



Guide for US Visitors to Russia

Courtesy of the ATA

Gift Giving

Generally speaking, Russians take great pleasure in giving and receiving gifts. Be sure to bring an assortment of gifts so that you will always have something appropriate to give.

Here are some ideas on what to give:

1. Books with beautiful scenes of the Adirondacks or Hudson Valley or the Catskills (limit the amount of English text).
2. Russians have a hereditary sweet tooth. Odds are good you'll be introduced to gingerbread (honey cake) or Alenka chocolate. To reciprocate, bring your favorites or the ingredients to make your favorites like s'mores or chocolate chip cookies.
3. New York produced maple syrup is always a huge hit with Russians. Hannaford carries a variety of sizes but be sure to wrap foods in ziplock plastic bag and pack in checked luggage.
4. Tea (not vodka) is Russia's National Drink so bring some of your favorites to pass around too.
5. Any souvenir items like pens, postcards, pencils, memo pads, mouse pads, stickers that include the words Albany or New York - for example, "UAlbany" or "Albany-Tula Alliance" or "Discover Albany" or your own high school logo is much appreciated.

Sources

The Albany Visitors Center next to the Pump Station carries many souvenir items as well as the the University of Albany gift shop or the Albany Institute of History gift shop. Also, the travel plazas on the I-87 thruway have gift shops that carry dozens of I love NY-branded swag.

Money

1. Take some in US currency: \$100, \$20s, all new and unblemished.
2. ATM machines available in the cities, convenient for withdrawing rubles as needed or anticipated.
3. Get some at rubles at airport on arrival as you may need cash for public toilets. Don't withdraw too much cash, however, because of very high commission fee unless you find an ATM there. Sometimes, only rubles are accepted at government owned organizations such as museums and other places with entrance fees.
4. Be sure to notify your credit card companies and the bank providing your ATM of your travel dates. Call them a day or two before departure so the notification is "high on their screen."

Packing

1. Try to pack light because of airline costs or automobile space, plus you need space for all the Russian gifts you'll receive.
2. Be aware that Russians dress well and like to look "put together" when in public, at school or visiting friends. Take appropriate clothing.
3. Take footwear for a variety of experiences like a walk in the country, in the rain or snow. Bring slippers or "house only" footwear to take to people's apartments (socks are okay).
4. Check weather forecasts but be prepared for a variety of weather. Rain gear, comfortable footwear. Plan on dressing in layers in the spring and fall.
5. Bring a wash cloth and small packages of Kleenex or other tissues in case of allergies.
6. Bring prescription medicines and prescriptions in case of need; extra eyeglasses if possible.
7. Bring headache, cold, cough, stomach and intestinal remedies for unexpected issues.

Social Customs

1. When one is going to someone's home for the first time, it is customary to bring a bouquet of flowers. Flowers are readily available in the many area flower shops and street vendors. Only give an uneven number of flowers for happy occasions. An even number of flowers is given only on a sad occasion, especially at funerals.
2. Plan on removing your shoes when you enter a home/apartment. Your host will often offer a pair of slippers to wear inside.
3. Tipping customs : Tip 10-15% in restaurants, no tips for taxi drivers.
4. Even though most Russians under the age of 60 speak English fluently, it's always nice to learn a few basic niceties like "hello", "please" and "thank you." If you have time to familiarize yourself with the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, it has 33 letters, even better!

Hotel/Dormitory Accommodations

You may be given a room key. It is typical that the person on duty at the desk will expect you to turn it in when you go out and ask for it again on your return.

Restrooms

In public restrooms there may be a worker on duty to take the fee, if any. Sometimes she will provide a small supply of toilet tissue for your use. If you see a small wastebasket in the stall, it may be to deposit your used toilet tissue, to avoid clogging the plumbing. This is especially true of dormitories and old buildings.

Phone and Internet

For electric appliances, 220 volt electricity plug adaptors are necessary. Don't use host family's phone to call home, as charges are dry high. Buy or rent a cell phone and charge with minutes from a Russian sim-card, incoming calls are free of charge but international outgoing calls are very high. Even if you've paid for a discount calling card



or international plan on your personal cell phone, roaming charges might still apply. Best option is to use Skype to call home when on wifi. There are apps for installing Skype on smart phones, laptops and iPads.

Making Calls from a Landline

To call Russia from the U.S., just follow these dialing instructions:

1. First dial 011, the U.S. exit code.
2. Next dial 7, the country code for Russia.
3. Then dial the 3-to-5-digit area code followed by the 5-to-7-digit phone number.

To call US from Russia, 810 is the international prefix to call somewhere outside of Russia while 1 is the international code used to dial the USA from Russia.

RUSSIA AREA CODES	
Moscow	495 or 499
Saint Petersburg	812
Novosibirsk	3832
Nizhny Novgorod	8312
Samara	8462
Omsk	3812
Kazan	8432
Ufa	3472
Chelyabinsk	3512
Rostov	48536

***Allow for time difference between locations in the Russian Federation and the United States. For example, when it's noon in Moscow, it's 5 am on the East coast of the United States or 7 hours time difference.

Carry-on Items

International airlines may have different restrictions for carry-on luggage. Again, it is always best to check with your airline first to get their exact requirements. Airlines enforce all size and weight limits much more strictly now than in the past. Bags are weighed at check-in and many airlines have placed bag sizers at their gates. If your carry-on bags are too big, you will have to check them. This might cause them to be classified as "extra bags" which usually carries an extra charge.