

Welcome to The Benedict School!

Contact Details:

Letters may be sent to you at:
Russia
190000 St Petersburg
P.O.Box 178
Benedict School
Your name (course code)

Your representatives:

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Flights

The group will be met at the airport by the Benedict School and your RLUS representative, who will welcome you to Russia and then take you to your accommodation. Similarly, if you leave with the group you will be taken to the airport for your departure.

If you have booked a group air ticket you are able to change the return date for a fee of approx. 2000 roubles, though only one change is possible. The best way to change your flight is to go to the BA office in St Petersburg which is located in the Owental Business Centre on 14 Sotsialisticheskaya Street, on the 6th floor in office 701; phone number 3800626. If you do change your return date, then you must let the Benedict School have a copy of the changed ticket and you will have to make your own way to the airport. If you require transport assistance, the school can arrange this for you at a cost of 1200 roubles. This is the current cost and is subject to change. We personally recommend you take a taxi as it's cheaper and we will provide you with taxi numbers.

Travel Around St. Petersburg

St Petersburg has a metro system as well as a wide-ranging network of trams, large public buses, minibus-sized private buses (marshrutkas) and trolleybuses. Prices are cheap compared to their British equivalents. The number of registered taxis is increasing and it is fairly easy to catch rides at prices that are low compared with those in Western cities. Taxis can be booked by telephone and fares should be negotiated in advance. The official RLUS advice is to use official taxis rather than hailing private cars (as many Russians prefer to do). If you choose to neglect this advice, be careful about whose car you are getting into.

It is possible to buy a monthly travel card valid for metro, tram, bus and trolleybus (rather than using separate tickets and tokens), which you can purchase in the metro stations and currently cost about 1400 roubles per month. It is cheaper if you get a card for just two or three modes of transport. As foreign students you do not qualify for an even cheaper student travel card. Alternatively, you can buy cards valid for a certain number of journeys on the metro. There is a conductor selling tickets on buses, trams and trolleybuses. Ensure that you are always in possession of a ticket.

Marshrutkas (private buses/minibuses) are a fairly new and efficient alternative form of transport. Travel by marshrutka is not included in the cost of travel cards and tickets must be bought from the driver.

Bureaucracy

From day one you will see that this remains a very real, and very irritating and VERY UNPREDICTABLE reality of post Soviet Life.

You are required to register your visa within three days of arrival, which you will need to pay for. This will be arranged for you by the Benedict School as costs 200 roubles. You may need to apply for a multi-entry visa upon registration. This currently costs 1000 roubles. You must make sure that you hand in your passport to the Benedict School when requested and make any necessary payments. Failure to do this may result in a fine, or at worst, deportation. As you may be without your passport for some time, please make sure that you have a photocopy of your passport and visa, before handing it in.

Until now OVIR, the organisation that registers you, have accepted foreign insurance policies. However, they are now insisting that you are covered for the costs of deportation. No UK insurance policy will cover you for this. This will mean that you will have to purchase a special Russian policy at a current cost of about 2200 roubles for the 16 week students and 4200 roubles for 36 week ones. Please make sure that you have the money to pay this.

You may have to have another HIV test done on arrival. If it's necessary this can be done for you at a Russian clinic and it is much cheaper than having your original test officially translated. The clinic does not reuse needles. You can inspect the sealed needle if you wish before the test is done. If you prefer, you can bring your own needle, but do not put it in your hand luggage. You can also have the test done at an international clinic, but it is much more expensive.

You must obey the rules for registering your visa in Russia. These may be very annoying but they must be obeyed. On arrival this will be done for you, but if you leave the city for more than three days you may have to re-register. Please ask the course provider for the latest information regarding this. If you leave the country for any period, you definitely have to re-register and you should inform the school of your intention to leave before you travel. If you fail to hand in your documents when requested or if you fail to re-register, you will be subject to a fine of up to 45,000 roubles. In extreme cases you may be deported in addition to having a fine.

Food and Drink

Unboiled water should on no account be drunk as this can lead to diarrhoea, followed by severe stomach cramps. Water should therefore be boiled for at least 5 minutes before it is drunk. Water filters can be picked up relatively cheaply from supermarkets and would be a good investment early in your stay. Bottled water is the best option and is readily available at shops and kiosks. If you need to, don't forget to see your doctor about suitable medicines before you leave home, though you can also buy them here.

You can buy a wide variety of food in St. Petersburg, though prices (especially for processed food, fresh fruit and vegetables) are roughly the same as and sometimes more expensive than in UK. Any fresh food and vegetables bought should be thoroughly cleaned before being eaten. There are a growing number of western style supermarkets of a generally high standard, but again goods are no cheaper than would be in the UK. There are also markets by many metro stations, as well as many traditional indoor markets.

Entertainment

There are various cinemas, showing an interesting selection of films. Most regions now have a multiplex showing the latest Hollywood blockbusters, but if you prefer something a little more intelligent Dom Kino shows new films from around the world (and has a British film festival every year). Their website (domkino.spb.ru) has more details.

Theatre tickets are still fairly cheap and performances generally world-class – you can get tickets from the box offices dotted around the city, often at underground stations. Carry your Russian student card, given to you on arrival, to ensure discount prices. It is worthwhile getting hold of an International Student Identification Card (ISIC) in the UK, although these can be purchased at Café Max in St. Petersburg.

There are also plenty of nightclubs, charging anything from 100 to 600 roubles on the door. ‘Authentic’ English-style pubs are also starting to appear – one of the best is The Red Lion, which is next to the Bronze Horseman. For those interested in sport, the aptly-named Vegas (vegas.ru) is a sports bar (and casino) showing most sports fixtures you’d find being broadcast in the UK.

The free English language St Petersburg Times (which is published every Tuesday and Friday) has reasonable listings of clubs and gigs in the Friday edition, and the Russian language Dosug and Kalendar, which come out weekly and fortnightly respectively, are also very informative. St. Petersburg in Your Pocket is also extremely useful for entertainment information as well as restaurants, museums, etc.

Eating Out

St. Petersburg is home to various restaurants and there are many establishments offering international cuisine, including Vietnamese, Armenian, Greek, Japanese, Uzbek, Lebanese, Georgian, Korean and even some serving Russian dishes. As the best places seem to change year by year I won’t list any here, but needless to say if you enjoy international cuisine there is plenty of choice at a reasonable price in St. Petersburg. The St. Petersburg Times is a good starting point for details on both cafes and restaurants.

Clothes

It can be surprisingly difficult to find good winter coats and shoes. You can find practical but unattractive snow shoes on markets from November onwards but fur coats will cost 5000 roubles at the very least. You are advised to bring with you clothes you can wear in several layers e.g. vests and tights, especially as it tends to be rather warm inside buildings and cold on the streets.

Books

There are several places specialising in English language books (e.g. Anglia, Britannia, John Parsons’ Bookshop), but these are generally expensive. A new place which has just opened up, Bukvoyed, located right in the city centre opposite Ploschad’ Vosstaniya, has a huge selection of cheaper books in both English and Russian. Many bookshops give a student discount on presentation of an ISIC card. Other popular bookshops are Dom Knigi (Nevskii Prospect), which has branches all over the city. It is easy to join a library here but be prepared for much bureaucracy should you wish to look at a library book.

Communications

Communication with the UK is pretty good. You can phone abroad from normal domestic phones but it can be a bit expensive, and of course family and friends can phone you on these numbers (they should dial 007 812 then the seven digit domestic number). It is pretty cheap to dial Russia from the UK. Prices on Telediscount (www.telediscount.co.uk) are currently 2p a minute to Russia (5p a minute to mobiles); and MoneySavingExpert (<http://callchecker.moneysavingexpert.com/intcallchecker>) are currently from 0.5p a minute to Russia (from 2p a minute to mobiles).

Alternatively you can buy phone cards which give you credit in an account which you access by dialling a local number and then entering a pin (Evroset usually has good rates for phoning the UK and other countries). Amongst other places, phone cards can be bought in computer shops and kiosks around the town and in underground stations. Western European Mobile phones (the GSM system – like in England) can usually be used in St Petersburg (if they are not blocked by the UK operator) but most students chose to connect to a Russian mobile phone network (and this is worth doing!) - St Petersburg being served by four main [GSM] providers: MTS, Beeline, Tele2 and Megafon. You need to be registered before you can buy a sim card, unless

you buy a Tele2 card. The coverage for this network however is not as good as the others and you can't really use it if you leave the city, although the calls are extremely cheap.

Post usually takes at least 2-3 weeks to arrive and may not arrive at all. You can send it to the address on page 1 or you can receive it via the Grand Hotel Europe (name c/o Grand Hotel Europe, P.O. Box 53, SF-53501 Lappeenranta, Finland). They only accept ordinary letters and postcards which take 3-5 days to arrive from the UK and will charge you for receiving them. It is also possible to send letters by express post from another desk in the Grand Hotel for about 100 roubles. Post can also be sent and received at Westpost at 86 Nevskiy Prospekt and takes 3-5 days to get through.

Students can also use e-mail at the main telephone office and at a growing number of Internet cafes all over the city including CafeMax on Nevsky Prospekt and Quo Vadis on Liteiny Prospekt. Many places now have free wifi connections if you want to use your laptop. There is also wi-fi at the Benedict School.

Money

You should expect to spend as much money as you do in the UK, if not a little more. A good average seems to be about 4000 roubles per week, depending on your lifestyle (this doesn't include accommodation). Please don't make the mistake of coming here and expecting to live on next to nothing.

Changing cash (dollars) is no problem as there are currency exchanges in the numerous banks and some shops, particularly in the centre, though please be aware that **dollars themselves cannot be spent in Russia**. Do not bring all your money in cash, as you are not covered by insurance if it is stolen. Do not bother with travellers' cheques either.

Roubles and sometimes dollars and euro can be withdrawn on credit cards and debit cards from the many cash machines around the city. There are cash machines in almost every metro station. Most dispensers limit the amount you can withdraw. Keep a record of all transactions. Visa and MasterCard are best, but Cirrus is also widely accepted. Chequebooks and cheque guarantee cards cannot be used in Russia.

You are required to show ID whenever you change money. A photocopy of your passport and visa is generally adequate when changing cash. On no account try to change money on the black market i.e. with individuals on the street – you will be ripped off.

Homestays

RLUS cannot guarantee where the families are situated. Your landlady may let you use her washing machine or even do your washing for you, usually because they are particular about the type of powder used or the settings etc. You should ask permission to do your laundry and pay for each load.

Please note that if you find your own accommodation, you must give a month's notice in writing or pay a month's rent in lieu of notice. You should also inform your UK University Liaison Officer and your RLUS rep. You are advised to make sure that it is safe and you cannot expect any assistance from the RLUS Student Representative to solve any problems

The landladies are almost without exception pensioners. As a guest in their flat, you should be courteous and inform them if you are expecting to come home very late at night, ask their permission if you want to have a guest round making sure they don't stay later than 9-10pm and ask to use their phone, washing machine etc.

Finally, while the Benedict School does its best to take into account the preferences that you have stated on your accommodation preference forms, it is unable, in return, to offer you any information about the families where you will be staying in advance. This is due to the fact that in Russia such issues are resolved much later than in

the UK and it would not be possible to get you the information in time. Should you need to know in order to get to your accommodation if you are making your own way there, please contact your RLUS rep.

You should pay the Benedict School for your accommodation promptly at the beginning of every month. Failure to do so may result in a fine.

The Course

Tuition will take place in a newly refurbished building about 10-15 minutes walk from Sennaya Ploschad' / Sadovaya metro stations. Tuition is usually in the mornings from 10:00, and you may have slightly longer days in order to give you one "library day" a week – that is a day with no lessons. The teachers are friendly and willing to adapt lessons to meet the needs of students. The groups are split according to ability.

You will be based in a building in which only foreign students are taught. In the past students have complained that this leads to a lack of integration with Russian students, lack of involvement with university clubs etc. The faculty sometimes arranges a few activities per semester for students, but other than this the onus will be upon you if you want to get out and make Russian friends. Russian universities are different to British ones in that they often don't have many clubs, societies, a student union etc. for students to be involved with. Past students have noted that more 'personal' treatment is often on offer at the Benedict School.

Unlike the system in most English universities, classes at the Benedict School are one and a half hours long. There will be a fairly long test on your first day. This test is to place you in groups in terms of ability. Don't be too concerned, should you have a bad day as it will be possible later to request a change of group.

Life In General

As with any big city, St Petersburg has more than its fair share of crime and students should always be on their guard. Pick pocketing, especially in the metro, is rife, so be wary. Make sure that you have a bag that closes securely and try not to carry valuables (purses, wallets, cameras) in outside pockets (even if they do zip up) as in a crowded metro carriage, trolleybus or shop it is all too easy to have something stolen without even noticing. Recently, a number of students have fallen victim to theft, therefore it must be stressed that carrying large quantities of money, personal documents and credit cards – especially all in one place (i.e. in one wallet) - should be avoided. It is not unusual for foreigners (usually males) to be stopped in the street by the militsiya and requested to show their documents. **CARRY YOUR RUSSIAN STUDENT CARD AND A PHOTOCOPY OF YOUR PASSPORT, VISA AND REGISTRATION AND MIGRATION CARD WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES.**

The majority of problems that students seem to have occurred late at night, when they are out and about and drunk, so be careful. If you do go out and drink a lot, bear in mind that you will probably be forcing other students into taking care of you, which may not be as easy as it is on a British campus.

Students have asked us to stress that you should be prepared for anything and everything to take a long time and to be difficult to arrange. You can expect things to be closed when the cold has set in (even if your guide book says that it will be open). Don't be offended if people don't smile and take care when crossing roads.

Finally, one thing to be aware of is that, as in parts of Eastern Germany and Central Europe, nationalism is on the increase in Russia and in St Petersburg in particular. This has only ever been directed towards non-white students of African/Asian appearance and is something that all students should be aware of – please feel free to get in touch with your RLUS rep if you have any further questions. The senior RLUS representative in St Petersburg is of Asian appearance and can answer any questions you may have regarding this issue.

Visas / Travelling Outside St. Petersburg

In Britain you will be issued with a single-entry, ninety-day visa, which at present is the only visa issued to students. This may not be long enough for your entire course, and so on your first day at university you will hand in your passport and apply for a multi-entry visa. You will have to pay for this (approx 700 roubles), as well as perhaps have an HIV test (yes, another one), during your first week. The advantage of having a multi-entry visa is that you can leave Russia (and return!) whenever you want. It does, however, take around six weeks to process, so you will be without your passport for this duration and will not be able to travel.

When travelling, use your common sense. There are areas that should be avoided (e.g. Chechnya and the Caucasus), and you will need to apply for a visa if you decide to travel to Belarus. If you are not sure about the situation in a country or area that you are intending to visit please check with the consulate and they will be able to advise you. You can also look at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. There is a link to the page on Russia on the RLUS website.

Students will get reading weeks in which they can travel, the dates are in the general briefing document. If you leave St. Petersburg, even to travel to Moscow, you must be in possession of your passport - a photocopy is not sufficient.

It is possible to invite friends or relatives through agencies in the city, e.g. Sot-West Contact Service have been particularly good in the past (ostwest.com). You could go through an agency in Britain that offers the full service - invitation, visa and advice about registration on arrival, air ticket and accommodation. Scott's Tours 141 Whitfield St London W1T 5EW, phone 020 7383 5353 or Regent Holidays, 15 John Street, Bristol BS1 2HR, tel. 0117 921 1711 can make such arrangements. It is best not to be over-ambitious regarding travel during reading weeks as the best-laid plans can fall through without warning.

Your insurance may cover you for Europe only. If that is the case and you decide to travel beyond the Urals or into Asia, you will need to extend your insurance. Make sure you know how to do this with your insurance company.

Many students prefer to stay in St Petersburg for at least one of the reading weeks as the city has so much to offer. Outside the city there are miles of lovely countryside dotted with imperial estates, all of which are well worth a visit. When the rivers and canals aren't covered in ice, cruises can be taken both in the city and around its environs.

All in all, St Petersburg is an excellent city for studying and few students would have any hesitation in recommending it in the strongest terms.

FAQs

- **Where can I find a map of the St Petersburg underground system?**

<http://petersburgcity.com/map/metro/> You can buy a transport map of the city showing all roads and all public transport routes from almost any book shop and we strongly recommend you get one. Dom Knigi is a good place to get one.

- **Do I need to bring passport photos with me?**

Yes, they would be useful, but it's easy to get them done here. You'll need one for your student card and your multi-entry visa (for courses longer than 13 weeks). The requirements of the photos may be specific so don't get any done before you come if you don't have any.

- **Do I need to get another HIV test done?**
It's possible that you may need one for your multi-entry visa. If you do need it for the multi-entry visa, it's cheaper and easier to get another one done in Russia rather than pay to have an English one officially translated. At the western clinic, an HIV test currently costs about 1200 rubles.
- **Can I withdraw money from cash machines?**
Yes, cash machines can be found everywhere. Be warned that sometimes some cards don't work in some machines. You just have to keep trying until you find a machine that's willing to dispense you some money, so it's a good idea to make sure you always have a bit of cash on you just in case you can't find a machine that works for you. Some bank cards just don't work at all, so it's a good idea to bring more than one card with you just in case. Remember to carry only one with you at any one time in case you lose it, it's stolen or whatever. That way you'll have a back-up way to access your money in case of a bad situation. Speaking of money, don't bother bringing cheques or travellers' cheques.
- **How far from the school will I be living?**
This can't be confirmed much before your arrival, but central locations are not guaranteed. You may find yourself commuting on a daily basis for up to 1.5 hours.
- **How do I get the multi-entry visa?**
If you are on a course longer than 13 weeks, your passport will be taken by the school following your arrival and your visa will be annulled. You will be given a multi-entry visa after this, though this can take up to five weeks to process, during which time you will not be allowed to leave St. Petersburg.
- **How do I register my visa and what are the rules?**
The rules change like the wind so be prepared for that. The current rules are that you should submit your passport, visa and migration card (you should get this on the plane before you land) and the school will register you for the duration of your stay. If you leave St. Petersburg, for example in reading week, and travel within Russia, you should register in whichever city you go to. This can be done at the hostel/hotel where you stay. If you leave the country during reading week, you MUST inform the school of the date that you will leave and return. If you fail to do so, migration services may impose a fine and in the worst case, could deport you. Following your return to Russia, you must turn in your documents on the first working day in order to be re-registered. Failure to do so could result in a very large fine and possible deportation. Please check the latest rules with your RLUS representative before you travel.
- **What clothes should I bring?**
Bring layers for the cold weather as it's usually warm inside buildings but obviously cold outside. It can actually be rather warm in St Petersburg in September and in Spring/Summer so don't bring just cold weather clothes. It's rather rainy here and can be slushy so boots are advisable.
- **Where can I use the internet?**
If you have a laptop, you can take advantage of the free wi-fi in places such as Subway, McDonald's, etc. and even the Benedict School itself. You can also buy USB modems at any phone or electronic shop. There are some internet café's such as Café Max on Nevsky Prospect (nearest metro: Mayakovskaya). You could use the internet in your host family's flat provided that you ask their permission first and you pay for it. This is best discussed and negotiated upon arrival.
- **What are the host families like?**
Let's be honest, having paying guests is like a business for them. Bed and breakfast is what you're paying for and that's exactly what you'll get. You'll be one of the lucky ones if you have a host family that are happy to have good conversations with you or spend time with you. Note that cooking facilities are not necessarily available for you to use.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact your RLUS reps at rlus.spb@gmail.com

Updated June 2010; please note that inflation is high and prices are subject to change.