*, available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Travel in Russia and its neighboring states can be strenuous, particularly for the elderly and individuals with special health problems. When you plan your trip, be careful not to overschedule. Leave time for rest and relaxation. Tourists in frail health are strongly advised not to visit because of the harsh conditions and lack of adequate medical facilities. Outbreaks of diphtheria have been reported throughout the region, even in large cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend up-to-date diphtheria immunizations before traveling to Russia and its neighboring countries. Typhoid can be a concern for those who plan to travel extensively in the region. Cases of cholera have also been reported throughout the area; the risk of exposure to cholera can be reduced by
refraining from drinking local water supplies.

**Immunizations.** No immunizations are required for travelers to Russia. However, diphtheria, tetanus, polio and gamma globulin vaccinations are recommended for the region. The following vaccines should be considered, depending on the locations to be visited, planned activities and the health of the traveler: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies, encephalitis and typhoid.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention's international travelers hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); the automated fax information system at 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299) or by visiting the CDC Internet home page at [http://www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

**AIDS Testing.** Russia requires submission of an appropriate HIV-negative certificate at the time of applying for a visa in case of an intended stay of 3 months or longer. Positive test results for HIV could be grounds for expulsion from the country. All travelers intending to reside in Russia are strongly advised to have the requisite tests performed in the United States, as the testing conditions in the region tend to be very unsanitary and could pose a hazard to your health. Requirements for HIV testing are likely to change as new legislation is adopted. Please refer to the current Consular Information Sheet or contact the U.S. Embassy or nearest consulate for the latest requirements.

**Drinking Water.** Drink only bottled water or water that has been boiled for 20 minutes. The U.S. Public Health Service warns that many visitors to the region have returned to the United States infected with the intestinal parasite giardia lamblia. This infection is usually contracted by drinking local tap water. In addition, you should avoid ice cubes, salads and uncooked vegetables and fruits that cannot be peeled. Use only bottled water for brushing teeth. A good rule to follow is if you can't peel it or cook it, don't eat it! Local water supplies can be avoided in several ways. Some travelers to the region bring drinking water with them in their luggage. If you cannot import your drinking water, drink only bottled carbonated drinks. Some portable water filters are specially constructed to remove the giardia parasite. However, if you are relying on a water filter, it is still highly advisable to boil the water after filtering. In many large cities, bottled water of imported or Russian origin can be purchased in stores. However, travelers should not rely on the availability of bottled water from these sources. In addition, carry iodine tablets to disinfect drinking water (though it should be noted that some iodine tablets take several hours to work.) Travelers returning from the region who develop a diarrheal illness lasting more than five days should consult a physician.

**Bring Your Own Medicines.** Bring any necessary medications with you and keep them in the original, labeled containers in your hand luggage. Because of strict laws on narcotics, carry a letter from your physician explaining your need for any prescription drugs in your possession. Also bring along any toiletries and personal hygiene items that you will need. These items can be difficult to obtain in major cities and virtually nonexistent elsewhere.

**Legal Matters**

**How to Avoid Legal Problems.** While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens are subject to that country's laws and regulations. In some instances, laws in Russia differ significantly from those in the United States and do not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Exercise caution and carefully obey local laws. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may have difficulties with the authorities and may be expelled and forced to forfeit the unused part of a pre-purchased tour. Serious transgressions of the law can lead to arrest and imprisonment.

Under Article 12 of the U.S.-USSR Consular Convention of 1964 (which the U.S. considers to remain in force), government authorities in Russia are required to inform the U.S. Embassy or consulate of the arrest or detention of a U.S. citizen and to permit communication with the detained citizen within two to four days of arrest. If you are detained by authorities, ask that a U.S. consular officer be informed and that you be allowed to meet with a consular officer without delay.

**Dual Nationality**

Russian law may require naturalized U.S. citizens of Russian origin to enter and depart Russia using a Russian passport.
In addition, a Russian visa may not be issued to U.S. citizens who are still considered Russian citizens under Russian law. Dual nationals who enter Russia on a Russian passport will be considered Russian citizens. Dual nationals who enter Russia on a U.S. passport and Russian visa will be considered U.S. citizens during their stay. While recognizing that some Americans are also citizens of other countries, the U.S. Government does not encourage its citizens to become or remain dual nationals due to an array of complications that may ensue from the obligations (payment of taxes, military service, etc.) owed to the country of second nationality. It may be necessary for such persons to “withdraw” or renounce their former Russian or Soviet nationality before a Russian consular official in the United States. Those who are unsure whether they hold Russian citizenship are advised to contact the nearest Russian consular office for information about citizenship requirements and travel documentation.

The United States recognizes as an established principle of international law that every sovereign state has the right to decide under the provisions of its own laws who is and who is not its citizen.

The U.S. Department of State maintains the following:

- U.S. citizens, whether by birth or naturalization, possess full American citizenship and its accompanying benefits and responsibilities despite any additional entitlement to other citizenship(s).
- U.S. citizens cannot lose their U.S. citizenship because of automatic acquisition of foreign citizenship. However, if a U.S. citizen contemplates voluntarily accepting dual nationality in connection with assuming duties as a government official in any country, he or she should first consult with the Department of State’s Office of Overseas Citizens Services at 202-647-5225 or with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Additional information about the U.S. Government’s policy with respect to dual nationality may be found at the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at dualnationality.html.

Legal Permanent U.S. Residents

The ability of U.S. authorities to assist legal permanent U.S. residents is limited. These individuals should travel with appropriate documentation of their legal status in the U.S. Those who are citizens of Russia or any country should ensure that they have the correct entry/exit permission from the appropriate embassy in the United States before they travel.

Marriage Abroad

Americans contemplating marriage to a citizen of Russia or other country should contact the Consular Section of the nearest American embassy or consulate before the marriage takes place. Consular officers cannot perform marriages, but can provide information about local regulations concerning marriage.

Photography Restrictions

The majority of areas formerly closed to foreigners have been opened. Use good judgment when photographing in museums, churches and sensitive areas. Many museums do not permit photography near the exhibits. At the time you are purchasing your tickets, inquire as to whether or not photography is allowed in the museum, if a permit is required, how much the permit will cost, and, if photos taken with high-speed film and without a flash are allowed. When in doubt, ask your tour guide or someone else in authority if it is acceptable to take a photograph.

The following are general guidelines for photography in Russia:

- Photographs are permitted of architectural monuments, cultural, educational and medical buildings, theaters, museums, parks, stadiums, streets and squares, and living quarters and landscape scenes.
- If prior permission is obtained from officials of the institution concerned, photographs may be taken of industrial enterprises that manufacture non-military products, farms, railroad stations, airports, riverports, riverlocks, dams, construction sites, and governmental, educational and social organizations.

Telephone Service

Long distance telephone calls can usually be made from a hotel. AT&T, MCI and other telecommunications companies
can provide calling card service with local access numbers. Check with your phone card provider for specific information. Calls can also be made from phone kiosks, located near Metro and train stations, tourist attractions and in downtown areas, with pre-paid, locally purchased phone cards.

It is also possible to make calls from the local Telephone and Telegraph office. This is the cheapest way to call, but it also necessitates standing in line and putting in a request to make an international call. A rudimentary knowledge of the local language is extremely helpful for those placing a call through the Telephone and Telegraph office.

**U.S. Priority Mail Services**

Federal Express, DHL, TNT and United Parcel Service all offer priority mail services between the U.S. and Russia. However, even packets sent by priority mail may be held up in customs for up to a week. Local regulations forbid the mailing of Russian passports to or from a foreign country.

**Currency**

The ruble is the only legal tender. It is illegal to pay for goods and services in U.S. dollars except at authorized retail establishments. Old or very worn dollar bills are often not accepted at banks and exchange offices, even though this constitutes a violation of currency laws. Russia operates on the basis of a cash-only economy. This means that traveler's checks and credit cards are not widely, if ever, accepted as currency. Travelers’ checks and credit cards are not generally accepted outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Even in these cities, the acceptance of credit cards is subject to change. Before you leave home, check with your credit card and travelers check companies to learn if and where these can be used in Russia. Travelers should expect some difficulty in obtaining dollars in Russia, although dollars can be easily exchanged into rubles. Travelers should not rely on automated teller machines (ATM) for cash. Major hotels or the American Express offices in Moscow or St. Petersburg may be able to suggest locations for cashing traveler's checks or obtaining cash advances on credit cards. Western Union agents in Moscow, St. Petersburg and some other large cities disburse money wired from the U.S. Russia sometimes experiences periodic cash shortages. The difficulties of a currency shortage can be avoided by taking a prepaid tour that includes all meals and hotels. Most travelers go to Russia with a sufficient supply of hard currency to cover their obligations during travel. Some hotel restaurants and shops will accept payment only in dollars or other hard currency.

Generally, U.S. dollars can be exchanged for local currency only at official exchange offices or in banks. Anyone caught dealing on the black market can expect to be detained by the local militia.

**Shopping**

Artwork, souvenirs and handicrafts purchased at special stores for tourists may be taken out of Russia. Be wary of antiques! The authorities define antiques as anything of historical or cultural value and they apply this definition to a wide range of articles. Antiques and artifacts (such as samovars) often may not be taken out of Russia without inspection by local cultural authorities and payment of a substantial export duty. This can be an inconvenient and time-consuming process. Items such as samovars, which are not purchased at tourist stores and not cleared by cultural authorities, are normally confiscated at pre-departure customs inspections. You should obtain a receipt for all items of value that you have purchased. The receipt must indicate that the items were bought in a store clearly licensed to sell to foreigners. Furthermore, icons, art, rugs, antiques and other culturally significant objects must have a certificate indicating that they have no historical value. This certificate can be obtained either from the store at the time the item is purchased or from the Ministry of Culture.

**Customs Regulations**

Russian customs laws and regulations are in a state of flux and are not consistently enforced. Travelers to Russia should declare all items of value, including cash, on a customs form upon arrival and keep this form until their departure from Russia. Make an accurate and complete customs declaration of all money, travelers’ checks and valuables in your possession. Include all personal jewelry, such as wedding rings and watches, and other high-value items, such as personal
computers. Have your customs declaration stamped by the authorities and keep it with you until you leave the country. Keep your exchange receipts to account for your expenditures. Without these records, customs officials could confiscate your cash and valuables upon departure. Currently, travelers leaving Russia with more than $1,500 dollars must declare the amount of cash they are carrying on their customs declaration. Lost or stolen customs forms should be reported to the Russian police, and a police report (spravka) should be obtained to present to customs officials upon departure.

Attempts to bring any of the following articles into Russia has caused difficulties for U.S. citizens in the past:

- Narcotics - Drug laws are strict. U.S. citizens have received long sentences for trying to enter or transit with illegal narcotics. Under Russian law, any amount of marijuana or other narcotic is considered to be a large amount of drugs.
- Pornography - Magazines with sexually explicit photographs, that may be considered commonplace in Western countries, may be regarded as pornography and are often confiscated.
- Gifts for Persons in Russia - A high rate of customs duty may be assessed on gifts that you bring into Russia. U.S. citizens have had to abandon gifts at the airport because they lacked funds to pay the customs duty.
- Video Cassettes - Customs regulations allow for the import and re-export of a limited number of blank or commercially recorded video cassettes for personal use. Some travelers with a large number of cassettes have had them confiscated. Travelers are advised to leave blank video cassettes sealed in their wrappers when entering a country.

**Electronic Devices**

The importation and use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and other radio electronic devices are subject to special rules and regulations in Russia. In general, mapping and natural resource data collection activities associated with normal, commercial and scientific collaboration may result in seizure of the equipment and/or arrest of the user. The penalty for using a GPS device in a manner which is determined to have compromised Russia's national security can carry a prison term of ten to twenty years. In December 1997, a U.S. citizen was imprisoned in Rostov-na-Donu for ten days on charges of espionage for using a GPS device to check the efficacy of new-installed telecommunications equipment. He and his company believed the GPS had been legally imported and were not aware that Russian authorities considered nearby government installations secret.

No traveler should seek to import or use GPS equipment in any manner unless it has been properly and fully documented by the traveler in accordance with the instructions of the Glavgossyaznadzor (Main Inspectorate in Communications) and is declared in full on a customs declaration at the point of entry to the Russian Federation.

All radio electronic devices brought into Russia must have a certificate from Glavgossyaznadzor of the Russian Federation. This includes all emitting, transmitting, and receiving equipment such as GPS devices, cellular telephones, satellite telephones, and other kinds of radio electronic equipment. Excluded from the list are consumer electronic devices such as AM/FM radios.

Cellular Telephones. To obtain permission to bring in a cellular telephone, an agreement for service from a local cellular provider in Russia is required. That agreement and a letter of guarantee to pay for the cellular service must be sent to Glavgossyaznadzor along with a request for permission to import the telephone. Based on these documents, a certificate is issued. This procedure is reported to take two weeks. Without a certificate, no cellular telephone can be brought into the country, regardless of whether or not it is meant for use in Russia. Permission for the above devices may also be required from the State Customs Committee of the Russian Federation. Cellular phone rentals are available and recommended.

**U.S. Embassy and Consulate Locations in Russia**
**U.S. Embassy in Moscow**
Novinskiy Bulvar 19/23
tel. (7-095) 728-5000
After hours duty officer: (7-095) 728-5109 h
http://usembassy.state.gov/moscow/
E-mail address: Consulmo@state.gov

**U.S. Consulates General**
St. Petersburg
Ulitsa Furshtadskaya 15
tel. (7-812) 275-1701
After hours duty officer: (7-812) 274-8692
E-mail: Acs_stpete@state.gov

Vladivostok
Ulitsa Pushkinskaya 32
tel. (7-4232) 30-00-70 (also for after hour emergencies)
http://www.vladivostok.com/usis/visaeng.htm

Yekaterinburg
Ulitsa Gogolya 15
tel. (7-3432) 62-98-88
After hours duty officer: (8-29) 05-15-06
Elsewhere within Russia for Yekaterinburg tel. (8-3439) 05-15-06
http://www.uscgyekat.ur.ru
E-mail: uscggyekat@gin.ru

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**Russian Embassy and Consulate Locations in the U.S.**

Embassy of the Russian Federation
2641 Tunlaw Road, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
http://www.russianembassy.org

Consulates General of the Russian Federation
New York City
9 East 91st Street
New York, NY 10128
Telephone: 212-348-0926

San Francisco
2790 Green Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
Telephone: 415-928-6878

Seattle
2323 Westin Building