



**RLUS Volgograd Orientation Pack
Spring 2011**

Welcome to Russia!

Welcome to Russia from your RLUS representatives, Natasha Fevre and Catherine Suart. We both work at Language Link and share the job of providing RLUS students in Moscow, Volgograd, Tver and Yaroslavl with advice, assistance and support for the duration of your stay in Russia. We have both graduated with Russian degrees and have experience travelling and working in Russia.

This orientation pack contains a lot of the information that you might need during your stay (including important safety and emergency information), so please read it carefully and keep it for future use. If you have any questions that cannot be answered by this document, contact us and we'll be happy to help. However, please remember that RLUS is only one part of our full-time jobs. Things like organising trips/booking theatre tickets aren't part of our responsibilities. As RLUS representatives, we can help you in the following ways:

- **If your valuables/documents get lost or stolen**, you should notify your Course Director within 24 hours. He will arrange for you to be accompanied to the police station to report the theft/loss. You should then contact us and we'll help you arrange your insurance claim.
- **If you lose your passport** we will help you make arrangements to get a replacement; this will require you to travel to Moscow.
- **In the unlikely event that you get arrested**, contact your Course Director and one of us as soon as possible and we will inform the Consul at the British Embassy. If you cannot get through to us, contact the Embassy Duty Officer, who will notify the Consul. Do not leave a message on an answer phone, as this is counted as a call.
NON-BRITISH STUDENTS please note: We will not be able to help you unless you provide us with the contact details of your Consul and Embassy duty officer.
- **If you fall seriously ill**, call your Course Director, who will arrange treatment for you in Volgograd if possible. If you then need to be transferred to Moscow or home for treatment, we will help you organise this. We will also help you make an insurance claim for your medical bills if they exceed the insurance excess of £40.
- **If you want to make a doctor's appointment**, your Course Director will give you contact details of good local clinics.
- **If you need to go home for compassionate or health reasons** we will assist you in this, and in making the necessary insurance claims.
- **If you are having problems with your course or accommodation** that cannot be solved by talking to your teachers or the accommodation officer at your institution, we can liaise with the Course Providers to resolve the matter.

We will regularly phone your elected group leader to deal with any queries or problems that may arise, and will visit you at least once during your stay. At other times, both of us can be contacted at work or at home. We will provide you with our mobile phone numbers in case of emergencies, so you can always contact one of us wherever we are. However, they are for emergency purposes ONLY.

Russia is a unique place, and the lifestyle and attitudes here are very different from those in the West. Living here will be a rewarding but challenging experience. It will undoubtedly leave you with memories to treasure for the rest of your life, but at times, unexpected cultural differences may irritate and unnerve you. We therefore ask you to pay attention to the information in this pack, even if you have spent time in Russia before: things here are constantly changing, so you are bound to come across something new.

Enjoy your stay!

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Some Tips on Living in Russia

Life with a host family

Students live in carefully selected home-stay accommodation, generally near the centre of the city (not more than 30 minutes on public transport and often within walking distance of the place you'll be studying). The accommodation will be selected taking into account the information you gave on your application form. The standard home-stay setup is usually with a middle aged or elderly lady who is used to having foreign students as lodgers. Please be aware that you will have to make the first rent payment on arrival or the next day, and that these prices are subject to increase as inflation is much higher in Russia than in the UK (though Language Link will give you plenty of warning if this is the case). Please make sure that you pay your rent on time every month and that the first payment is made on the day of your arrival or the next day in order to avoid any problems or misunderstandings with your accommodation provider.

Relations with your hosts

Russian parents do not always regard their teenage and young adult children as adults, and tend to advise them on what to wear and eat, and generally ask lots of questions about what is going on in their lives. As a 'host child' it is likely your 'host parents' will treat you in a similar manner. Please try not to take offence – it is simply a demonstration of care for your well being. If you really find such attention annoying or unpleasant, just remark politely that you are not accustomed to it, or that it embarrasses you.

Many host families are relatively elderly, and may be upset if you regularly come home in the early hours of the morning in a less than sober state. Although you have a right to an independent lifestyle, please try to respect your host family's feelings, and always warn them if you're planning to come home late. Please **DO NOT** bring friends to stay overnight without asking permission first. Friends of the opposite sex will not be allowed to spend the night.



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Meals

If your hosts provide you with breakfast or supper, do not hesitate to say if you find something too rich or sweet, or that you simply do not eat a certain food. Your hosts might try to give you more food than you are used to eating - don't politely accept this at first as later they might worry that your appetite has decreased. In order not to offend the host, you may say that the food is tasty, but that you are not used to it and would prefer something else, or that you are already full (useful phrases include “я уже сыт(а)”; “у меня аллергия на этот продукт”; “я не могу привыкнуть к этому вкусу, я больше не хочу, спасибо”).

Please be considerate if you use your host's kitchen to cook any of your own meal and clean up after yourself.

House Rules

In Russian homes it is not acceptable to wear your street shoes in the house. Instead, people wear slippers (тапочки) or socks. Russians will often wash their hands when they first enter their home and may expect you to do the same. Russian apartments are not usually very spacious, so it is not acceptable to leave your things all over your room, or indeed other rooms, or to leave your bed unmade. Please make an effort to be tidy.

Cultural Differences in Interpersonal Relations

Visiting Russian Friends

If you visit acquaintances for the first time, it is a good idea to take a gift for the hosts (e.g. a box of sweets or chocolates, a bottle of wine, flowers). Only buy odd numbers of flowers, as even numbers are associated with funerals.

Russians are not very punctual people. The limit to acceptable lateness is about 10 minutes (though this does not apply for important meetings!). When making arrangements, Russians often give an approximate time (“около 7”, “к двум часам”, “дня через 3”).

Conversations with Russians

Russians are more open than Westerners in talking about their incomes, although this is becoming less common. Do not be offended if someone asks how much your parents earn, or about salaries for various professions in your country (although of course you are not obliged to answer such questions).

The ‘вы’ form should be used during introductions, in conversations with people older than yourself and with strangers. You can use ‘ты’ to address students your own age, children, or once your Russian acquaintances suggest speaking ‘на ты’.

Russians often criticize their authorities, laws, systems and government, but they react very negatively to similar criticism by foreigners.

It is generally acceptable to phone people between 10am and 10pm. You should only call earlier/later if you have given prior warning, or are sure the person won't object.

Behaviour in Public Places

It is not considered acceptable to speak loudly on public transport, in public areas, in restaurants, or in museums.

Russians often seem very serious and unsmiling to foreigners. However, the absence of a smile simply signifies a neutral attitude. A smile expresses goodwill.

Russians have a different concept of personal space from Westerners. It might feel that they are standing very close to you in queues or on escalators, and they may lightly touch you during conversation.

In the street and on public transport you may be stopped by strangers asking for neutral information, e.g. directions, what time it is, if you have a lighter, etc. (they generally start such questions with “Вы не подскажете...”). In other circumstances you should ignore strangers who speak to you in the street.

Gender Roles

At bars and restaurants, the person who invited you usually pays the bill, although you should always offer if you are unsure. Men will almost always pay for women.

The division of roles for men and women is much more traditional than in the West. Men will offer to carry women's bags, and it is considered unacceptable for women to lift or move heavy objects such as furniture. On the other hand, men generally don't get involved with cooking and washing up.

City Transport

Russian Drivers

Unfortunately, Russian drivers are not the strictest observers of traffic regulations. Be very careful when crossing the street. Where possible, take an underground pedestrian passage called a *переход*, the location of which is indicated by a blue sign with a picture of stairs, or use a pedestrian crossing.



Taxis

Most official taxis are yellow, but Russians generally just flag down “gypsy cabs” (private cars) instead. Passengers usually sit in the front seat. Prices are negotiable but should be about 50-100 roubles within the city centre. On public holidays the price can be higher. They are probably best avoided, especially if you’re alone, but if you do decide to take a gypsy cab, always agree a fare before getting in and never get in a car if other passengers are already being carried. You should never take a gypsy cab alone at night.

To book a taxi, ring 8 (8442) 281010 or 916916.

Buses, Trams and Trolleybuses

Most places in the town centre are within reasonable walking distance, but if you're going further afield, or want to save time, then public transport is the best way of getting around. There is a good network of bus, tram and trolleybus routes with frequent services from early in the morning to late at night. There is a flat fare of 6 roubles on any bus, tram or trolleybus route. You will usually be able to pay a conductor on board for your ticket (although be warned that there may not be one on every route, and there’s a fine if you're caught without a ticket; you can buy a ticket from the driver if there isn’t a conductor). Prices rise to about 20-25 roubles after 9pm. If you use public transport a lot, then it's worth getting a monthly pass, valid on buses, trams and trolleybuses. Be warned that public transport can get very crowded, and not just during the rush hour – be prepared to push to get on and get off (especially as people don’t queue to get on buses, trams, trolley buses).

There are lots of маршрутки (маршрутные такси), which are privately run transit vans that follow certain routes and go faster than other forms of public transport. The destinations are listed on a sign in the window of the bus. One journey costs about 10 roubles. You have to tell the driver when you want get off (“Остановите [на остановке], пожалуйста”).

General Advice on Public Transport

If a Russian says something to you on public transport, nine times out of ten they’re asking whether or not you are getting out at the next stop (“Вы будете выходить на следующей?”). If you’re not, move to let them through.

Seats on public transport are intended for the elderly, people with young children or disabled people. You should give up your seat to the elderly, or they may shout at you.

Travelling by Train and Plane



Russian Railways

Train travel within Russia is currently very cheap in comparison with the West. The two main classes are купе (four to a cabin, two up two down) and плацкарт: (open carriages, less luxurious but cheaper). All carriages have a samovar, so there’s a constant supply of boiling water for making tea, coffee and pot noodles. You will pay a small fee for bedding once you’re on the train if you’re travelling overnight.

Buying Train Tickets

There is only one main station in Volgograd, which is less than 10 minutes’ walk from school. The best place to buy tickets there is on the 2nd floor (up the stairs to the left of the entrance), as the queues are shorter there.

You need your passport or your passport number to buy tickets and to get on the train (if you are travelling internationally, you’ll need to show your passport). Tell the lady at the counter: “Один билет (2/3 билета) на поезд № ____ на ____ число.”

You can also book train tickets online at www.realrussia.co.uk.

Plane Tickets

A good place to buy plane tickets is STAR travel (он ул. Коммунистическая 28а, 3rd floor (Russian style), room 207, tel. 8 (8442) 33 32 28, 33 28 02; contact Tatiana Chernyavskaya on vog@startravel.ru).

For contacting airlines directly: British Airways uses Домодедово airport; you can contact them on 8 (495) 363 2525. Аэрофлот also offer decent deals: For details of your nearest office and information on prices and flight times, call 8 (495) 753 5555. Аэрофлот fly from Шереметьево airport. Keep an eye out for the increasing number of other budget airlines, such as Skyexpress and S7, flying to various locations across Russia.

Changing Your Return Flight Date

Your RLUS flight is booked through BMI. If you wish to change the return date, you may do so only once for a £55 fee, although it does depend on seat availability on the dates you wish to travel. You should send Dr Bivon (roy.bivon@rlus.co.uk) a selection of your preferred dates for your flight home as soon as you can. Please note that you need to be flexible regarding dates for flying home, as places for your type of ticket (a group ticket) are limited. He will book the change as soon as he receives the £55 payment, either by cheque (payable to Study in Russia and sent to Dr Bivon at Flint House, Lynn Road, Stoke Ferry, King's Lynn, PE33 9SW), or via internet banking (banking details: Sort Code 08 60 81, Account Number 33195965, Study in Russia), or as a cash payment to the representatives in Moscow. If Dr Bivon is able to obtain an appropriate ticket, he will then contact you by email with your new electronic ticket reference (which you will need when you check in). If you have booked your own ticket, you will have to make any changes of your return date yourself.

Visas and Insurance

Most RLUS students have an initial 3-month single-entry visa which is converted into a multi-entry to cover the duration of their course after the first month, you may have to request at the centre that they do this for you. These allow you to cross the border as and when you like. However, if you don't have a multi-entry (многократная) visa and you wish to travel abroad during the reading weeks, you need to apply for an exit/re-entry visa. This is not available at every institute due to local OVIR regulations, so ask before you plan any trips. Exit/re-entry visas take about two weeks to process, so don't book flights until you have your visa. **DO NOT LEAVE RUSSIA BEFORE THE END OF YOUR COURSE ON YOUR CURRENT VISA IF IT'S A SINGLE ENTRY. YOU WILL BE UNABLE TO RE-ENTER THE COUNTRY.**

Please note that you will be required to pay Language Link directly on arrival for visa registration.

If you are going anywhere south or west, even within Russia, check you have the visas required for any countries you may pass through on the way (e.g. a transit visa for Belarus). US, Canadian, EU and Swiss citizens currently don't need visas for Ukraine (for maximum 90-day trips); however, this policy may change and you should always check the latest visa requirements with the Embassy before you travel.

If you are travelling to another country that requires a visa (e.g. China) it is up to you to sort out that visa yourself.

Please check your insurance policy. If you are covered for Europe only, you will not be covered for travel beyond the Urals.

General Travel Advice

If you decide to travel independently within the Russian territory, please inform your host family. For your own safety, tell the RLUS representatives of your whereabouts, and leave a contact number and address. Remember that no one guarantees you complete safety during your travels through Russia. Be careful and attentive, and keep in contact with your host family and the RLUS reps while travelling.

Before you plan any trips, we recommend you check out the British foreign office website (www.fco.gov.uk), which provides up-to-date information about where it is unsafe to travel, and what regulations there may be. This recommendation extends to students who are not British; however, you should also check your own foreign office website for specific information and travel advice pertaining to citizens of your country.

PLEASE NOTE: Absence from the course is only permitted in cases of illness or during official travel weeks. Attendance and marks will be sent to your universities.

Safety in Russia

Documents

You must have your documents (passport, visa, migration card and registration slip) with you at all times. The police have the right to arrest anybody without documents. You can be detained for up to 72 hours or until your documents are produced. If you are supplied with a student pass/card by your course provider, you should always carry that with you too as the militia may ask to see it.

If you believe the risk of losing your documents is higher than the risk of being stopped and fined, then you may choose to carry photocopies of them instead. Strictly speaking, the law requires you to have the originals with you, but you can often get away with copies as long as they're clear. Make sure you have copies of your passport information page, your visa, the migration card, and the registration slip. Double check that your passport number matches the one quoted in your visa.

The Militia

Contact with the police (better known as the милиция) should be avoided as much as possible. Most often you'll see them in the metro and near buildings of governmental or state importance. You should try to blend in as much as possible. Please note that if you are very drunk, the police have the right to, and will, arrest you. The police regularly stop young males – normally they just check your documents and let you go. Your documents will be in order and registered, so if the police try to say otherwise and start demanding money, they are probably just trying to supplement their own (admittedly meagre) salary. There are a number of ways to deal with this: offer to travel to the милиция station to pay the fine on the condition that a representative from your course meets you there, and get out your mobile phone to call the Embassy. If that doesn't stop them bothering you (it should do), then demand to see their names and numbers on their милиция ID (удостоверение). If you legitimately have to pay a fine (for drunken behaviour or not having your documents with you), demand a receipt that has been stamped and signed. However, if you are on your own very late at night, and the милиция officers are behaving threateningly or aggressively, the easiest thing is to pay the fine. Being out alone in the early hours of the morning, especially when carrying large sums of money, is asking for trouble.

If the police visit you at your home to check your documents, you are not required to open the door. Be aware that there are people who will represent themselves as police in order to gain access to your apartment. The best policy is not to let them in.

If you are arrested SAY NOTHING and SIGN NOTHING. If you are forced to sign something write that you do not understand what you are signing. Keep demanding to speak to your Embassy or to a RLUS representative (you should carry the emergency numbers given to you upon arrival at all times). Try to use the one phone call you are entitled from the station to speak to the Embassy, rather than a RLUS representative or your course provider, as the Embassy Duty Officer is better placed to provide assistance.

Common Sense Advice

Foreigners are particularly vulnerable to crime so avoid drawing attention to yourself – don't walk in big groups speaking loudly in English. Pick pocketing is very common. Only carry a small amount of money in your purse/wallet and keep most of your cash separate. Watch out for pickpockets at markets and in tourist areas. Keep bags and wallets shut at all times, and ensure that they are in front of you where you can keep an eye (or even better a hand) on them at all times. Never leave your bag or coat with valuables in the pockets unattended or on the back of a chair in a cafe. If you do have something stolen, you can make a claim for it through your insurance policy.

For this, you will need to obtain a police report (справка) within 24 hours of the crime. A representative from your centre can accompany you to the police station (отделение милиции) nearest to where the crime

took place; the RLUS reps will then assist you (liaising with Language Link Volgograd if necessary) with sending the справка and claim form to the insurance company.

Absolutely never touch drugs here. The penalties are simply not worth the risk, and if you break the law, at the end of the day we cannot help you. The attitude even towards soft drugs like cannabis is no different than to heroin, and usually entails a prison sentence. This would be a great way to improve your Russian, but prisons here are not pretty...

If you go out for the evening, stay in a group, and plan it so that you accompany each other home right up to the front door, even if you then have to stay the night on someone's floor. It is inconvenient, of course, but better to be safe than sorry, and your hosts (given some warning) should be understanding. Female students are strongly recommended not to walk home alone after 11pm, and they should be prepared to put up with occasional verbal harassment late at night as the attitude of some Russian males towards the opposite sex unfortunately leaves a lot to be desired. Russians who have had too much to drink might be loud and obnoxious, but if you ignore them they usually won't bother you. Male students should also be careful when out late at night in large English-speaking groups, as nationalism is on the rise (in Russia as a whole), as is the growing number of unprovoked attacks on foreigners.

Some streets are badly lit, so if you're out at night try and keep to the main streets, which tend to have better street lighting. When taking a taxi late at night, see that you are delivered to your doorstep.

Remember that safety here in Russia, as at home, is generally a question of using common sense and making smart decisions. Always be aware of yourself, your belongings and your surroundings, and you shouldn't come across any major problems.

Visitors

If you are going to be entertaining guests from home, they will need to have a tourist visa. If they're coming through a tourist company, and staying in a hotel, then this should all be organised for them and they can register their visa at the hotel.

If your guests are travelling independently, things are a little more complex, but not impossible. Visas can currently be purchased from on-line companies and UK- or Russia-based tourist agencies. Your guest will have to register the visa within three working days of arriving in Russia (make sure the visa company you use gives you instructions on how to do this). You could try searching for visa companies on google or yahoo, but we would recommend trying to organise visas through an established travel agent as they are usually much more reliable. Although many people do use online companies without any problems, visa laws are subject to frequent change, and on-line companies don't always offer legal registration. A few tourist agencies in the UK worth checking out are Scotts Tours (www.scottstours.co.uk, sales@scottstours.co.uk, 020 7383 5353), Intourist (www.intourist.co.uk, info@intourist.co.uk, 020 7727 4100), Direct Passport and Visa Company (020 7229 0116/ 020 7229 1412) and Alpha-Omega Ltd. (www.alphaomega-travel.com, neilh@alphaomega-travel.com, 01274 760600).

Shopping

Grocery Shopping



In larger shops where products are on open display, you usually have to leave your bags at the entrance, either with an attendant or in a locker. There is a Ramstore (a large and quite expensive supermarket) located near the metro at ул. Краснознаменная 7а (open 07:00-23:00). The supermarket Gourmand on Проспект Ленина (near ул. Гагарина) has a large selection, but is more expensive than smaller Russian-style food shops.

Суперман, on ул. Советская, has been recommended by previous students as the best option for cheap food and variation. It has replaced a large market, called Центральный рынок. Only part of this market remains, but you can still buy

fruit and meat. Plus, if you go in and turn right, walk to the end, you'll come to a factory outlet of Volgograd's main vodka distillery!

There is bound to be at least one small продукты shop within 5 minutes' walk of your apartment, where you can buy basics like bread, cheese and frozen food. In such small shops, the products are stored behind counters, so you have to explain to the attendant exactly what you want. Be advised to bring a bag if you would like to save money, as you will be charged (though usually not more than a rouble) for each bag you need to tote your purchases home.

Most fruit and vegetables can be bought from small kiosks on the street. There is a smaller variety of fruit and vegetables in Russia than in the West (don't expect to find yams for an affordable price), and availability depends greatly on the season.

Shopping for Household Goods

For cheap, basic household goods, it's best to look for small Russian stores (хозяйственный магазин/товары для дома) in the area where you live. The Перекресток at Парк Хаис has been recommended by previous students.

Shopping for Clothes

Russia is not a great place for buying clothes, as good-quality clothes are very expensive and Russian styles and sizes differ greatly from those in the West. Wherever you are, it is best to head to the market (where goods are cheaper, though the quality can be suspect).

The most popular place for a day of shopping is along Проспект Ленина. There are also many shopping centres where brands such as Nike, Benetton, Mango, etc can be found. One good shopping centre, though located outside of the centre and a little expensive, is Park House, and stocks just about anything you could want, including clothes. To get there, take маршрутка 7а, 41 or 64а from the centre of town. Пирамиу sells clothes as do Кино and Рамстор.

Shopping for Books and DVDs

There is a large bookshop on ул. Коммунистическая, with a selection of foreign language books in the basement. There is another bookshop on the corner of ул. Комсомолская and ул. Мира (but that one is not so good for foreign language books). Previous students have recommended Буква, ул. Мира, 11 and Книжный Город, ул. Гоголя, 4.

For cheap English language DVDs, there is a good kiosk under the subway on ул. Комсомолская. Previous students have also recommended Муз-Торг in the Универмар.

Shopping for Souvenirs

There are good souvenir stands in Аллея Героев. There is also a souvenir shop on ул. Коммунистическая, further up from the station.

Unfortunately, shopkeepers and market stallholders often overcharge people with a foreign accent, so you should always bargain. It's advisable to go souvenir shopping with a Russian who can haggle for you, or find out beforehand what a reasonable price is for whatever you are shopping for (ask your host family, or look around).

Telephones

Phoning Home

You must use an international phone card (телефонная карта для международных звонков) to call abroad. **DO NOT USE YOUR HOST FAMILY'S PHONE TO CALL ABROAD WITHOUT A CARD.** You will need a phone that can be switched from 'pulse' to 'tone' mode (sometimes you need to switch to the tone regime on answer by pressing the * or P-T button) or you can go through the operator given on the card. Using phone cards makes calls



much cheaper, e.g. MTU/Matrix/Zebra Telecom/ArcTel cards give about 3 hours to the UK for £6. They can be bought at kiosks or mobile phone outlets, Евросеть has been recommended by previous students. You should follow the instructions on the back of the card.

Dialling Codes

To make an international call from Russia you must always dial 8 first, wait for the tone to change, dial 10, then dial the international country code for wherever you're calling, and finally the rest of the telephone number (including area code).

Calling within Russia

To make calls to other cities in Russia you have to dial 8 first, wait for the tone to change, and then dial the number with area code (Moscow's is either 495 or 499 and St Petersburg's is 812). To dial mobile phones, you must also press 8, wait for the tone to change, and then dial the mobile phone number (dropping the 8 at the beginning).

Public telephones are called таксофоны, and are found on street corners. To use them you need a phone card, which can be bought at kiosks in various units. Put the card in the phone box, chip upwards, dial the number and remember to press the telephone symbol button on answer (otherwise the person you're phoning won't hear you). Only local calls can be made from public telephones.

Calls from Abroad

If friends and family want to call you from home the cheapest way is to use a phone card such as Swiftcall or onetel (UK) or US2Global or BestRatesCards (US), which can be bought on the Internet. Try www.1st4phonecards.com for a few options. You can buy cards for calling Russia for as little as 1.1p a minute. For even cheaper calls, go to the website www.telediscount.co.uk. The international dialling code for Russia is +7 and the Volgograd code is 8442.

Mobile Phones

It's a good idea to get a mobile phone while you're here, for security and convenience. You can buy a Russian SIM card for about £5 (giving you 100 roubles credit to start), and have it inserted in your phone from home, or buy a Russian phone for £20-100. They are not expensive to run (and it's easy to top up your credit in shops, using automated kiosks or buying cards), though with some companies you do pay to receive calls, and if you are contacted from a landline the cost is much higher.

Technically it is not possible to buy a SIM card without a passport and a registered visa, though in certain shops you may be lucky with only a copy of your passport and a letter stating that your visa is in the process of being registered. Alternatively, you can wait until your visa has been registered and take your passport and registered visa with you to obtain your SIM card. MTS, Megafon and Beeline are widespread networks, although some students have had difficulties texting England from Megafon and Beeline networks. You may be charged heavily for receiving calls from the UK on your mobile.

E-mail

There are a number of internet cafes, and prices are usually around 70-100 roubles per hour. There is also a good internet place on the third floor of the Торговый Centre (accessed via a separate entrance on the side of the shopping centre). It costs 65 roubles/hour and there are no traffic charges. The post office also offers internet access – they have five computers, and it costs 50 roubles per hour (the door is off the main street ул. Мира, down the side). Previous students recommended the internet café Кеебp at Park House, saying that it's new, cheap and there are many computers, although quite far away.

If you have a laptop, you'll be glad to know that internet access is much cheaper than at home, and is fairly simple to set up using an Internet card such as Telecom IP Telephonia (although connections can be slow due to the Russian phone network). You should always ask your landlady's permission before logging on at home, because it usually means tying up the phone line.

Post



Sending Letters

The postal service in Russia is unreliable and can be extremely slow. If you want to send letters abroad, you can buy stamps at any post office. Just ask for “марки на письмо в США/Англию/wherever you want to send your letter”.

Sending Parcels

Not all post offices accept parcels. The central post office is on Площадь Павших Борцов (on the corner of ул. Мира and ул. Гоголя) and provides internet and postal services.

If your parcel is small and weighs less than 20g, you can send it as a бандероль. This is a small plastic packet, in which they will place the item you wish to send (don't wrap it up yourself). It is a bit simpler and less time consuming than sending a посылка, which is a bigger type of parcel that has to be wrapped up in brown paper (at the post office), glued and tied with string. For both types of parcel you have to fill in a couple of (if not four!) customs declaration forms (in Russian only) stating the contents and its value, the sender and the recipient.

If you want to send books home, there is a special reduced rate for sending printed matter (and it doesn't involve any forms).

Receiving Mail

Letters and parcels can be sent to you at the Language Link Volgograd address (RUSSIA, 400131 Volgograd, Komsomolskaya Ulitsa 6, Language Link, your name)

To collect parcels you may have to go to the post office yourself – you receive a notification slip telling you which post office to go to. Fill out the details on the back and take it, along with your passport, to the necessary post office.

It's not advisable to send large parcels via DHL. Past experience has shown that they are prone to being stopped at the border and can only be picked up for a fee (with the added complication of Russian customs forms) or sent home on payment of a fine.

Health

You should be able to get adequate medical treatment in Volgograd. Most RLUS centres will send students first to a general clinic and then to a more specific doctor, depending on the nature of the ailment and/or the diagnosis given by the doctor.

Volgograd students may be referred to one of two municipal clinics: (1) to the Clinic of the Central Region (for various symptoms) or to the (2) Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialists (ENTs). Students should talk to a teacher at Language Link if they would like to make an appointment, and/or like someone to accompany them to the clinic.

Please read your insurance policy before you have any medical treatment, as if you have any which is not covered then you may have to foot the bill (e.g. treatment on problems which existed before you came to Russia are normally not included). Please be aware that even for things covered by your policy, you will have to pay all charges directly to the clinic where you are treated and make an insurance claim afterwards.

Always use a condom if you have sex, as STDs in Russia are rife. Most chemists stock a wide range of brands. Morning-after pills are largely available over the counter at chemists. Currently the most well-known (and perhaps the only) pill is a two dose pill called постинор, found in most pharmacies for a reasonable rate. If you have any questions, you would be best advised to consult a pharmacist.

Be wary of food poisoning, and be careful when buying fast food from street kiosks.

In Russia you should not drink water straight from the tap. You should always boil it first, and then filter it to improve the taste. If you travel to St Petersburg you should definitely avoid the tap water since it is taken from the Neva River and contains various pollutants, such as lead and mercury. It also has the parasitic bacteria 'Giardia lamblia' which can cause stomach cramps and diarrhoea. The treatment for this is 200mg of Metronidazole every day for two weeks. In Russian chemists this is known as 'Trikapol'.

Money

Changing Money

There are plenty of places in town (обмен валюты) where you can change cash. NEVER change money on the street - it's illegal, and you'll probably be fleeced.

Travellers' cheques can be a nightmare to change, although it is sometimes possible for a hefty commission. American Express cheques are recommended, as they appear to be the cheapest to exchange. You have to show your documents (photocopies are not sufficient) to change travellers' cheques, so if you've decided to bring money in this form, you'll have to wait until you've received your registration to change them. Сбербанк is also a good place to change pounds.

Cash machines

Cash machines (банкоматы) are everywhere. Your bank will probably charge you 1.5% to 2% per withdrawal for roubles and some banks may make an additional charge if you withdraw dollars. It is quite difficult to get dollars out of cash machines in Volgograd, though you should be able to get them using your card in banks.

Laundry

It cannot be guaranteed that you will have access to a washing machine in your home-stay. If you don't, either make friends with someone who has one, or wash by hand, as most Russians do. Even if your hosts do have a washing machine, you will probably be asked to buy your own washing powder as this is not included in your rent.

There is a good laundry service on ул. Мира (first yard west of the library, in the basement on the right side of the court yard). Laundry takes 2-4 days and is quite cheap (50 roubles for two bags of clothes).



Entertainment

Radio and TV

Russia has 15 free terrestrial channels, so it's best just to channel hop and see what you like. The quality of programmes is not great, although there are frequently good films on at weekends.

The BBC World Service broadcasts on MW around 1300 kHz.

Sport and Leisure

Volgograd offers various opportunities for all-weather sports, such as swimming (open-air and indoor pools), football, and a large new indoor ice-skating rink called Дворец Спорта located at the metro of the same name. There are a large number of swimming pools scattered about the city, although these require a health certificate, easily obtained from a Russian doctor. There is one swimming pool that previous students have used called Искра, which costs 650 roubles for 12 swims and is open early in the morning and in the evening.

If you prefer watching sport over taking part, head to the Sports Bar, the House of Officers, or Time-Out as they regularly show international and national football games. As the weather gets warmer, the people of Volgograd (Волгоградци) love to relax on the beaches and holiday centres of the Volgograd region.

There are many gyms in Volgograd too, the nicest being City Fit which is located at Набережная. A mediocre alternative is Fitness Club LA Sport located at 4 Аллея Героев (tel. 40-81-44), which costs 1000 roubles a month to visit the club three times a week.

Other leisure options include exhibitions, cinemas (Киномах, the Радеж shopping centre, Пирамид, Победа, and Park House - tickets are 50-200 roubles), a dance studio, and horse-riding. Bowling is also quite popular, and there are many good alleys to be found. Пирамид (located near the Ramstore) seems to be the most popular – although book ahead as it gets quite busy. The cost from Monday to Thursday from 12:00-18:00 is 440 roubles per lane per hour, and from 18:00-close the cost goes up to 660 roubles. From Friday to Sunday the cost is 720 roubles per lane per hour – and don't forget, on Mondays, students receive a 30% discount, and for the entire month of your birthday, you receive 50% off! Park House is another popular bowling alley, and costs 730 roubles per lane per hour on the weekend (students can bowl for the night on Tuesdays for 1000 roubles).

Culture/The Arts

Volgograd is famous for its Experimental Drama Theatre (opposite the post office), and also boasts a musical theatre (ул. В.И. Чукова), a circus, a Youth Theatre, and its own opera company. On Sundays there is often an opera or orchestra to be seen at the hall by набережная (the cost is usually 150 roubles). Visitors to the town enjoy strolling along the beautiful Volga embankment, which is decorated with fountains and rotundas, and features many restaurants and concert halls, as well as a river-boat station.

Finally, you can't miss the imposing sculpture dedicated to the Battle of Stalingrad. The sculptural composition illustrates episodes from the battle, and the peak of Mamaev Hill is crowned by an enormous statue of Mother Russia (metro stop Мамаев Курган).

Cafes, Bars and Clubs

Eating out in Volgograd is good value for money and there are plenty of places worth trying. There is a big self-service restaurant (столовая) about 15 minutes down from the school on ул. Коммунистическая, which has had generally good reviews from previous teachers. In addition to the swarms of cafes offering traditional Russian cuisine for next to nothing, there are a number of reasonably-priced restaurants serving foreign cuisine: Texan, Georgian, German, French, Italian and Chinese. A three-course meal with drinks is unlikely to set you back more than £10 unless you opt for either of the two Japanese restaurants Sakura (at the beginning of ул. Коммунистическая) or Yakitorya (near Piranya) – where you'll be paying more like £15. The 'English Bar' (nothing remotely English about it, but some nice seafood dishes) can also cost you more than the average restaurant.

Some other restaurants and cafés to try include:

- Арка - a good Italian restaurant, Проспект Ленина, 2.
- Бочка - a German-themed restaurant with live music on Friday nights, ул. Советская, 16.
- Grand Café – serving Georgian cuisine, ул. Мира, 12.
- Грану Пицца – expensive but good pizza place on ул. Мира.
- The Steakhouse - a great, cheap steakhouse 10 minutes from La Vamba on ул. Чуйкова.
- Riviera - fast food wraps and chicken, good for a quick lunch, on Port-Said Street.
- Shuri-Muri - a self-serve café on Аллея Героев, a favourite in Volgograd.
- Kaufe - a nice, relatively cheap café on Проспект Ленина, 23а. Good coffee, food, atmosphere and TV.

Some bars/pubs/nightclubs to try include:

- Galleria - a quasi Irish pub with Guinness on tap (160 roubles), ул. Мира, 11.
- The White Horse - a pub with food, live music most nights of the week, ул. Коммунистическая 23 (in courtyard off Проспект Ленина).
- Green Pub - a popular Irish pub, ул. Краснознаменная, 7.
- La Vamba - a Mexican themed bar/nightclub/restaurant with funky animal chairs and great Latin American dance shows, ул. Чуйкова, 1.
- Pirania - a nightclub complete with a bowling alley, on the bank of the Volga in the centre of town (otherwise known as набережная)
- Ibiza - a nightclub with relaxing couches and western parties, located near the train station.

Useful web links

Processing your Russian visa

- www.rusemblon.org/ - Consular Section of the Embassy of Russia in the United Kingdom
- www.great-britain.mid.ru/ - Embassy of the Russian Federation in the UK

Advice about travel to Russia

- www.britemb.msk.ru/consular/index_ie.htm - Consular advice for UK citizens (see FCO travel advice: Russia)

General information about Russia

- www.rbcnews.com/ - news and information site

Travel in Russia

- www.poezdka.ru (Russian) – search engine for flights/air tickets
- www.polets.ru (Russian) – search engine for flights/air tickets
- startravel.ru/eng/index.shtml - Star Travel (STA Russia) for cheap tickets (air/train/bus) and under-26 and ISIC discount cards

Information about Volgograd

- www.volgadmin.ru/ - Volgograd's official information server (some parts in English)

Visiting Moscow

If you fit in a trip to Moscow during your stay in Volgograd, or have friends or family visiting Moscow, you may find the following information useful.

Entertainment

English language entertainment guides can be found in the Friday edition of The Moscow Times, which is available free in internet cafes and Western-style outlets.

The best Russian language listings about exhibitions, sports events, gigs, plays, and films happening all over Moscow (with addresses) can be found in *Афиша* and *Ваш Досуг*, which are available from most press kiosks. Both magazines have their own websites where you can find out about the latest happenings in Moscow. There is also a monthly theatre guide, somewhat confusingly also called *Афиша*, which is sold at kiosks selling theatre tickets.

Depending on which season you are in Moscow, the following come highly recommended: In the winter, outdoor ice-skating is great at Горкий парк. You can hire skis or snowboards at Крылатские горы (end of the light blue line) and skis, rollerblades, and bicycles at Соколники парк (on the northern branch of the red line). If you're in Moscow in summer, a river cruise is a great way to see a different view of the city. Boats leave from the Новоспасский bridge near Пролетарская metro, or outside the Radisson-Slavyanskaya hotel at metro Киевская.

Some useful websites about leisure in Moscow include:

- www.moscowtimes.ru - English Language newspaper providing up to date news on Russia and entertainment listings for Moscow
- www.expat.ru/ - The Moscow Ex-pat Site – a virtual community for English speaking ex-pats and Russians
- www.afisha.ru (Russian) - Russian site providing entertainment listings for Moscow
- www.vashdosug.ru (Russian) - Russian site providing entertainment listings for Moscow

- www.waytorussia.net/Moscow/Info.html - featuring 'What is Moscow', and Practicalities, Maps, Transportation, Accommodation, Eating Out, Entertainment, Sightseeing

Transport



The Moscow metro is extremely fast and efficient. Services begin between 05.30 and 06:00 and the last train leaves the beginning of the line at 01:00 when all the *переходы* shut.

Tickets can be bought for 1 (22 roubles), 2, 5, 10, 20 or 60 trips. If you're ever in Moscow for a longer period of time it's worth knowing that it is possible to buy a monthly pass for no more than 70 trips, or a plastic re-chargeable magnetic card that gives you unlimited journeys within 30 days or 90 days.

If you want to book a taxi in Moscow, one good firm ("Allo Taxi") can be contacted on the telephone number (495) 745 5049. You will have to make the booking in Russian ("можно заказать такси на [time, date etc]"), but they work 24/7 and don't overcharge. They will arrange for the driver to phone you when he arrives, to tell you the number plate and make of the car you should look for on the street.

Moscow is served by an extensive system of buses, trams and trolley buses that run until about midnight, with 5-15 minute frequency. If you buy tickets from the special kiosks (*киоски 'Проездные билеты'*), one single journey costs 15 roubles. If you purchase your ticket from the driver or conductor, it will cost 25 roubles. If the vehicle is not equipped with a turnstile system (increasingly common in the capital) you must always stamp your ticket yourself using one of the hole-punchers on the vehicle. Sometimes people may ask you to punch their ticket or to pass money to the driver for a ticket. Occasionally ticket inspectors get on, and will fine you if you don't have a punched ticket when they ask you.

Travelling by Train and Plane

Train tickets can be bought in advance from any station. Tickets can also be bought from railway ticket agencies (*железнодорожные кассы*) often located in and around metros. The queues are much shorter, but be aware that you will on average pay an extra 150 roubles per ticket.

Some useful websites about train travel are:

- www.tutu.ru (Russian) – *elektrichka* timetable for Moscow and Moscow region
- <http://russia.km.ru/trans/moskwa/vokzal.htm> (Russian) – train timetable for Moscow railway stations

There are nine railway stations in Moscow. Generally, these railway stations correspond to the following travel directions:

- Western direction (to Belarus and Poland): *Белорусский вокзал*
- Northern/north-western directions (St Petersburg and the Baltics): *Ленинградский вокзал, Савёловский вокзал, Ярославский вокзал, Рижский вокзал*
- Eastern/north-eastern/south-eastern directions: *Казанский вокзал, Павелецкий вокзал*
- Southern direction: *Курский вокзал*
- South-western direction: *Киевский вокзал*

A good place to buy plane tickets in Moscow is the big branch of STAR travel at metro station Sokol. They have a website at <http://startravel.ru/eng/index.shtml> which includes a map explaining how to get there (and the 5 other branches in Moscow), and they speak English. You can also obtain student cards such as ISIC from there.

Moscow has several airports, but the ones you are most likely to travel to and from are *Домодедово* and *Шереметьево 2*. Here are directions on how to get to both of these airports.

Домодедово: There is an express train that leaves from *Павелецкий вокзал*, which is located near *Павелецкая* metro station (at the intersection of the green and ring lines in the southeast of the city). The easiest way to locate the *касса* selling tickets for the express train (*аэроэкспресс*), is to exit at the green line station and follow blue *аэроэкспресс* signs to the ticket desk. Tickets cost 200 roubles. The train leaves on



the hour from 06:00 to 23:00 (with a few trains going on the half-hour, look at the schedule on the website for more details) and takes about 40-50 minutes to get to the airport. The platform you arrive at is connected to the airport terminal. Домодедово has a good website if you need more information: www.domodedovo.ru .

Шереметьево 2: There is an express train that leaves from Савеловская metro station (one up from Менделеевская on the grey line) and takes about 35 minutes to get to the airport. Tickets cost 250 roubles. You can also take the metro to Речной вокзал metro station at the top of the green line, where you can catch a bus or a маршрутка to the airport. At the metro station, follow the signs that show an airplane and an arrow, as these will direct you towards the correct exit for the bus stop. The airport bus, number Ш 851с, works from 06:30 to 20:30 and costs 15 roubles. There are also regular buses and маршрутки that leave from the same

area which cost 30 roubles. Look for signs that say Шереметьево in the bus window (or for other people with suitcases). Make sure that you get off at Шереметьево 2, as the buses also go to the domestic airport Шереметьево 1. The airport also has a website, although the English version is not as helpful as Домодедово's: www.sheremetev-airport.ru. Please note – opt for a маршрутка if you are running short on time, as the bus makes a lot of stops on the way to the airport (although if you're there during rush hour, no matter what this will be a long journey). If in absolute dire straits, flag down a cab.

Visitors

For visa services in Moscow, you can refer to Demlink Travel (www.demlinktravel.com) at metro Белорусская or Russian National Group at metro Чистые пруды, located on Чистопрудный бульвар 5/10 office 214, (8495) 980-84-40, 980-84-38. The most cost-friendly option that we have found is Moscow Bureau of Voyage, located at ул. Тверская 2/30 Office 18 – open Monday to Friday 10.00-17.00. The documents usually required for registration are: passport, visa, immigration card.

A lot of hotels in Moscow are incredibly expensive. The latest edition of the Lonely Planet is very up to date on more budget options, as are the following websites:

- www.hostelmoscow.com/
- www.trav.com/cities/hostels/moscow.html
- www.bootsnall.com/hostels/re/Russia/Moscow+Hostels.php
- www.hotelopia.co.uk/home/homepage.jsp

How to Survive the Russian-ness of Russia

Although Russia is becoming more and more Westernised in many places, there are still plenty of aspects of life in this country that can take a lot of getting used to. Sometimes you can laugh at the differences without any problem (why do Russians always seem to leave footprints on toilet seats?), but when you've been flattened by a rampaging babushka for the umpteenth time, or spent two hours queuing at the post office only to be told it's the wrong counter, and you should have gone to that counter (but don't bother because they haven't got one of the six forms you need to fill out anyway), it can leave you fuming and ready to get on the next plane home.

But try to resist the urge to phone British Airways. Remember, you are a guest in a totally different culture, and you must try to respect that things here are done differently. Try to be prepared for frustrations, and hopefully you'll acclimatise before too long. The following are points that you may want to bear in mind...

- Standards of efficiency and service in Russia are often somewhat lower than what you get in the West.

You may come across friendly, efficient service on occasions, but be warned: at times you will be exasperated by Russians working in official or administrative capacities. They may seem slow, unhelpful, and inconsistent to the point of rudeness, leaving you with the urge to pull your hair out, and theirs too... but try not to internally combust. For a start it's unhealthy and won't get you anywhere, and secondly there are reasons (or excuses, depending on your point of view) for this infuriating aspect of Russian culture.

It all comes down to culture and mentality. Generally speaking, Russians take a far more laid back attitude to work than their counterparts in Western, consumer-driven, corporate-management societies. Whereas in America everything should be done 10 minutes ago and in the UK it should be done right now, in Russia it probably won't get done until the end of the working day (or week). It's just the way it is, the way it always has been, and Russians, particularly among the older generations, see no reason why it should change. They certainly won't take kindly to a pushy young foreigner telling them how to do their job. Even the RLUS representatives, while slightly more experienced at battling the system, can't be guaranteed to get anywhere fast when working with big institutions (so please don't expect miracles).

The key to survival is PATIENCE. Be flexible, try to adapt to a different environment from the one you're used to. Waiting is an accepted part of life here – it's considered normal, and to many Russians, even among the younger generation, your expectations and desire to get everything done by yesterday will seem impatient, unreasonable and unnecessary. Things are changing gradually, but as they say here, Moscow wasn't built in a day.

- Russians like to say exactly what they think.

There are various words to describe the way Russians communicate. Leaving aside “incomprehensible”, some people call it “rude”, “impatient”, “tactless”, “angry”, especially after trying to purchase train tickets from scary women with even scarier make-up, who certainly don't seem to have time to sell tickets to people with funny accents. But in fact, many prefer to describe their approach as “direct” and “emotionally expressive”. Yes, people may yell at you here: for getting in the way, for going to the wrong counter, for daring to breathe on the glass of exhibits in museums. But don't take it to heart as it's nothing personal. Partly, it's just the style of the Russian language; whereas a British person might ask “Do you mind not touching the glass please”, a Russian would say “DON'T TOUCH THE GLASS” with a glare and a tone of voice that ensured you understood completely what they were getting at. Direct, to the point and effective—just hard to get used to if you were raised in most Western cultures. Yes, Russians will let you know if they are angry or if something is not quite as it should be— they are open, and say what they think. And this is not necessarily a bad thing: the openness is also reflected in great warmth, hospitality and friends you can really count on to be honest with you.

- Don't judge a дом by its подъезд.

Anyone who has spent any time in Russia will know that a Russian дом is in no way, shape, or form the same thing as an English 'house'. While the Mercedes-driving, pent-house suite-dwelling новые русские are obviously an exception to the rule, the vast majority of ordinary Russians live in multi-story concrete blocks, which are undeniably not the most aesthetically-pleasing structures in the world. They are generally very large and very grey, with entrances and hallways (подъезды) that smell of something unidentifiably unpleasant, and where the paint is not always guaranteed to be stuck to the walls. Thankfully, however, this outward decrepitude is generally no reflection of the flats inside.

Your Russian home is guaranteed to be comfortable and cosy with all the basics necessary for survival. Although you will have your own room, there probably won't be a massive amount of space, as space (especially in Moscow) costs money. This may mean that you sleep on a sofa bed rather than a 'normal' bed, (these are popular here as it is common for Russians to use their bedroom as a sitting room during the day). The kitchen will invariably have a fridge and cooker, but other amenities such as microwaves, washing machines, etc. are rarities. Be prepared to wash your socks in the bath on Sunday nights. It is also unlikely that everything will be shiny and new, as that's not the kind of rent you're paying. The chances are that at some point during your stay the odd cockroach will pop in to say hello; they are a fact of life here and it's virtually impossible to find a flat without one or two resident тараканы. But if you politely squash them with a slipper they generally get the message— they don't bite, and generally want to avoid you as much as you want to avoid them.

Final note: All information in this orientation pack is correct at time of going to press, but as things in Russia change almost daily (restaurants open and close, new registration laws are passed), it is very likely that information will change during your stay here.