



Focus on RUSSIA

School Program

The Soviet empire is gone, but even without its satellite nations, Russia remains so vast that it covers one-eighth of the world's surface, extending across 11 time zones. Travelers need a week to ride the Trans-Siberian Railway from one end to the other. Having thrown off Communism, Russians are now grappling with democracy, private industry, free-market economics, and a government that no longer guarantees jobs or incomes. Russians who can negotiate this new system have become rich, but many others are struggling. At the same time, big cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg are energetic and exuberant, and young artists there are tasting freedoms denied not long ago to such world-renowned artists as Prokofiev and Shostakovich, Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak. Buffeted by these social upheavals, Russians can be curt with strangers but are warm and generous with friends—and they make friends easily.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Russia has been in existence since 1990. About 100 AFS volunteers in six areas across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Russia hosts approximately 100 AFSers from as many as 21 countries such as France, Italy, Norway, Thailand and Venezuela.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Russia

After you arrive in Moscow, you and your fellow AFSers will collect your baggage, pass through customs and be met by AFS Russia staff and volunteers.

Orientation

After your arrival, you will attend a brief orientation camp organized by staff and run by AFS volunteers. After you have spent many long and tiring hours on the plane, this will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world, ask questions and learn about AFS in Russia as well as Russian culture.

Living in Russia

Lifestyle and Family Living

Russians are warm and intelligent people. The family is the principal stabilizing factor in society. You can expect your host family to include grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Both parents usually work, and often the grandmother assumes the responsibility of managing the home and caring for the children. Most Russians live in relatively small apartments, and at least one member of the family is likely to smoke. Privacy is a very difficult issue, because there is no concept of privacy in Russian culture.

It is not unusual for a Russian family to show its affection for its children (and its exchange student) by partly limiting their freedom, spoiling them and overfeeding them. Russians are protective of their children. Parents expect to know when the children are going out and where they are going.

Russian families who have the economic means like to get away on weekends to their country homes, which are called *dachas*, where they enjoy country life, working in their gardens, fishing and hiking. But Russia is a land of paradox. While some people are moving up the economic ladder in the new entrepreneurial economy, others have had their savings wiped out by hyperinflation. Many comforts that were available a few years ago are no longer part of their lives.

Recent developments in the country have given rise to mixed feelings of hope and doubt, gratitude and anger as Russians try to cope with wrenching social and economic change. They have a strong awareness of their history and are well informed about specific events in their past. While proud of their culture, they do not necessarily feel the same way about the political system.

Russian host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Participants are mostly placed in small towns outside of larger cities in the western and central parts of Russia.

Dress and Appearance

Russian teenagers dress very much according to today's styles. Bring jeans, T-shirts, sweaters, sneakers and a full range of warm clothing for the winter months including warm underwear, snow boots and a heavy jacket. For special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for women a dress or blouse and skirt; for men a jacket, slacks and tie.

Diet and Meals

The Russians are hearty people. The bases of their main meals are pork, noodles, chicken, potatoes, cabbage, rice and soups such as *borscht* (beet soup) and *shchi* (cabbage soup). Pastries, preserved fruit and sweets are often served at the end of the meal. For breakfast, sausage, cheese, eggs, hot cereal (*kascha*) and bread are common. Everybody drinks tea or coffee at meals and elsewhere, but tea is a mainstay of Russian life. In Russia it is customary for the whole family to eat the same foods at meals together. It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods or to prepare separate foods for themselves.

Dinnertime is often an occasion for celebration with guests dropping by and many toasts honoring everything imaginable. You may be offered alcoholic beverages. You may accept if it is consistent with your family's rules and if you observe caution and moderation.

School

School starts on September 1 and runs through the end of May, with June being exam month. The school year is divided into four terms with vacations between: one week at the start of November, two weeks for Christmas and New Year's and one week at the end of March. School usually goes from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, but some schools run through Saturday.

Schools generally house primary and secondary grade levels in the same building, often with 50-90 students enrolled in each grade. The senior year of school is the 11th grade. Subjects studied in 11th grade include Russian, algebra, literature, geometry, history, foreign languages, politics, psychology, biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy and physical education. All subjects are mandatory, and there are no electives. There can be exceptions for exchange students.

New types of schools have recently been established specializing in science, language and fine arts. Students begin specializing in a language at a very early age and continue throughout their careers. Schools sometimes offer extracurricular opportunities in music—students can take dance, voice and instrumental lessons—as well as in sports.

Classroom work often means reciting and being tested in written form or orally by the teacher and sometimes being evaluated by the teacher in front of the class. Criticism by the teacher in front of the class is frequent and accepted. You may, if all academic requirements are met, obtain a report card or certificate of attendance.

Teen Life

Teenagers like to get together with their friends at someone's home, go to movies, watch television, go to theaters or museums, and hang out in local cafés. In rural areas, students often organize dances at the local high school. Football (soccer), hockey and track and field are popular sports, and many people participate in volleyball, cross-country skiing and ice-skating. Chess is both a favorite leisure-time undertaking and a competitive activity.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Russia will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

Language lessons will be arranged to help you learn Russian. Also, your local chapter will arrange one or two optional exchange weeks with another chapter during the fall and/or winter semesters. This will allow you an opportunity to experience life in another

city in Russia and to get to know a different host family. Sightseeing and other get-togethers will be planned for you by the local volunteers.

In addition, periodic chapter get-togethers help you get to know the volunteers in your region, have fun with fellow AFSers from around the world who are in your region and perhaps attend a cultural event, have a group party or international dinner or participate in some other fun activity.

Right before you return home, you will join other AFSers in the region where you are hosted at the End-of-Stay orientation. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Russia, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Russia. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. AFS recommends that US\$1,100 in traveler's checks, credit cards or cash should be sufficient to meet spending needs for a full academic year. Young Russians are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money. Spending more money than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

Safety and Support

Russia is a relatively safe country and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country and follow the instructions of your host family and AFS volunteers.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Russian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Russia may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Russia (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs. Updated childhood immunizations are required as well as proof of being HIV negative.

If you need medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for

illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Russia is the largest country in the world. From the western borders of Finland, the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine; across the vast steppes and Siberia to the far reaches of the north Pacific in the east; to the frigid Arctic Ocean in the north and to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and China in the south, Russia boasts eleven time zones, arctic tundra, dense forests, steppes and grasslands. The great mountain range of the Urals divides western Russia from the eastern part. Historic rivers like the Volga and the Don cross the great expanse.

The climate in most of Russia is temperate with warm summer weather, but because of the northern latitudes, winters are long and very cold. The temperature range in Moscow and St. Petersburg extends from 60 to 90 °F (15 to 32 °C) in the summer, 30 to 55 °F (-1 to 13°C) in the fall, 20 to -25 °F (-7 to -32°C) in the winter, and 30 to 60 °F (-1 to 15 °C)

in the spring. Winter starts early, often with a first snow in October, and typically lasts until May.

Population

The population of Russia is 145 million. Moscow, with 9 million inhabitants, is the capital. The ethnic structure is Russian 81.5%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 3%, Chuvash 1.2%, Bashkir 0.9%, Belarusian 0.8%, Moldavian 0.7% and other 8.1%.

Language

Russian is the official language, but the country has many regional languages and ethnic dialects among its indigenous peoples.

Government

Russia is a constitutional republic with a president and a bicameral legislature. The upper house of parliament, the Federation Council, has 176 elected members. The State Duma, or lower house, has 450 elected members.

Religion

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, there has been a resurgence of interest in religion. Russian Orthodoxy is the principal religion in European Russia. However, most of the people do not attend church services.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Russian words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Russia, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Russia and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Russia. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Russian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Russia will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Russian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Russian

● Largest Lake -- The largest lake in the world is the Caspian Sea (in Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran). It is 1225-km (760-miles) long and its area

is 371,800 sq km (143,550 sq miles). The Caspian Sea yields good supplies of fish, including salmon, carp, herring and sturgeon, the main source of caviar.

- **Deepest Lake** -- The world's deepest lake is Lake Baikal, in Siberia, Russia. The deepest point of the lake, the Olkhon Crevice, has a depth of 1,637 m (5,371 ft), of which 1,181 m (3,875 ft) are below sea level. It is the oldest freshwater lake on Earth, having formed between 20 and 25 million years ago. Baikal also contains one-fifth of the entire world's fresh surface water.

- **Highest-Rated Male Chess Player** -- The highest rating in chess for a male player is 2,851, accomplished by Russia's Gary Kasparov in January 2000.

- **Largest Art Gallery** -- One has to walk 24 km (15 miles) to visit all of the 322 galleries of the Winter Palace and the rest of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. The galleries house nearly 3 million works of art.

- **Coldest Inhabited Village** -- The coldest inhabited village is Oymyakon, in Yakutia, eastern Siberia. Temperatures there can drop to as low as -70°C (-94°F). The average in January, the coldest month, is -50°C (-58°F). The town is in a valley surrounded by two high mountains that trap cold winter air and prevent warmer air getting in. Snow covers the ground from early autumn to mid spring.

- **First Woman In Space** -- The first woman to orbit the earth, Valentina Tereshkova, was launched in the "Vostok 6" from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, at 9.30 am GMT on June 16, 1963. She landed nearly three days later after 48 orbits. She applied to become a cosmonaut in 1961, shortly after the Soviet space agency announced they were considering sending a woman into space.

- **First Man In Space** – On April 12, 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yury A. Gagarin became the first man in space, making one orbit of the earth in *Vostok 1*.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student Age (upon arrival)	15y 5m to 17.5y	
Country data	Size	17,075,200km ² , 6,593,000 mi ²
	Population	144,526,278
	Official Language	Russian
	Government	Federation
Currency	Russian ruble (RUR) divided into 100 kopeikas.	
Useful websites	www.russia.com www.waytorussia.net	
AFS Russia website	http://www.afs.ru/	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>