



## Albany Tula Alliance Travel Guide for Russian Visitors Coming to the U.S.

### 1. TRAVEL Documents, Air Travel, Insurance, Communications

**Passport:** Russian citizens must first make sure their passport is up to date several months before the trip.

#### **Getting Your US Visa: Official Letter of Invitation:**

- As soon as you confirm that you can make the visit, the sponsoring organization (Albany Tula Alliance) will issue your letter of invitation to the Dept of State. It must include the name, address and phone number of the person you will be staying with here (this information is required for the visa application).
- You must provide your passport # and other personal information to complete the application. This can be done online through Pony-Express, which sends all the documents to the US Embassy [www.ponyexpress.ru](http://www.ponyexpress.ru).
  - Pony-Express provides updates about the current visa application process and costs. Now all applications are filled out online and more detailed information can be found at:
    - <http://russian.moscow.usembassy.gov/nivservices.html> - общая информация
    - <http://russian.moscow.usembassy.gov/nivapplying.html> - более подробная информация по визе
    - <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/> - здесь заполняется заявление на визу
    - Their address in Tula: г. Тула, ул. Болдина, д. 69, 1-й этаж, офис №1
  - Directions: Проезд: Остановка "Орловская", новое четырёхэтажное офисное здание рядом со Студией Куприкова. Троллейбус № 4, 5; маршрутное такси № 11, 22, 40К
  - Телефоны: (4872) 71-11-71, 71-01-71 Московское время  
Эл. почта: [all@pony-tula.ru](mailto:all@pony-tula.ru) Режим работы: пн—пт 9:00—18:00
- **Air Travel**
  - Most Capital Region visitors fly into New York's John F. Kennedy airport (JFK) and then are picked up by someone from the Alliance. Driving distance between JFK and Albany is 3+ hours. (Note: It is possible to take the airport Express Bus from JFK airport to Penn Station in downtown Manhattan <http://www.nyairportservice.com> and from there catch the Amtrak train ([www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)) to Albany-Rensselaer station.
  - An alternate route that was used recently by two Tula visitors is to fly to Albany via Dulles Airport (outside Washington DC). However, as these visitors found, if the incoming flight from Russia is delayed, it may be impossible to make the connecting flight, as all luggage must be claimed and you must go through customs at Dulles before rechecking luggage and boarding. If you miss the connection, you'll be waiting in the airport for several hours for the next flight to Albany.
  - Best routes, based on Alliance experience, are available via Delta. A good website to check airfare and various options is [anywayanyday.ru](http://anywayanyday.ru).
- **Medical, repatriation, and trip cancellation insurance**
  - **You must purchase your own travel medical insurance in Russia before the trip. Do not assume that your normal medical insurance will cover medical services in the United States!!!! Emergency medical expenses can be enormously expensive if you do not have insurance!**
  - Almost every Russian travel agency offers an extensive international insurance coverage. Elena Molchanova advises using *Moskovskaya Strakhovaya Kompaniya* located on *ulitsa Pushkinskaya* in Tula.
  - All major health insurance companies provide medical insurance policies. Standard coverage for the US is USD 50,000, and the premium payment about USD \$20-30 (depending on the company) for a two-week trip.
  - THE ONLY TIME YOU DO NOT NEED TO PURCHASE INSURANCE IS IF YOU ARE TRAVELING WITH A GROUP SUCH AS OPEN WORLD. In this case, insurance will be provided by the American Councils or the Alliance. But we will need a complete list of the names, contact info, birthdates, and passport#s of each member of the group well in advance of your arrival to secure this coverage.



## Albany Tula Alliance Travel Guide for Russian Visitors Coming to the U.S.

- **Phone and electronic communications**

- **Internet Connection:** U.S. hosts will likely give you use of their computer for accessing internet, email. If you bring your own computer, most hosts will be able to provide Internet access. Free wireless access is also available at some public coffee shops, such as Starbucks or Paneras, which are located sporadically around the Capital Region.
- **Phone:** Elena Molchanova advises using a TMobile sim-card with your Russian cell phone. She has had good luck with this and says it is very easy. You can also purchase a pre-paid cell phone from vendors like Tracfone, Virgin Mobile, Boost Mobile, Verizon and AT&T, although the authors of this document have no experience with that (see [http://www.ehow.com/how-does\\_4566558\\_prepaid-cell-phone-work.html](http://www.ehow.com/how-does_4566558_prepaid-cell-phone-work.html)).
- **How to make calls:**
  - To place a local call (within the Capital Region), just dial the 7-digit number.
  - To place a call from the Capital Region to another location in the US, you must first dial 1 plus the 3-digit area code for that calling area. (If calling from a cell phone, you do not need the 1.) some commonly needed area codes are:
    - Manhattan 212
    - Boston 617
  - To call Russia, dial 011+7+ number. However, the cost is prohibitive, so it is best to set up SKYPE accounts before your trip and use a computer to call home via SKYPE (free).

## 2. **Homestay needs and comfort – VERY IMPORTANT!!!**

**PLEASE TELL US YOUR HOUSING NEEDS EARLY!** Please help us make your Capital Region visit as comfortable as possible. As soon as you know you will definitely be coming, please send an email to the Alliance member arranging your visit with the following information:

***Your name and names of any family members or others traveling with you***

***Dates of birth***

***Your home address***

***Your email and SKYPE***

***An emergency contact (with email, SKYPE, and phone #) for you in Russia***

***# of beds required (if you are traveling with a spouse or children)***

***Are you a smoker?***

***Any special dietary requirements?***

***Any allergies?***

***Any medical concerns we should be aware of?***

***Have you arranged your trip medical insurance coverage? What is the carrier and # of your policy?***

***Any special requests for your homestay arrangements?***

***Are you planning to travel elsewhere in the US after your visit to the Capital Region? Do you need any help making these arrangements?***

- **WATER.** Most suburban homes where you'll be staying have good tap water available, but there may be differing levels of minerals in each town's supply. To avoid stomach problems adjusting to the local water, some travelers prefer to use bottled water. If you are sensitive, ask your host to keep bottled water on hand during your homestay.
- **SAFETY.** Most homestays will be in safe areas where you can walk or run outside for exercise before or after a long day. When in doubt, ask your host for advice on this.
- **EXERCISE.** If you will be staying for more than a couple of days, pack light workout clothes and a swimsuit. Some Alliance members keep gym memberships and would be happy to arrange a workout during your stay.



## Albany Tula Alliance Travel Guide for Russian Visitors Coming to the U.S.

### 3. What to pack

- TRY TO PACK LIGHTLY, REDUCE THE NUMBER and SIZE of YOUR BAGS. All checked bags are now subject to a fee from American airlines. We find that Russian travelers to US usually have huge shopping lists and end up having to purchase extra luggage for the return trip. Plan accordingly.
- Please note the Amtrak baggage regulations ([www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com); also applies to most public transportation):
  - **Two-Piece Limit:** Each passenger may bring aboard no more than two pieces of carry-on baggage. Not included in this limit are personal items such as purses, briefcases, laptop computers, baby items such as strollers, diaper bags and car seats
  - **50-Pound Limit:** Each carry-on bag may weigh no more than 50 lbs.
  - **Size Limit:** Each carry-on bag may not exceed 28" x 22" x 14" in size.
- FOOTWEAR. Russian visitors to US should bring appropriate footwear for both professional meetings and for country outings. We strongly suggest that all female visitors bring walking shoes (flats!) for use when touring.
- WARMTH. Plan on dressing in layers. Weather can vary and change quickly, particularly in the fall and spring. For local weather, visit Be sure to plan on rain/snow/heat/cold
- MINIMIZING CLOTHING. Some travelers suggest keeping to basic colors: black, brown, beige and white and then bringing accessories to dress-up (jewelry, scarves, etc.).
- If any formal business, cultural event, or government meetings are planned, formal clothes are necessary. For men, a suit, tie, and dress shoes. For women, nice dress, suit, or pants suit with dress shoes. (High heels are not considered a requirement for formal dress; low or mid-range heels are perfectly acceptable.)
- Plug adaptors for converting US 110/120V electricity to 220/240V electricity for hair dryers, etc.

### 3. Useful background information about the USA

- Tipping customs
  - Taxi: 15-20% of total fare on meter
  - Restaurants: 15-20% of total meal price before tax
  - Luggage handling: \$1 per bag (or you can decline this service and do yourself)
  - Hotel rooms: \$2 per person per night for the housekeeping staff
- Transportation
  - Bus routes and schedules (<http://www.cdta.org/>) in Albany/Capital Region are far less convenient than in Russia. (But some Russians visitors have used CDTA transportation successfully with a little planning.)
  - Taxis are expensive in the Capital Region and not readily available except at airport, train station, and hotels. If you wish to order a taxi, you can call Capitaland taxi:
    - Albany 453-8888 (Essex Street), 270-8294 (Kraft Avenue)
    - Colonie 482-5555
    - Rensselaer 465-0077
    - Saratoga 583-3131
    - Schenectady 372-7777
    - Troy 270-8294
  - The Alliance tries to arrange transportation for all homestay visitors. In general, expect to ride to various events and destinations in the Capital Region in cars provided by The Alliance.

### 4. Tourism outside the Capital Region.

The Alliance does not typically pay for our visitors' travel outside of the Capital Region, but we are happy to help you with travel arrangements, including booking train reservations, hotels, tickets to museums or shows, etc.) Please let us know as far in advance as possible what you would like to see or do in the area if you need this kind of help. Email: [contact@albanytula.org](mailto:contact@albanytula.org)



## Albany Tula Alliance Travel Guide for Russian Visitors Coming to the U.S.

**GETTING THERE.** Transportation from Capital Region to NYC takes 2 - 3 hours and is available by:

- **Train:** [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) \$34-\$58 each way (off-peak/peak times) to Penn Station in NYC. You can purchase reservation online and print out your ticket or bring your electronic reservation number.
- **Bus:** <http://www.gotobus.com/albany/> Prices vary: currently \$20 each way from two locations in Albany to two locations in Manhattan.

**ACCOMMODATIONS.** We are working on a list of inexpensive quality hotels. One that we used recently and found excellent is Eastgate Tower Suites, on East 39th St., between 2nd and 3rd Avenues.

<http://www.affinia.com/New-York-City-Hotel.aspx?name=Eastgate-Tower&kw=p279178753>

We were able to book for \$238/20 per person for two nights - not bad for a quite decent hotel, only three blocks from Grand Central Station.

### **NEW YORK CITY TOURS:**

Russian language bus tour of NYC tours

<http://glavstravel.com/ru/bus/6.htm>

<http://www.newtours.us/new-tours/regular.php?tour=new-york>

(Lana Sullivan's parents went with this one and loved it!)

**For other questions, contact the Alliance person arranging your tour.  
If you don't have one, please email [contact@albanytula.org](mailto:contact@albanytula.org).**