

# HOW TO GET A RUSSIAN VISA IN 3 EASY STEPS

# 3 EASY STEPS TO GETTING A RUSSIAN VISA

So – you have your heart set on a trip to Russia and it's time to get planning! Where to go, who to go with, how to get there and how much beautiful scenery, amazing architecture, extraordinary culture and crazy adventure you can fit into the single trip of a lifetime.

But, no matter what your plans may entail, there's one other thing every international visitor to Russia needs to understand and prepare for, and that's the **RUSSIAN VISA**. On first glance, getting a Russian visa can seem a little daunting - clear, concise advice can be difficult to find. This eBook will take all the confusion out of the visa process by explaining each step in detailed but simple, straightforward terms. Read this guide, give yourself at least a month to get your visa sorted, and your visa acquisition should be a surprisingly easy and stress free experience.

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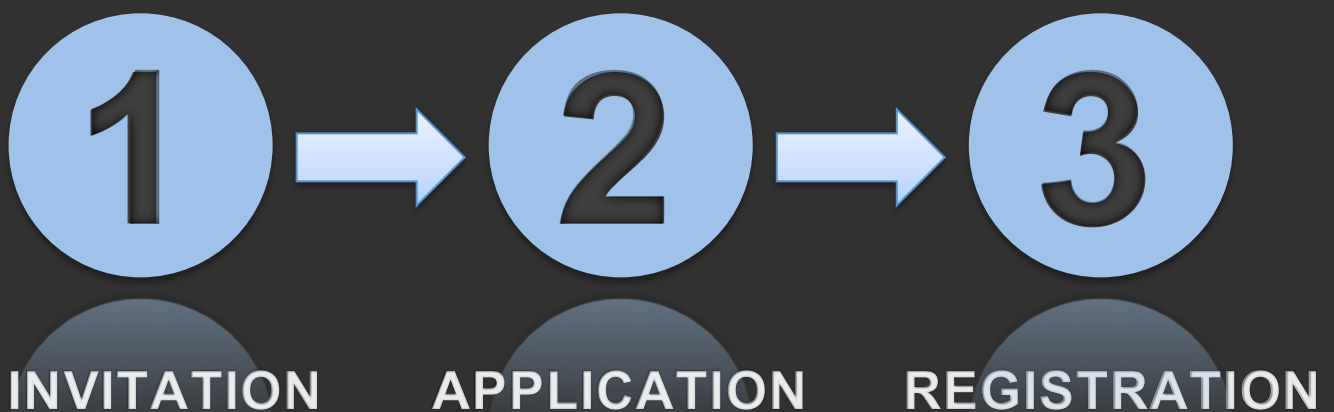
# DO I NEED A RUSSIAN VISA?

At the time of publication (October 2013), the vast majority of visitors need a valid visa to enter Russia. There are exceptions for a select few countries (for example, those from the ex-Soviet states), but for the moment, a visa is mandatory for all foreign nationals from the EU, UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and most of Asia. The only exception is if you're visiting St Petersburg on a cruise ship, in which case you are allowed visa-free travel within that city for 72 hours. At present, Russian visas can only be obtained through Russian Consular Departments and not at border crossings, so organising your visa in advance is essential. **DON'T** leave your visa to the last minute. Allow at least **ONE MONTH** to secure your visa. In most cases, your visa will arrive much sooner, but it's best not to take any chances and risk a nervous, stressful wait.

## TYPES OF RUSSIAN VISAS

There are six main types of Russian visas: a tourist visa, a business visa, a student visa, a personal visa, a work visa and a transit visa, with each type corresponding to the purpose of your visit. As a holiday maker, you'll probably only need to apply for a tourist visa, which is valid for a maximum of 30 days from the date of entry. You'll be given the option to apply for either a single or a double entry visa. The double entry visa allows you to leave the Russian Federation once and then return, within the validity dates specified on the visa. If you plan to travel in Russia for more than 30 days, you may be able to apply for a business visa. Contact your local Russian consulate for advice.

## HOW DO I APPLY FOR A RUSSIAN VISA?



The first two steps are completed before your trip, and the last one, Registration, takes place on arrival in Russia.

# STEP 1 : INVITATION

The very first thing you need to obtain your Russian visa is a letter of invitation (also known as a visa support document or tourist voucher), which is an official document issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs granting you permission to apply for a visa. You will need to provide a copy of this letter to the Russian Consulate when you apply for your tourist visa.

The standard practise is to enlist the services of a travel agency or hotel in Russia who will obtain your letter direct from the Russian government.

**56<sup>th</sup> Parallel** specialise in organising invitation letters for visitors to Russia through a simple online process. Anyone requiring a letter of invitation for tourist purposes can arrange one via our online form at: <http://www.56thparallel.com/russian-visa-support-letter>

Once you've submitted your completed form, your invitation letter will be sent to you via e-mail within **1-2 business days**.



*Please note **you need only a scanned copy of the invitation letter** for tourist visas, for other types of Russian visa, you may need the original document, which can be mailed or couriered to you.*

Applying for an invitation letter through 56<sup>th</sup> Parallel keeps your visa application as flexible and open-ended as possible.

You don't need to already have a fixed itinerary and travel dates – simply make your Date of Entry and Departure Date on the form 30 days apart, and you'll be able to travel in and out of Russia at any time within those 30 days.

You don't need to be locked into booking specific hotels or tours either – just enter in the destinations you *expect* to visit. Nothing needs to be set in stone.



*Please note, 30 days is the maximum term for a tourist visa.*

## STEP 2: APPLICATION

Once you've received your invitation, you can apply for a visa through your nearest Russian consulate. You can apply in person, or via post. First, you'll need to gather all the necessary documents to lodge your application. Contact the consulate you'll be applying through to confirm exactly what documents they need. This information can usually be found on the consulate's website.

Citizens of most countries will need to supply the following:

- A high quality copy of your invitation letter
- A completed visa application form, which you can fill out at the consulate or complete online and print from: <https://visa.kdmid.ru>
- One passport photograph of 3 by 4cm (1.18 inches by 1.57 inches), glued in the reserved place on your application form.
- An international passport valid for at least 6 months after the visa expiration date stated in your letter of invitation.
- Consular fee. Check how much the fee is with your consulate, and what payment forms they accept. EU citizens pay EUR 35 for an application to be processed within the normal 10 day time frame, or EUR for an urgent application (3 days). Australian citizens pay \$110 for a single entry visa with a 7 day processing time, which is comparable to most other countries.
- If you're applying by post, you must enclose a pre-paid self-addressed envelope or courier airbill. Be sure to use a delivery service that includes tracking so you can monitor the arrival of your precious documents!

## STEP 3 : REGISTRATION

Once your application is approved, and your passport has been returned to you with the Russian visa stamped inside, you've done everything you need to do before your departure. The last step is the registration of your arrival in Russia. On arrival, you'll need to fill out an immigration card (a long white card which is usually handed out during your flight) or at the passport control gate on arrival. Half of this card is surrendered immediately to passport control. The other half of the card is kept with you for the duration of your stay and handed over when you leave Russia. Take good care of it, as it's essential for registration.

You need to register within three working days of arrival, usually at the first hotel you check into. Simply hand over the card to the hotel staff, allowing them to input your registration information. As a rule, you need to register with each new city or hotel you stay in, although not all hotels are particularly stringent about this.





## VISA EXTENSIONS, EMERGENCIES AND OVERSTAYS

Generally speaking, there's no possibility of renewing or extending the 30 day period on a Russian tourist visa. For this reason, it's highly inadvisable to voluntarily stay in Russia past the valid date on your visa. Not only will you be hit with a considerable fine when you attempt to leave, but you will most likely encounter significant problems trying to leave the country and must first obtain an exit visa from the Federal Migration Service. This is time consuming, expensive and may affect your ability to apply for a Russian visa in future.

*There are a few except cases where your Russian visa may be extended for a short period, such as:*

- Your flight being delayed, cancelled or missed due to misadventure
- An accident or serious illness
- Seat unavailability in case of an open-date ticket

In most cases mentioned above, you can extend your visa for up to 2 weeks and you will need to provide the appropriate documents to prove your case. If you've only overstayed for one day due to factors beyond your control, there's a good chance you can purchase an exit visa at the airport, especially if you already have a plane ticket. For longer overstays, you'll have to apply for an exit transfer at the local OVIR (immigration office) and provide the appropriate documents to prove your case.

The cost of the exit visa varies according to circumstances, usually between \$100 to \$500.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY VISA IS LOST OR STOLEN?

If you lose your passport and visa while travelling, you'll need to apply for a new exit visa. You should report the loss to your embassy or consulate, and they may also be able provide you with assistance as a non-Russian speaker. First, you need to report the matter to a local police precinct to provide you with an official document confirming your visa was lost. You will then need to make arrangements to get a new passport via post or in person from your national embassy in Moscow. The processing time usually takes no less than 5 business days, so it may be necessary to reschedule your flight home.

## OTHER RESOURCES

If you need additional Russian visa related information or support, you should contact your nearest Russian Consulate. A comprehensive list of contact details for Russian Consulates by region and city can be found at: <http://www.russianconsulates.com/>