

Hello friend! My name is Anton, I am a traveler from St. Petersburg. I love independent travel and I know what travelers need most in my city. I have created this FAQ list to visiting my hometown especially for travelers like me. Over time it will be modified and completed.

Do this before you travel:

1. Check your **visa and passport**. I don't know if you need a visa and what the requirements are to get one for your country. The easiest way to come to Russia is to get an e-tourist visa, all official information on this topic can be found on this website https://electronic-visa.kdmid.ru/index_en.html.
2. **Stock up on cash**. Your international bank card (Visa or MasterCard) doesn't work in Russia, you need Russian bank card Mir or cash. The most popular currencies for exchange in Russia are the American dollar and the Euro. These currencies have the best exchange rate. It is best to have new, undamaged bills of 100 American dollars or Euros.
3. Download this list and some of the **most useful apps**:
 -  **2Gis** – offline and online navigation and public transportation in the city (download maps that you plan to use offline);
 -  **YandexGo** - the most popular taxi app;
 - Google translate** (download your language and Russian and use it offline);
 -  **Onetwotrip, Trip.com** - hotels, intercity bus and train tickets (you can pay with your Visa or MasterCard). There are other apps, but you need a Russian bank card to use it.

Useful information and tips:

 Since January 2025 it has become very difficult for foreigners to buy a Russian **SIM card** (Step-by-Step Guide to Getting a SIM Card in Russia on the last page of the guide). I think somewhere you can buy a SIM card registered to another person or you can ask your Russian friends to help you buy a SIM card. Or you can use touristic eSim (you don't need some documents and it is cheaper than roaming. My favorite apps are Yesim and MobiMatter).

If you are here for a few days, you can use public **Wi-Fi** or ask someone to share an internet hotspot with you. We usually have large internet packages in our tariffs and we don't spare. It will be easier for you to ask young people, they usually speak English and understand modern technology.

 Every time when you go to change your money, check the official rate in Internet. I recommend you to change it in official bank offices. You will not have any risks or problems there. One of the best places for money exchange in St. Petersburg is here - <https://ligovka.ru/en/pda/>

 International **accommodation booking services** no longer work in Russia, but we have our local services (Onetwotrip, Avito, Sutochno, Ostrovok, etc) and trip.com, use this services and CouchSurfing.

 **Language barrier**. Many people in Russia do not speak English, so if you need help, use the translator on your phone (online or offline) or ask young people, young people are more likely to speak foreign languages. The locals are quite friendly, although you may find them a bit cold at times, like other northern peoples. I think you realize that it is better to try not to talk to locals about politics, interpretation of history or religion (especially with drunk Russians in a bar or club). I think you have heard about the complicated political situation in our country, everyone has different opinions and you better avoid these topics. In any country, locals are happy if you know a few polite words in their language.

 Russia is quite safe, I would say it is safer here than in many big European cities. Theft does happen, but very rarely. In any case, keep an eye on your belongings!

Beware of scammers! If someone asks you for money for a service you didn't ask for, you don't have to pay. This can happen in popular tourist areas. Ask the police or locals for help. Sometimes the police can check your documents, so it's best to have your passport and visa with you.

The main types of fraud:

1. taxi drivers can overcharge. Use the YandexGo app, you can take a taxi or check the real price.
2. People in historical or other costumes may come up, hug you and take pictures with you, and then demand money. If you didn't ask for it, don't pay them!
3. Prices in restaurants. This rarely happens, but sometimes in restaurants the prices in the English menu are higher than in the Russian menu. You can ask for the Russian menu and compare prices.
4. Promoters trying to lure you into tasting tea or some other food or drink. They may try to sell you their products

at an inflated price or demand money for the tasting.
Just be careful not to give them your money.

🚫 Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and some other social networks and websites are blocked in Russia. If you want to use these apps, you will need a **VPN**.



Places to eat cheaply:

- local fast food (Vkusno i tochka, Burger King, Rostics, etc)
- street food (shawarma, pyshki or pirozhki)
- supermarkets (Many supermarkets such as Perekrestok and EuroSpar have a special area inside with tables where you can heat up and eat the food you buy at the supermarket.).

🧥 Check the **weather** before you go! Sometimes we have very **cold or rainy weather**. If your clothes are not suitable for the weather, you can buy clothes from charity shops or other cheap stores. And if you do not need it in your country, throw it away or donate it to some homeless people. I usually do this in other countries.

🚇 We have pretty good **public transportation**, use it to get where you need to go. It's cheap and pretty fast, just use Podorozhnik card.

🏛️ **Museums**. Before visiting museums, check the official website for opening hours. Sometimes it can be closed (especially on Monday) and your day plan will be ruined.

🚆 If you want to **go to another city** (e.g. Moscow), you can use train, intercity bus, plane, hitchhiking or Blablacar.
You can buy train tickets online or offline at the station ticket office. Bus tickets can be bought online or at the ticket office of the bus station near the metro station "Obvodny Kanal".

Your first day in St. Petersburg

Okay, you have arrived in St. Petersburg. Welcome!
The first thing you need to do is:
- change some money;
- to get to your room.

Don't change a lot of money at the airport, the exchange rate there is not the best. If you plan to use public transportation, you will not need more than \$10. If you want to take a taxi, install the YandexGo app in advance and check the cost of the trip to the place where you plan to stay. Or you can book a taxi in the official window near the airport exit (it is the most expensive way to get to your destination, but it is easy)

If you plan to use public transportation, I advise you to buy a **Podorozhnik card**. This is an electronic card to pay for public transportation in St. Petersburg. When you use the card, the fare is reduced by a third and special transfer rates apply. The plastic card costs 80 rubles, but you can get this money back if you return the card to the ticket office within 45 days. You can load Podorozhnik at any metro ticket office or at special kiosks. There is one such kiosk in the arrival zone of Pulkovo Airport (outside, near the bus stop). A bus ride with the card costs 51 rubles, a metro ride 56 rubles. If you're not travelling alone, you'll need to buy a Podorozhnik card for each person.

For offline navigation I recommend you to download and use 2gis maps. This is an offline map with the possibility to create a route using public transport.

That's it, you can take it from here! Have a good trip!

The current version of the guide can be downloaded here:
<https://antonch.ru/spbguide>

Step-by-Step Guide to Getting a SIM Card in Russia

Buying a SIM card for a foreigner in Russia since 2025 has become quite difficult, it'll take two days to a week, but you can try...

1. Get a Notarized Translation of Your Passport (1 hour – 1 day)

Before you can apply for any official documents, you must have a notarized translation of your passport into Russian.

Visit a translation bureau or a notary office.

Ensure that all passport pages containing personal details and visas are translated and certified.

2. Apply for SNILS (Russian Social Security Number) (1-5 days)

A SNILS (СНИЛС) is required for various government services, including SIM card registration.

Apply at the Social Fund of Russia (Социальный фонд России) or an MFC (Multifunctional Center “Мои документы”).

You will receive an SNILS number on the spot.

3. Register on the State Services Portal (Госуслуги) (1 hour - few days)

The Russian State Services Portal (Gosuslugi) is necessary for activating your SIM card.

Visit an MFC or a bank (such as Sberbank or VTB) to verify your identity.

Bring your passport, notarized translation, and SNILS.

You'll need a Russian phone number for registration (yes, you need to have a Russian SIM card to buy a Russian SIM card), so ask the staff for temporary solutions.

Verification takes up to a few days.

4. Submit Your Biometrics (few hours)

Go to a bank (Sberbank or VTB) or an MFC to get your biometric data collected.

Bring your passport, notarized translation, and SNILS.

Your biometric profile will be registered in the Unified Biometric System on the same day.

5. Apply for a SIM Card at a Mobile Operator's Store (1 hour)

Once you have SNILS, a verified Gosuslugi account, and registered biometrics, you can buy a SIM card.

Visit a mobile operator's official store (e.g., MTS, Beeline, MegaFon, T2).

Bring your passport and notarized translation.

Provide the IMEI (serial number) of the device where you'll use the SIM.

The staff will verify your identity using biometric data.

6. Activate Your SIM Card via Госуслуги (1 or few hours)

For activation, you must log in to your Gosuslugi account and confirm the registration.

Some operators allow in-store activation with the help of the staff.

The SIM card will only work after biometric verification.

Alternative Solutions to get internet in Russia for Tourists

1. Roaming: Check if your home provider has affordable roaming plans for Russia.
2. Touristic eSim (you don't need some documents and it is cheaper than roaming. My favorite apps are Yesim and MobiMatter)
3. Use only public Wi-Fi.
4. Ask your Russian friends to use their SIM (it is illegal for SIM owner, but nobody cares).