

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO GETTING A RUSSIAN VISA

For independent travellers only! 😊

If you are planning to visit St Petersburg or any other Russian cities independently and want to save money on getting your Russian Visa, then follow the steps below.

1- Choose your travel date

Before you try to apply for a Russian Visa, you should decide exactly when you are going to be traveling and which cities you are going to visit. This information must be included on your visa application.

2- Check your passport

Make sure your passport is valid for the dates you are planning to travel. Most consular departments will ask that your passport is valid for at least six months after your planned departure date from Russia. You also need to ensure that you have the required number of clear pages in your passport (this also varies at different consular departments, but two is normally enough).

3- Make up your mind about what kind of Visa you need

The type of visa you will apply for depends on the reason of your trip and the duration of your stay. Most visitors to Russia require only the single-entry Tourist Visa, valid for one month. If you are thinking to stay for longer, or you would like to enter Russia more than once during your trip, then you will need a Business Visa even if you're traveling for pleasure. Lastly, if you're going to visit your friends in Russia, you'll need to apply for a Private Visa.

4- Find someone to sponsor your Visa

Once you've decided on the type of visa you need, you will then need to find a person or company who will supply you with the documents required by Russian consular departments to process your visa application. These documents are usually known as visa support documents. If you are pre-booking accommodation in Russia, then nearly all hotels and most travel agencies will be able to issue you with the necessary documents to apply for a one-month Tourist Visa.

When you're applying for your Tourist Visa you must hold the following documents:

- *Tourist Voucher*
- *Tourist Confirmation*

These documents should be provided by a travel company or a hotel, which are nothing more your visa sponsors. There are many travel companies who will, for a fee, act as visa sponsors and give you these documents without pre-booked accommodation. Both documents can be fitted on to one A4 sheet of paper if necessary, and usually they can be presented to most Russian consular departments as a faxed copy.

For Business Visas and Private Visas, you will need a Business Visa Invitation or Private Visa Invitation, given by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for Business Invitations) or the Russian Ministry of the Interior (for Private Invitations) at the request of the company or individual who is sponsoring your visa application. Many travel companies are able to get such invitations for a fee, and can arrange to have them mailed to you if your consulate needs an original copy.

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5- Find your Russian Embassy or Consulate

Once you got all the documents you need to apply for a Visa, the next step is to look for the nearest Russian consular department in your country to submit your visa application. If you are unsure where that is, check the Russian Consular Locator. You will need to check the processing times, application rules and visa tariffs for each consular department separately. They all are different!

6- Get an HIV test

If you are applying for a visa for longer than three months, you will need to provide, along with your application, a document certifying that you are HIV negative.

7- Get health insurance

Don't think to travel to Russia without travel insurance! Most Russian consular departments will require you to have health insurance covering your trip to Russia for the whole time of your staying. If you already have one, you will need to confirm that it covers the Russian Federation. You may also have to fill in an Insurance Card, noting the number and validity of your insurance policy.

8 - Get your picture taken

Your visa application must be accompanied by a recent photo of yourself. In most cases, you will need to submit one passport-size colour photograph taken against a white background. You must remember to sign the back of the photograph.

9 - Fill in the application form

Along with your passport and all the other documents, you will need to submit a completed Visa Application Form. You can download this form even online through the embassy or consulate website. However make sure that this form is valid with your Russian consulate before submitting your application. For your information, US, UK, Australian and Canadian citizens are required to fill in a longer and more detailed form (two pages) than the one for other nationalities.

10 - Send your application

Now you have everything ready, you can submit your documents to the nearest Russian Consulate. If you have the time, we strongly recommend that you send your application by post, or much better, directly to them, if you leave nearby. However, the process can take up to one month and, as far as we know, consular departments do not issue urgent visas by post. If you need a visa urgently, then you need to visit personally your nearest consular department. If you go, make sure you turn up as early as possible to avoid long standing queues.

Remember that your application must be accompanied by the following documents:

- Your passport;
- A completed Visa Application Form;
- Relevant visa support documents;
- Details of health insurance;
- One colour photograph;
- HIV test results (if applying for a six-month or longer visa);
- A postal or money order for the cost of your visa (if applying by post);
- A self-addressed envelope with pre-paid postage (if applying by post).

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11 - Waiting for your Russian Visa

Once you've applied, just wait until your visa is issued and don't do anything else. Avoid trying to contact the Russian Consular Departments before the date you have been told your visa will be ready. No worries! It will arrive on time.

12 - The Migration Card

Along with your Russian Visa, you will need to get also a Migration Card at your point of entry into Russia. This is a form in English and Russian which you must complete and present at passport control. Part of it will be stamped and returned to you, and you must keep it with your visa until your departure. Don't lose it or you will face troubles!

13 - Don't forget to register your Visa

Once you're in the Russian soil, the party that provides you with accommodation have to register your visa within seven working days of entry. If you are traveling on a Tourist Visa and staying in a hotel, then the hotel staff should register your visa at reception. In this case, the hotel will issue you with proof of registration, which you will be required to submit at passport control when you leave Russia.

If you are traveling on a Business or Private Visa, then you will be registered with a local department of the Federal Migration Service. Legally speaking, the responsibility to register you lies with the person or company who is hosting you or who has sponsored your visa.

To register you, they will need your passport and immigration card. They will then be issued with proof of registration, which you should carry until the end of your stay.

14 - Make a copy of your documents

It is a good practice and common sense to make photocopies of all your travel documents, including the main pages of your passport, your Russian Visa, and both sides of your migration card before you go. Should you lose your passport or migration card during your stay, copies are almost certain to make things easier. We recommend that you do that for your peace of mind!

