



HEBRIDEAN
SPIRIT



THE BALTIC
- EAST



The following pages contain brief information on the countries and places to be visited on your cruise. We trust this will be of value to you.

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TRAVEL BOOKS

ESTONIA

Estonia: The Bradt Travel Guide

Bradt Travel Guides, Neil Taylor

Footprint Tallinn

Pocket Guide, Clare Thomson

The Rough Guide to the Baltic States

Rough Guide Travel Guides, Jonathan Bousfield

FINLAND

Scandinavia: The complete guide to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

Eugen Fodor, Editor, Gold Guides, Fodor's Travel Publications

Finland, Insight Guide

Insight Guides, Langenscheidt Publications

Michelin Green Guide: Scandinavia and Finland

Michelin Green Tourist Guides

GERMANY

Michelin Green Guide: Germany

Michelin Green Tourist Guides

Germany, Insight Guide

Insight Guides, Langenscheidt Publications

The Rough Guide to Germany

Rough Guide Travel Guides, Gordon McLachlan

RUSSIA

The Rough Guide: St Petersburg

Rough Guide Travel Guides, Robert Humphreys & Dan Richardson

The Companion Guide to St Petersburg

Companion Guides, Jenny Hughes & Kyril Zinovieff

St Petersburg, Insight Guide

Insight Guides, Langenscheidt Publications

Russia

Eyewitness Guide, Kathleen Berton Murrell, Dorling Kindersley

FRANCE

Blue Guide: Normandy

W W Norton & Company, John McNeill

Michelin Green Guide: Normandy

Michelin Green Tourist Guides

The Rough Guide to Brittany and Normandy

Rough Guide Travel Guides, Greg Ward

The information given in this booklet has been provided in good faith and is intended only as a general guide. Whilst all reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that the details are correct, Hebridean Island Cruises cannot accept any responsibility for inaccuracies.

ESTONIA

Situated 50 miles (80 km) across the Gulf of Finland from Helsinki, the Republic of Estonia is the northernmost and smallest of the Baltic States, slightly larger than Switzerland or Denmark, bordered by Russia to the east and Latvia to the south, enjoying strong cultural links with Finland over the centuries. A land of 1,500 islands, strung along its rocky and heavily indented western and northern shores in an ideal habitat for breeding and migrating birds. In the hinterland lie a thousand lakes – 1,400 to be more precise – of which Lake Peipsi, by the Russian border is the fourth largest in Europe.

Dating back to migrating Finno-Ugric hunters between 3000 and 2000 BC, Estonia's history was long one of strife and struggle against Danish, German, Swedish and Russian occupation. Although invaded in pre-medieval times by Scandinavians from the west and Slavs from the east, Estonia was virtually untainted by foreign influence until German traders and missionaries settled in the 12th century. Knights followed in 1193, answering the call to the Crusades against the northern pagans. Overcome in the south by the Knights of the Sword and the Teutonic Order, Estonia had fallen to the German nobility by 1346, remaining under their rule into the early 20th century.

Whilst the Hanseatic Baltic ports boomed, of which Tallinn was one, the peoples of the region, particularly in rural areas, were condemned to serfdom and poverty, and Estonia was no exception. The 16th and 17th centuries brought the Swedish who reinforced Estonian Protestantism and a series of wars, the most decisive of which was the Great Northern War (1700-1721) when Estonia fell to the Russian Empire led by Peter the Great.

A relatively brief period of independence ensued in 1918, although financial links were never severed, ending abruptly in the Communist occupation of August 1940. Liberation and independence would take just over 50 years, finally declared in August 1991 as Estonia broke away from the Soviet bloc, joining the United Nations a month later. Looking very much towards the West and the future, a new era opened when Estonia became a member of an enlarged EU on 1st May 2004.

With a total population of 1,460,000, two-thirds of whom are ethnic Estonian, just over a quarter, Russian – about half of Tallinn's residents are Russian – and 7% of other origins, Estonia boasts a rich folk culture that has prevailed despite, or perhaps because of, centuries of foreign domination. Finno-Ugric links with the Lapps, Finns, Livs and, further afield, Hungarian Magyars, have set the country apart from its Indo-European neighbours, Latvia and Lithuania.

Although almost inevitably influenced by a strong Russian and Baltic-German heritage, still rooted in its Hanseatic German past, modern Estonia has a distinctive Scandinavian feel and its vibrant capital Tallinn acts as a magnet not only for the Finns across the Baltic but for a fast-growing number of international visitors.



AT A GLANCE

Weather:	Mean Temp	Rainfall
Tallinn: August	61°F/16°C	2.8"/71 mm
Time: GMT+2/+3 (28th March - 31st October)		

Official language: Estonian

Currency: Kroon

Banking hours: Mon – Fri: 09.00 – 15.00 or 16.00

Shopping hours: Mon – Fri: 09.00 – 18.00 or 19.00
Sat: 09.00 – 15.00

TALLIN

On the same latitude as St Petersburg and southern Shetland, the Estonian capital of Tallinn stands majestically on the Gulf of Finland, overlooked from Toompea Hill by the medieval Old Town, an imposing labyrinth of winding cobbled streets, turrets and spires. Granted city rights in 1248, a member of the Hanseatic League from 1285, Tallinn grew in importance as a major port and trading centre that eventually became one of the largest in Northern Europe, retaining its German name *Rival* or *Revel* until 1918.

On the sea route between Novgorod, Skov and the West, Tallinn exported furs, leather and seal fat. Its golden age, with a population of 4,000 by the mid-14th century, declined in the 16th century under pressure from abroad. From 1561 to 1710, the Swedes ruled Tallinn and the rest of Estonia, supplanted after the Great Northern War by Peter the Great and Russia. The city continued to expand throughout the 19th century, rapidly reaching 150,000 by 1914, drawn by the busy shipyards. Another explosion followed World War II as foreign immigrants streamed in, and only half of today's residents are Estonian.

Cradled between two promontories, the city spreads south from Tallinn Bay into the centre or Old Town, combining two distinct medieval districts. The cobbled upper town of Toompea, pronounced *TOM-pe-ab*, meaning *Danish City* or *Castle*, is the site of a castle built by the Danes in 1219, occupied by a bishop, whilst the lower town of merchant and guild houses spawned at its foot to the east behind walls originally erected as a defence against attack from above. Most famous of the guild houses is Blackheads' Hall, now internationally known as a concert venue, founded for unmarried merchants, mainly of foreign origin, who took their name from their patron saint, Mauritius.

At the very centre of Tallinn sits Town Hall Square or *Raekoja Plats*, which served as the market place until 1896. The Town Hall itself, built between 1371 and 1404, is the last-surviving Gothic town hall in Northern Europe, noted for its 17th century spire capped by an older, 16th century weather vane, *Vana Thomas* or Old Thomas, and ornately painted main chamber within.

Beautiful Old Tallinn boasting charming medieval architecture and slender church spires, its original moat rimmed by green parks has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1997. Nearby, the past meets the present in the westward-looking modern city, now home to a population of 420,000 and hub of the Baltic States, strongly influenced by Helsinki across the Baltic, almost another world.





FINLAND

Covering 130,500 miles (338,000 sq km), Finland, or *Suomi*, is the seventh largest country in Europe. Dense pine, spruce and birch forests, scattered with lakes, cloak two-thirds of its territory, extending northwards across the Arctic Circle and sparse, bleak tundra to Lapland, the fabled home of Father Christmas. A little-known land of great natural beauty whose fleeting moods were perhaps best captured in the haunting music of composer Jean Sibelius.

Sharing borders with Sweden, Russia and Norway, Finland's history was long dominated by the battling Protestant Swedes and Eastern Orthodox Russians, whose cultural influence is still tangible. Ruled as part of Sweden from the 12th to the 19th centuries, Finland fell to Tsarist Russia in 1809. Three years later, the capital was moved from Swedish-oriented Turku to Helsinki, closer to St Petersburg. A period of strong nationalism resulted in independence in 1917 during the Russian Revolution. After German prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse refused the call to the throne, modern Finland was born with its own republican constitution in 1919.

The inter-war period and the *Years of danger* from 1944 to 1948 were marked by outbreaks of anti-communist violence culminating in a friendship treaty with the USSR that left Finland a cold-war buffer zone between East and West. Post-war, Finland opted for neutrality, whilst its economic destiny was anchored to the Baltic region as a whole. The collapse of the Soviet Union affected its ties with Scandinavia and soon afterwards, in 1994, Finland voted to join the EU, assuming full membership in 1995.

Descended from Ice Age tribes migrating from west of the Urals, the Finns are neither Scandinavian nor Slavic in origin. Through centuries of invasion and foreign rule, Finland has emerged as a bilingual nation, recognising both Finnish and Swedish as its official languages. Culturally, it is significant that Finland was the first European country to grant franchise to women in 1906.

Boasting 900 museums, countless summer festivals and a wide variety of regional dishes, Finland's heritage owes much to neighbouring Sweden and Russia. A vital bridge between East and West, with an undeniable Nordic identity, Finland, from its unspoilt landscapes exudes romance, history and culture for every taste.



AT A GLANCE

Weather:	Mean Temp	Rainfall
Helsinki: June	59°F/15°C	1.7"/43 mm
July	63°F/17°C	2.9"/74 mm

Time: GMT+2/+3 (28th March - 31st October)

Official language: Finnish

Currency: Euro

Banking hours: Mon – Fri: 09.30 – 16.30

Shopping hours: Mon – Fri: 09.00 – 17.00

Sat: 09.00 – 16.00



HAMINA

Located 25 miles (40 km) west of the Russian border, Hamina was originally founded as a fortress town in 1653 under Swedish rule to defend the eastern border. In 1722, Swedish General Axel von Löwen masterminded a reconstruction plan based on a unique circular grid of eight streets radiating around medieval stone Vehkalahti Church behind two miles (3.2 km) of fortified walls. As fate would have it, over the centuries, Hamina was passed among Finland, Sweden and Russia in a series of wars. Strong military traditions were handed down through the 19th century at the Cadet School and into the 20th century at the Reserve Officer School for Finnish officers, now a museum.

Hamina still breathes history from its charming streets of old wooden buildings, grander merchants' houses, churches and museums, including the historic Town Museum, where Empress Catherine the Great of Russia once met King Gustav III of Sweden, and the star-shaped Renaissance-style fortress, all well renovated and preserved.

Its eventful past is wonderfully encapsulated in a number of fine museums, including the Merchant's House Museum or *Kauppiantalomuseo*, a former merchant's store and residence that is regarded as one of Finland's best. Present-day Hamina is the EU's easternmost port and, as ever, a major axis on East-West trade routes.

Offshore lie the 400 islands of the enchanting Finnish archipelago – a tranquil paradise, wildly beautiful and untouched.

HELSINKI



Founded as *Helsingfors* by King Gustav Vasa in 1550 to rival Hanseatic Tallinn after Ekenäs failed, the Finnish capital stands on the shores of the omnipresent Baltic Sea. A quiet, unassuming market town for over 200 years, Helsinki assumed a greater role in 1809 when Finland was annexed by Tsarist Russia and three years later became the capital, site of a vast sea fortress now known as *Suomenlinna*, closer to St Petersburg than Turku, Finland's oldest city. The grandiose design was drawn up by town planner Johan Albrecht Ehrenström and German architect Carl Ludvig Engel, who had worked in Tallinn and St Petersburg.

The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed rapid expansion and although Helsinki suffered heavily under Russian bombing during World War II, it recovered quickly enough to host the Summer Olympic Games in 1952, the smallest city ever to do so.

Between sea and forests, the heart of this tantalisingly tiny city by Scandinavian standards beats around the main harbour of Eteläsatama, where the waterfront Market Square or *Kaupatori* is home to the famous Fish Market, overlooked by graceful 19th century buildings. The pervading atmosphere is modern-day Nordic, tinged with Swedish and Russian as well as more recent international influences.

On a skyline punctuated by the contrasting domes of the Orthodox Uspenski Cathedral and the Lutheran cathedral, Tuomiokirkko, Helsinki's fine architectural heritage ranges from Neo-classical and Art Nouveau to contemporary, with an array of museums and galleries, relaxing open-air cafés and beautiful parks – all of which contributed to its designation as one of the nine *European Cities of Culture* in 2000.

One of Helsinki's star attractions is the famous Rock Church or *Temppeliaukio*, designed by Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen in 1969. Controversial from its very beginnings, this unusual underground structure, fashioned from solid granite, open to the world through a skylight, is an eclectic, spiritual place of pilgrimage for people of all religions and nationalities, hosting concerts as well as religious services.

Helsinki is best viewed during the long Baltic evenings of July and August, cooled by refreshing sea breezes, when outdoor life is at its most atmospheric.





LANGINKOSKI FISHING LODGE

In 60-acre (28 ha) grounds beside the lower River Kymijoki lies the former Langinkoski Imperial Fishing Lodge, the unpretentious log house that served as Tsar Alexander III's retreat from 1889 to 1894.

Tsar Alexander III, Emperor of Russia and Grand Duke of Finland, first visited Langinkoski in 1881. Impressed with this secluded stretch of river by the Langin Rapids, which offered excellent salmon fishing, he chose it as the site of his retreat and commissioned Finnish architects, Magnus Schjerfbeck, Sebastian Gripenberg and Jac Ahrenberg to design a simple lodge. Built in 1889 across five small islands, connected by bridges, the modest log cabin provided safety and security for the Imperial family.

A far cry from the splendour of the Romanov's 900-room Peterhof Palace outside St Petersburg, the equally unassuming, simply furnished interior was the scene of freer, happier moments when Empress Dagmar cooked, the Emperor brought in firewood and water, and, after fishing, took the children on forest walks.

Tsar Alexander was to make 10 visits to Langinkoski by ship from St Petersburg, anchoring in the sheltered harbour at the river mouth. After his death from natural causes in 1894, the Empress never returned and, left to his successor, the last of the Tsars, Nicolas II, the lodge was virtually abandoned, apart from one stay in 1906. Serving as a rest home for wounded Russian troops during World War I, the site was taken over by the Finnish government after independence in 1917, and eventually designated a national park in 1960.

PORVOO

Located 31 miles (50 km) east of Helsinki, Porvoo is Finland's second oldest town after Turku, officially recognised by Magnus Eriksson in 1346, although hilltop *Borgå*, as it was first known, was an important centre before that date. Born where the river meets the Baltic, it served as a trading post for European goods travelling northwards. This picture-postcard fishing port combines three distinct districts – the new town, the 19th century Russian-style Empire quarter, built under Tsar Nicholas I, and the old town for which it is best known.

Mainly built in wood after the Great Fire of 1760, this charming quarter of narrow, winding cobbled streets, brightly painted houses, attractive craft and antique shops is almost sealed in time. Red and ochre storehouses picturesquely border the waterfront along Porvoo River, specially decorated for King Gustavus III of Sweden's visit in the late 18th century. The stunning medieval cathedral looks down from the Kikkotori, where the first Diet or parliament met in 1809 under Tsar Alexander I, topped by the pine-clad slopes of Linnamäki Hill, a Viking defence post.

With its warm atmosphere and dream-like setting, it is hardly surprising that Porvoo has attracted many Finnish poets and artists.

SAVIJARVI HOMESTEAD

This 1,000-acre (405-ha) manor farm, dating back to 1540, is home to three generations of the Savijarvi family. The present main building is late-19th century and now used as a riding school.

Originally dairy farmers, the Savijarvi's adapted to changing circumstances at a time of surpluses and government restriction by opting to ship their cattle to Russia in exchange for horses, which they have been breeding ever since. Visits to their Manor also include horse-training demonstrations.







GERMANY

Located in the heartland of Europe, Germany extends for 139,000 square miles (356,000 sq km), sharing borders with eight countries: Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. The absence of natural boundaries to the east and west has determined its destiny throughout history, leaving it easy prey to the great European Empires.

Germany divides naturally into three contrasting regions: the northern lowlands extending from the Netherlands eastwards to Poland and north to Denmark washed by the North Sea and the Baltic; the heavily industrialised centre between Belgium and Poland, crossed by the Rhine and the main rivers; and south from Munich to the Black Forest and the Bavarian Alps on the frontier with Austria.

Settled in early prehistory by the Neanderthals, invaded by Charlemagne, Otto the Great and the Viennese Habsburgs, by the 16th century Germany had been splintered into some 300 kingdoms ruled by princes in the aftermath of the religious conflicts that followed Martin Luther's Reformation. Fragmented, these tiny states were later vulnerable to attack by Napoleon. Prussia was the last stronghold of German resistance, overcoming his forces at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813. Prussia's powerful chancellor, the renowned Otto von Bismarck, went on to annex the majority in 1871 following his victory over the French, culminating in Germany's historic unification of Germany under Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm I. Having dismissed Bismarck, Wilhelm II disappeared from the stage in Belgium, towards the close of World War I, in 1918. Adolf Hitler took unfair advantage of civil strife and severe economic depression due to crippling reparation under the Treaty of Versailles to seize power, a move that led indirectly to World War II.

The post-war partition of Germany by the allies resulted in a divided nation – East and West Germany. The European Iron and Steel Community, formed in 1946, was France's answer to the German problem along her frontiers, which had brought two major wars within 50 years in a union that later burgeoned into the Common Market. In a sequence of events triggered off to the East, the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 both symbolically and literally, re-opening the way to a reunited Germany.

Germany's contribution to the world has been considerable in many spheres, not least a tremendous artistic heritage. Accomplishments in the field of music have been virtually unparalleled, a history bestrewn with names such as Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Handel and Wagner, not to mention more recent composers. Philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Marx, physicists Einstein and Planck also left a great legacy. The list goes on – in literature, Goethe and Schiller, the German Romantics, 20th century Brecht and Böll and countless well-known artists spanning the centuries in their thousands, hung in galleries world-wide.



AT A GLANCE

Weather:	Mean Temp	Rainfall
Schleswig: August	61°F/16°C	3.4"/86 mm

Time: GMT+1/+2 (28th March - 31st October)

Official language: German

Currency: Euro

Banking hours: Mon – Fri:	08.30 – 13.00
	14.30 – 16.00
Thurs:	08.30 – 13.00
	14.30 – 18.00

Shopping hours: Mon – Fri:	09.00 – 20.00
	09.00 – 16.00
Sat:	



SCHELSWIG- HOLSTEIN

The northernmost province of Germany, Schleswig-Holstein unites two former duchies, Schleswig and Holstein, divided by the River Eider, sharing the Jutland Peninsula with Denmark to the north.

The flat, wooded Baltic fjord landscape of picturesque fishing villages and white sandy shores is idyllic, a sought-after holiday destination that is a world away from the wind-swept, storm-prone coastline of the steely North Sea, where dikes protect grazing and arable land. Whilst there is a Norwegian feel to the Baltic coast, the hinterland of Holstein is quaintly known as the *Holstein Switzerland* or *Holsteinische Schweiz*, for its wooded rolling hills and lakes, different again from the barer dune, marsh and moorland scenery farther to the west.

Kiel is the region's capital, located at the mouth of its famous canal linking the Baltic on the east to the North Sea on the west.

KIEL CANAL

Opened by Wilhelm II in 1895, the 62-mile (98-km) long Kiel or North Sea-Baltic Canal is the world's busiest artificial waterway – third in terms of tonnage – handling an average of 46,000 ships annually between Kiel-Holtenau and Brunsbüttel, including large ocean-going vessels. The Holtenau Locks, overlooked by the Prinz-Heinrich-Brücke, control its junction with the Baltic, minimising fluctuations in tides. By passing through the Canal, vessels save an average of 250 nautical miles on the trip round Jutland.

The first plans to build a canal between the Baltic and North Seas were laid as early as the 14th century but took four centuries to realise. In the meantime, the Eiderkanal was completed in 1784 and included sections of the River Eider in its 109-mile (175-km) length from Kiel to Tönning, with a maximum tonnage of 300 tons. The concept of a new canal was born of commercial pressures and the German navy's need to cross the Jutland Peninsula for strategic reasons.

Begun at Holtenau in 1887, the year Schleswig-Holstein became part of the German Empire, the Kiel Canal employed 9,000 workmen and took eight years to build, a master feat of engineering for its day. It was officially opened on 20th June 1895 by Kaiser Wilhelm II at a special ceremony in Holtenau and named the *Kaiser Wilhelm Kanal*.

Between 1905 and 1914, its reaches were widened and deepened and two larger locks added at Brunsbüttel and Holtenau. Internationalised by the Treaty of Versailles after World War I under German management, owing to its military and commercial importance, Adolf Hitler closed the waterway to the outside world in 1936. The Kiel Canal was not re-opened to international traffic until the end of World War II.

Now officially known as the *Nord-Ostsee-Kanal*, the famous waterway incorporates three lakes in its northern section and the ancient town of Rendsburg as well as a number of other centres of historic interest – and is most certainly one for the Hebridean *canal-bagger*.



HOLM

An island in the River Schlei until 1933, now part of the mainland, the little fishing village of Holm is chocolate box-pretty. A tightly packed maze of cobbled streets and alleys of colourful low cottages, with *chat* half doors and bright geraniums, ring a tiny white chapel set in a peaceful cemetery and fishing boats bob on the waterfront. Site of the medieval Convent of St John's, built for a Benedictine order, this erstwhile fishing quarter of Schleswig, with a history dating back the 11th century, has become its most picturesque suburb.

From 1480, fishing rights on the Schlei between Arnis and Schlei were exclusive to fishermen from Schleswig who were also members of the local Holm guild and bound to supply the town with fish. The undertakers' guilds were equally famous, formed in 1650 during the Thirty Years' War, also a period of rampant plague. In keeping with other ancient guilds, their members enjoyed considerable privileges and obligations, traditions that continue to survive in local festivals. The annual guild festival, or *Holmer Beliebung*, is held on the second Sunday after Whitsuntide around a procession in traditional costume. At the end of August every year, Holm also stages the *Twiebakken-Regatta*, a race between old fishing boats.

A few families continue to live on the eel and herring catches from the river.

SCHLESWIG

The old port of Schleswig lines the low-lying banks of the Schlei fjord 27 miles (43 km) from the Baltic coastline of Schleswig-Holstein. Merchants settled on the south bank of the River Schlei in the 9th century, prized for its location at the crossroads of old north-south and east-west routes. A century later, Vikings from Sweden penetrated the region, renaming the settlement *Haitbahu* or the *town in the heather*. Traces of their fortifications still remain beside the Haddebyer Noor, whilst carved runic stones have been found nearby at the Busdorfer site. Seeking protection against Scandinavian raiders, the people of Haitbahu headed for the north bank of the River Schlei in the 11th century, founding Schleswig.

The town's destiny was later to be regal as the seat of one of the Danish royal lines, the House of Holstein-Gottorf which became the Imperial House of the Tsars of Russia in 1762, lending it an air of grandeur untypical of the provinces. Sixteenth to eighteenth century Gottorf Castle now houses two of the region's museums.

The elegant spire of St Peter's Cathedral stands out on the horizon in distinctive Gothic style, re-faced in brick in the 1950's on a Romanesque base. The south doorway, surmounted by a 12th century carved tympanum opens to reveal beautiful 13th century frescoes over the transept and its jewel, a superbly carved, 39-foot (12-m) high altar in the chancel, known as *Bordesholm Altarpiece*. With over 400 delicately sculpted figures, originally created by Hans Brüggmann for Bordesholm in the early 16th century, the work is widely acclaimed as one of Europe's most outstanding masterpieces. The 14th century cloister is noted for its painted ceiling, decorated with stylised vine-leaf motifs, whilst King Friederick I's tomb in the northern aisle is finely carved with Renaissance angels.

Holm is the site of the old sailors' and fishermen's quarter.



RUSSIA

Despite the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation still occupies a vast, predominantly flat territory of some 6,563,800 square miles (17 million sq km), reaching from the Baltic in the west and its borders with Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine and Turkey to the Pacific Ocean in the east. Its only mountains are the Urals in the west and the mountain ranges of the Far East.

To most outsiders, Russia is something of an enigma – the sum-total of a turbulent and often violent history tracing the rise and fall of a great empire. The historic founding of Novgorod in AD 862 by the Viking Rurik of Jutland, a dynasty that was to last 700 years; prosperity under the Hanseatic League cut short by late 15th century Mongolian Tartars; the 16th century reign of Ivan the Terrible, followed by 300 years of Romanov rule from 1613, marked by Peter and Catherine the Great; the 20th century Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime, ending in *perestroika* – a string of names that symbolise autocracy and repression.

With a total population of 147 million, cultural and regional differences within the Russian Federation are inevitably great. The existing strong local identities with both racial and religious roots have been consolidated since the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's.

Russia's 19th century cultural heritage was outstanding in every field of the arts. The St Petersburg Imperial Ballet School that produced Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky, composers Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, writers Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, to name but a few, all have distinguished themselves worldwide. That legacy endures in futurism, graphic art and the cinema, while Russian folk culture, too, has travelled far and wide through its choirs and dance companies.

Post-*perestroika* Russia is still in a state of flux and change, having experienced social and economic problems during the transition from the old system to the new, as it forges a different role in the international arena.



AT A GLANCE

Weather:	Mean Temp	Rainfall
St Petersburg: August	61°F/16°C	3.0"/76 mm

Time: GMT+3/+4 (28th March - 31st October)

Official language: Russian

Currency: Rouble

Banking hours: Mon – Fri: 09.00 – 13.00
14.00 – 18.00 or 19.00

Shopping hours: Mon – Sat: 09.00 – 19.00
17.00 – 20.00
Sat: 09.00 – 16.00

Some banks in Moscow and St Petersburg remain open all day and on Saturday from 09.00 to 14.00.

ST. PETERSBURG


St Petersburg was founded as the new imperial capital in 1703 by Peter the Great to celebrate his victory over the Swedes – the fulfilment of his vision on the mosquito-infested swamps of the Neva delta as he returned from the battlefield on a misty morning. Great in stature at 6'7" (2.01 m), Peter was also bold in vision. His aim was to build the vital port hugh and wealthy Russia so badly needed – and in the autumn of that year, his dream realised, he sailed the frigate *Standard* into the Baltic. St Petersburg was to remain the capital of this great Empire until 1918 when Moscow took its place.

Lying on the Gulf of Finland, bridging East and West, this most European of Russian cities, set majestically on 44 islands, is crisscrossed by the 66 palace-lined rivers and canals that made it the *Venice of the North*. Virtually intact, with its geometric elegance, opulent St Petersburg stands as a grand memorial to Russia's Tsarist past, embodying the spirit of the Far North on the same latitude as southern Shetland and Stockholm.

To achieve his master plan, Peter the Great engaged the Italian-Swiss architect, Domenico Trezzini, who had recently designed a palace for the king of Denmark. In time he was to blend the almost austere look then fashionable in northern Europe with the grace of Baroque to create the northern Baroque style that is St Petersburg in his grandiose Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Peter's Summer Palace and the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul. The cost was enormous in human and financial terms and when Peter the Great died in 1725, the city was far from complete. It was during the reign of Catherine the Great from 1762 and her residence in the Hermitage Winter Palace that the grand vision became reality.

Catherine's Palace

Built by Johann Braunstein as a gift from Peter the Great to his wife Catherine in 1710, this stunning palace at Pushkin (erstwhile Tsarskoe Selo or *Tsar's Little Village*) is regarded as an architectural masterpiece. Later extended and embellished in ornate Baroque style by Empress Elizabeth and the renowned Italian designer Bartolomeo Rastrelli, the imperial summer palace was remoulded into its present form by Catherine the Great, who lived here until her death in 1796. Becoming an art museum after the Revolution, when its parklands were also opened to the public, both palace and garden were sadly destroyed during World War II. An extensive programme has miraculously restored much of its former splendour. Fronted by the original lavish turquoise, white and gilded Rastrelli façade, with a Great Hall of some 9,257 square feet (860 sq m), the palace boasts a number of fine satellite pavilions – the Grotto Pavilion, Chinese pagoda and Hermitage.



Church of the Saviour on the Spilled Blood

The jewel of St Petersburg, said to incorporate more mosaics internally and externally than any other church world-wide, this magnificent structure was begun in 1883 on the spot where revolutionaries assassinated Tsar Alexander II in March 1881. Completed in 1907, the project was almost entirely financed by the Imperial family and private donations. Surprisingly perhaps, the main architect of this so Russian of churches, inspired by traditional 16th and 17th century style drawing heavily on Moscow's St Basil's and Kiev's Vladimir cathedrals, was of foreign origin – A Parland. Working in collaboration with distinguished Russian artists, he created a breathtaking casing for the bejewelled centrepiece, the Tsar's shrine. A branch of St Isaac's Cathedral Museum since 1970, which refunded its restoration, this opulent monument was opened to the public in 1997.

Grand Duke Vladimir's Palace

This beautifully decorated palace in true *historical* style was built by Russian architect Alexander Rezanov in the very heart of St Petersburg, not far from the Hermitage, for Tsar Alexander II's third son, Grand Prince Vladimir. Here, he held court as Commander of the Guards, Chief of St Petersburg Military District and President of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the palace became the *House of Scientists*. Now owned by the Russian Academy of Sciences, it contains several banquet rooms and stages theatrical performances.

The Hermitage

The brainchild of Peter the Great who had a two-storey Hermitage built beside Peterhof, inspired by Versailles, which later housed 17th century Dutch paintings. Today's Hermitage, started in 1754 by Bartolomeo Rastrelli, occupies part of the original Winter Palace, home to the tsars from Peter III. It was Catherine the Great who commissioned French architect Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe to build the Small Hermitage pavilion as a showcase for her art collection. Open to the public since the Revolution, the Hermitage museum displays confiscated private works in its 6¼ miles (10 km) of halls and corridors. The theatre was built for Catherine the Great by Giacomo Quarenghi in the 1780's.

Pavlovsk Palace & Rose Pavilion

This impressive Italianate palace was built by Catherine the Great for her only son, Tsar Paul I, on an attractive 1,500-acre (607-ha) estate by the River Slavyanka south-east of St Petersburg, to commemorate the birth of his first son, the future Tsar Alexander I in 1777. The décor reflects the contrasting tastes of Paul and his Empress Maria – an unusual blend of military style pervading the main state rooms, offset by Maria's exquisitely refined touch. After Tsar Paul's death in 1814, his widow remained at Pavlovsk, bequeathing the palace to her son Mikhail who neglected its upkeep. The era of the railways changed its destiny for a time when Johann Strauss conducted in the station building. Converted into a museum after the Revolution, though stripped by Stalin of its more valuable treasures, Pavlovsk has been extensively restored and now basks in its past glory.

Rose Pavilion

Nearby, the former cottage transformed by Maria Fyodorovna into a delightful park pavilion where she held small concerts, dramas and readings, reverberates with the sounds of classical music once more as one of St Petersburg's foremost concert halls – reconstructed after it was totally destroyed during World War II.

Peterhof Palace

The vast formal 18th century parkland garden on the oldest of the imperial palace estates is now more famous than the palaces it was designed to adorn – the Great Palace, Cottage, Marly and Monplaisir palaces. The Upper Garden and Lower Park, laid with straight alleys, trees, steps and over 40 cascading fountains, roll spectacularly down to the Gulf of Finland. Paradoxically, perhaps because of its very splendour, Great Palace, the Russian *Versailles*, fronted by the Grand Cascade, was rarely used by the Imperial family who were more at ease in the cosy Baroque ambience of seashore Monplaisir or other less sumptuous residences. A naval man, Peter the Great chose the site for easy access to the naval base of Kronstadt, commissioning Jean Baptiste Leblond in 1715 to build his Peterhof.

St Isaac's Cathedral

One of the world's largest cathedrals, this grandiose structure was designed in 1818 by the young and then unknown French architect Auguste de Montferrand at a cost of 23 million silver roubles – and completed in 1858 in the year he died. A major feat of engineering, the granite for the imposing columns was imported from Finland, whilst countless sculptors worked on the carvings. Of particular note are the dome, decorated by Russian painter Karl Bryullov, and the marble, mosaic-studded iconostasis, wonderfully worked from over 12,000 different shades.

With its special magic, St Petersburg has inspired all manner of artists – writers Dostoevsky and Gogol, poets Pushkin and Akhmatova, composers Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky and ballet dancers Nijinsky and Nureyev.



FRANCE

One of the largest countries in Europe, France covers an area a little more than twice the size of the United Kingdom, with a population of about the same. Sharing borders with Andorra, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Spain and Switzerland, protected by the Alps and the Pyrenees, France is described affectionately by the French themselves as *the Hexagon*. Along 1,950 miles (3,120 km) of varied coastline, an incredible array of landscapes unfurl from the chalk white cliffs of Normandy, the sandy shores of the Bay of Biscay to the sand-pebbled, even rocky beaches of the glorious Riviera, with three distinct weather patterns - Atlantic, Continental and Mediterranean. Inland, fertile soils have fostered agriculture, producing over 365 varieties of cheese, one for every day of the year, and over 450 classified wines - and 6,000 plant species, some 200 of which are unique to France.

From the country's rich diversity of terrain and climate grew a strong sense of regional identity, not to say independence, reaching far back into an eventful history - Breton, Catalan, Basque and Corsican continue to be spoken in the regions. Inhabited for 90,000 years, settled by the Celtic Gauls between 1500 and 500 BC, then the Romans overcome in turn by the Franks and other Germanic tribes, the seeds of conflict had been sown. A struggle between royal dynasties, Catholic and Protestant, king and people, interspersed with wars abroad, often with England, was to culminate in the French Revolution of 1789, casting ripples far and wide. It was, however, from the Empire period and Napoleon that France inherited the Napoleonic Code which became the basis of the French legal system, a model for others beyond France's colonial frontiers.

When church and state were finally separated in 1905, the age-old enmity with Britain - alliances had existed for many years between France and Scotland - was buried by the *Entente Cordiale*, to resurface only sporadically. After World War II, as one of the founder members of European Coal and Steel Community, a precursor of the EC, the French assumed a new role in the international arena.

That spirit of liberty and fraternity spawned an astounding culture that made invaluable contributions to the world in practically every field. France became the last word in gastronomy and wines, elegance and style, art and literature and French, the international language of diplomacy, supplanted more recently, perhaps not without rancour, by English. France gave the world champagne and *foie gras*, perfume and pomades, cancan and claret, the French Impressionists and *La Belle Epoque*, denim and ... the future will tell as France adapts and re-adapts uniquely *à la française* to the fast-changing modern world.



AT A GLANCE

Weather:	Mean Temp	Rainfall
Boulogne: August	63°F/17°C	3.5"/90 mm
Time: GMT+1/+2 (28th March-31st October)		

Official language: French

Currency: Euro

Banking hours: Mon – Fri: 09.00 – 16.00

Shopping hours: Mon – Sat: 09.00 – 12.00 or 13.00
14.00 or 15.00 – 18.30

Some food shops are open on Sunday mornings but closed on Monday



NORMANDY

Normandy was so named by the Scandinavian Norsemen who terrorised the region in the 8th to 9th centuries, born after land around the lower Seine was granted by the Carolingian king of France to Viking Wrolf, who was converted to Christianity. Following the Norman conquest of England in 1066, recorded in the frames of the world-renowned Bayeux Tapestry, the dukes of Normandy became Kings of England. Philippe Auguste retook Normandy from King John in 1204, leaving only the *Îles Anglo-Normandes* or Channel Islands in English hands. The Normans ventured further, to Sicily and areas of the Near East, leaving a remarkable heritage of Romanesque and Gothic architecture behind them.

Haunt of many an artist, Claude Monet and his great mentor Eugène Boudin, to name but two, and distinguished writers from Pierre Corneille to Gustave Flaubert, Normandy is the home of apples, calvados and cider, Camembert and Pont l'Évêque cheeses, cream, butter and fresh seafood.

Normandy is also a region of large Channel ports – Dieppe, Le Havre, Cherbourg - and more popular resorts such as Deauville, Houlgate and Trouville, although the ancient harbours of Barfleur and Honfleur have retained all their charm.

HONFLEUR

Bathed in the subdued light of the Seine Estuary, the picturesque fishing port of Honfleur, immortalised time and again by artists and painters, writers and poets, still exudes the atmosphere that was their inspiration. Painter Eugène Boudin was born here, the son of a ferryman, who was to influence a generation of artists – the French Impressionists – through his pupil, Claude Monet, joined now and then by Pissarro, Renoir and Cézanne.

Well-preserved, tall, attractive slate-hung houses, with colourful shops, cafés and restaurants beneath line Quai Ste Catherine overlooking the Vieux Bassin, where fishing boats bob at anchor in the gentle breeze, some tied up at the pier nearby, created in the second half of the 17th century as a safer, inner harbour. The Lieutenant, erstwhile residence of the king's lieutenant, guarding the harbour entrance, has served as the gateway to the inner town since 1608 when Samuel de Champlain set sail and eventually founded Québec. Links developed with Africa, particularly through the slave trade, with over a hundred expeditions by the 18th century.

At the centre of the town, amid timber-framed streets, stands the wooden Church of Ste Catherine, probably France's finest timber-framed church, built during the Hundred Years War in the 15th century when only wood was available for construction, stone being restricted to use in port fortifications. Unusually, the interior is separated into twin naves, both ringed by a balcony, whilst the hull in the roof was erected by local shipbuilders. Also of note is the old shipbuilders' quarter along Rue Haute.

Eugène Boudin himself was one of the founders of the Musée Eugène Boudin to the west of the port, to which he left 53 works after his death in 1898. The collection includes paintings by Dubourg depicting 19th century life in Honfleur, as well as 20th century artists such as Dufy, Henri de St Delis and Herbo. The Musée de la Marine, once the Church of St Etienne, houses displays of model ships and antique Norman furnishings. Nearby, the Musée du Vieux Honfleur is accommodated in two 17th century stores where salt was kept in the time of the *gabelle* or salt tax.

Fresh fish is served in the quayside restaurants, a wonderful window on this now upmarket resort.

NOTES