

CORONAVIRUS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS: RUSSIA AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM



Countries around the world are taking measures to limit the spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19). Russia is among them, with travel restrictions and limitations of movement within the country in place to ensure the safety of Russian citizens and foreigners currently on the national territory.

Although this has so far kept Russia at a relatively low rate of infections, it is bad news for those who were planning to visit the country for business or tourism or were considering moving there. If you're wondering how to get a Russian visa, you should know, for example, that the issuance of travel permits is temporarily suspended.

However, the government has been launching several initiatives in recent years to boost international tourism, which indicates that as soon and safely as possible, the Russian authorities will return to encourage travelers to visit the country.

Travel limitations for in Russia

Ever since the beginning of the pandemic, Russia has been taking steps to keep its population safe. Find below a timeline of what has been done so far:

- In February, flights from and to China were canceled or severely limited. Aircraft that were still allowed to fly were rerouted to airports with facilities that allowed to ensure the safety of passengers and aircrew members.
- In the same month, the eastern border with China was closed. The first areas in the far East to be affected by the closure were the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Khabarovsk Oblast, and Amur Oblast.
- Travelers from Mongolia were restricted in their access to Russia. Those coming from China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom were required to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- On March 18th, the government announced a general **travel ban for all foreign citizens** attempting to enter Russia. Exceptions include diplomats, airplane crew members, permanent residents of the Russian Federation, and transit passengers. Exempt passengers may still have to undergo mandatory temperature screenings and other health checks. The ban is in place until the 1st of May but may be extended.
- On March 27th, 2020, all commercial airline flights were suspended. Flights are still being operated to repatriate Russian nationals currently abroad.

As this is an evolving situation, foreigners should make sure to check the latest news regularly to learn about new developments.

Other measures against COVID in place in Russia

As of the 24th of April, 2020, the total number of deaths caused by a coronavirus in Russia was 615, which is very low considering the global statistics. Russia has achieved to keep its citizens relatively

safe thanks to a series of measures that go beyond the travel limitations outlined above.

To avoid flares in the capital area, the Russian authorities launched on April 15th a new electronic pass system for Moscow that focuses on regulating movement to and from the city. All those traveling to or from Moscow have to hold a digital pass for the journey. The pass applies to everyone moving by train, car, taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, and public transport. The pass is quite convenient as it can be obtained online by locals and foreigners on a dedicated website.

International visitors currently in the Moscow area are strongly advised to follow the government instructions. Failure to use the digital pass system may result in fines between 1,000 to 40,000 rubles (up to USD 535).

The Russian capital has also been in general lockdown since March 30th. Individuals are allowed to leave their residence only to seek medical care, go to the nearest grocery store or pharmacy, walk their dogs, take out the trash, and travel to and from work. A safety distance of 1.5 meters (5 feet) must also be respected at all times. Grocery stores, pharmacies, and restaurants who make deliveries are the only businesses allowed to remain open.

How to obtain a Russian visa

Issuance of visas and work permits to foreigners has been **temporarily suspended**. The restriction was implemented on March 18th, 2020, and will remain in place until further notice.

It is expected that consular services and the grant of visas will be resumed as soon as the coronavirus crisis is resolved and the global situation returns to normal. When that happens, foreign citizens will be able to apply for several types of visas for Russia depending on their specific circumstances.

Those who hold an eligible passport and wish to visit Russia for short-term trips can benefit from the new electronic visa system, which allows them to apply for a travel permit entirely online from the comfort of their home or office.

The new eVisa grants foreigners permission to enter specific Russian regions, namely the St Petersburg Leningrad area, the Far East territory, and the Kaliningrad Oblast. The required documents for the electronic visa are minimal and include a copy of the valid and eligible passport, a recent photograph of the applicant, and proof of health insurance coverage.

Those who intend to enter other regions or plan to stay in Russia for extended periods of time will have to apply for a traditional visa through their nearest Russian embassy or consulate.

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