

# Embassy of the United States Moscow, Russia

## RUSSIAN VISAS

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The Russian government maintains a restrictive and complicated visa regime for foreigners who visit, transit, or reside in the Russian Federation. A U.S. citizen who does not comply with Russian visa laws can be subject to arrest, fines, and/or deportation. Russian authorities will not allow a U.S. citizen traveler with an expired visa to depart the country, effectively stranding the person for up to 20 days, until local authorities grant an exit visa.

The Government of Russia does not recognize the standing of the U.S. diplomatic mission to intervene in visa matters, including situations in which an American is stranded because of an expired visa. U.S. citizens should also be aware that Russian immigration and visa laws change regularly, and the implementation of new regulations has not always been transparent or predictable.

The Russian visa system includes a number of provisions that may be unfamiliar to Americans, including:

- [Sponsorship](#)
- [Entry Visas](#)
- [Limitations on Length of Stay](#)
- [Exit Visas](#)
- [Migration Cards](#)
- [Visa Registration](#)
- [Transit Visas](#)
- [Restricted Areas](#)

[Dual citizens](#) who also carry Russian passports face additional complicated regulations. Dual citizen [minors](#) who travel on their Russian passports also face special problems. [International cruise ship passengers](#) do not need visas if they remain with authorized tour groups at all times while ashore.

**Sponsorship:** Under Russian law, every foreign traveler must have a Russian-based sponsor, which could be a hotel, tour company, relative, employer, university, etc. Even if a visa was obtained through a travel agency in the United States, there is always a Russian legal entity whose name is indicated on the visa and who is considered to be the legal sponsor. Russian law requires that the sponsor must apply on the traveler's behalf for replacement, extension, or changes to a Russian visa. U.S. citizens are strongly advised to ensure that they have

contact information for the visa sponsor prior to arrival in Russia, as the sponsor's assistance will be essential to resolve any visa problems. [Back to Top](#)

**Entry Visas:** To enter Russia for any purpose, a U.S. citizen must possess a valid U.S. passport and a bona fide visa issued by a Russian Embassy or Consulate. It is impossible to obtain an entry visa upon arrival, so travelers must apply for their visas well in advance. U.S. citizens who apply for Russian visas in third countries where they do not have permission to stay more than 90 days may face considerable delays in visa processing. Travelers who arrive in Russia without an entry visa will not be permitted to enter the country, and face immediate return to the point of embarkation at their own expense.

A Russian entry/exit visa has two dates written in the European style (day/month/year) as opposed to the American style (month/day/year). The first date indicates the earliest day a traveler may enter Russia; the second date indicates the date by which a traveler must leave Russia. A Russian visa is only valid for those exact dates and cannot be extended after the traveler has arrived in the country, except in the case of a medical emergency.

Russian tourist visas are often granted only for the specific dates mentioned in the invitation letter provided by the sponsor. U.S. citizens sometimes receive visas valid for periods as short as four days. Even if the visa is misdated through error of a Russian Embassy or Consulate, the traveler will still not be allowed into Russia before the visa start date or be allowed to leave after the visa expiration date. Any mistakes in visa dates must be corrected before the traveler enters Russia. It is helpful to have someone who reads Russian check the visa before departing the United States. Travelers should ensure that their visas reflect intended activities in Russia (e.g., tourism, study, business, etc.).

U.S. citizens who are denied visas may seek a clarification from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 32/34 Smolenskaya-Sennaya Pl., Moscow, Russia, 119200, e-mail [ministry@mid.ru](mailto:ministry@mid.ru). The U.S. Embassy and the Consulates General, however, cannot advocate on behalf of private U.S. citizens who have been refused visas or denied entry into Russia. [Back to Top](#)

**Limitations on Length of Stay:** In October 2007, the Russian government made significant changes to its rules regarding the length of stay permitted to most foreign visitors. For any visa issued on or after October 18, 2007, unless that visa specifically authorizes employment or study, a foreigner may stay in Russia only 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies to business, tourist, humanitarian and cultural visas, among other categories. [Back to Top](#)

**Exit Visas:** A valid visa is necessary to depart Russia. Travelers who overstay their visa's validity, even for one day, will be prevented from leaving until their sponsor intervenes and requests a visa extension on their behalf. Russian authorities may take up to 20 calendar days to authorize an exit visa, during which time the traveler will be stranded in Russia at his or her own expense. The ability of the Embassy or Consulates General to intervene in these situations is extremely limited.

Travelers with expired visas should also be aware that they may have difficulty checking into a hotel, hostel, or other lodging establishment. There are no adequate public shelters or safe havens in Russia and neither the U.S. Embassy nor the Consulates General have means to accommodate such stranded travelers.

Visitors who lose their U.S. passports and Russian visas to accident or theft must immediately replace their passports at the U.S. Embassy or one of the Consulates General. The traveler must then enlist the visa sponsor to obtain a new visa in order to depart the country. As noted above, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates General are not able to intercede in cases in which visas must be replaced. It is helpful to make a photocopy of your visa in the event of loss, but a copy is not sufficient to permit departure.

Travelers who are departing Russia by train should be aware that if they board a train on the last day of a visa's validity, Russian immigration officials may consider the visa to have expired if the train crosses the international border after midnight on the day of expiry. The Embassy and Consulates General are aware of cases in which travelers have been detained at border crossings, unable to leave Russia, because their visas were expired by a matter of hours or minutes.

Visas for students and English teachers sometimes allow only one entry. In these cases, the sponsoring school is responsible for registering the visa and migration card and obtaining an exit visa. Obtaining an exit visa can take up to twenty days so students and teachers need to plan accordingly. [Back to Top](#)

**Migration Cards:** All foreigners entering Russia must fill out a two-part migration card upon arrival. The traveler deposits one part of the card with immigration authorities at the port of entry, and keeps the other part for the duration of his or her stay. Upon departure, the traveler must submit his or her card to immigration authorities. Foreign visitors to Russia are normally required to present their migration cards in order to register at hotels.

Migration cards, in theory, are available at all ports of entry from Russian immigration officials (Border Guards). The cards are generally distributed to passengers on incoming flights and left in literature racks at arrival points. Officials at borders and airports usually do not point out these cards to travelers; it is up to the individual travelers to find them and fill them out.

Replacing a lost or stolen migration card is extremely difficult. While authorities will not prevent foreigners from leaving the country if they cannot present their migration cards, travelers could experience problems when trying to re-enter Russia at a future date.

Although Russia and Belarus use the same migration card, travelers should be aware that each country maintains its own visa regime. U.S. citizens wishing to travel to both nations must apply for two separate visas. A traveler entering Russia directly from Belarus is not required to obtain a new migration card, but at his or her option may do so if blank ones are available at the time of entry. [Back to Top](#)

**Visa Registration:** Travelers who spend more than seven days in Russia must register their visa and migration card through their sponsor or landlord. Travelers staying in a hotel must register their visa and migration card with their hotel within one day. Even travelers who spend less than seven days in one place are encouraged to register their visas. If a traveler chooses not to register a stay of less than seven days, he or she is advised to keep copies of tickets, hotel bills, or itineraries in order to prove compliance with the law.

U.S. citizens should be aware that Russian police officers have the authority to stop people and request their identity and travel documents at any time, and without cause. Due to the possibility of random document checks by police, travelers should carry their original passports, migration cards, and visas with them at all times.

Rules for registration of foreigners in the Russian Federation changed in January 2007. Registration is now performed either by the traveler's visa sponsor, or by a hotel, landlord, employer, or other entity acting as an "acceptance agent." The registration application form is called *Uvedomleniye o Pribytii Inostrannogo Grazhdanina v Mesto Prebyvaniya* and is available at post offices and on the website of the Moscow Migration Service at [http://www.fmsmoscow.ru/docs/migration\\_registration/registration.html](http://www.fmsmoscow.ru/docs/migration_registration/registration.html).

The registration form consists of two parts. The first, top part is filed by the sponsor or acceptance agent with the Federal Migration Service. The smaller bottom part remains with the traveler, who returns the form to the airport passport control officer upon departure. The last requirement is not enforced strictly. Failure to return the form does not interfere with departure. The sponsor or acceptance agent in turn must mail the form to the local migration office within two days. The process must be repeated if a foreigner travels to a different region of Russia for more than seven days. The registration fee is set and is usually posted in post offices and migration offices. There is a surcharge if the form is mailed. The registration rules are posted in Russian on [http://www.fmsmoscow.ru/docs/migration\\_registration/registration.html](http://www.fmsmoscow.ru/docs/migration_registration/registration.html) [Back to Top](#)

**Transit Visas:** Travelers intending to transit through Russia en route to a third country must have a Russian transit visa. Even travelers who are simply changing planes in Moscow or another international airport in Russia for an onward destination will be asked to present a transit visa issued by a Russian Embassy or Consulate. Russian authorities may refuse to allow a U.S. citizen who does not have a transit visa to continue with his or her travel, obliging the person to immediately return to the point of embarkation at the traveler's own expense. [Back to Top](#)

**Restricted Areas:** U.S. citizens should be aware that there are several closed cities and regions in Russia. Travelers who attempt to enter these areas without prior authorization are subject to arrest, fines, and/or deportation. A traveler must list on the visa application all areas to be visited and subsequently register with authorities upon arrival at each destination. Travelers should check with their sponsor, hotel, or the nearest office of the Russian Federal Migration Service before

traveling to unfamiliar cities and towns. [Back to Top](#)

**American Citizens Also Holding Russian Passports:** Dual U.S./Russian nationals who enter Russia on Russian passports face several possible difficulties. Russian authorities will not permit departure from Russia if the person's Russian passport has expired or has been lost, whether or not the traveler also has a valid U.S. passport. In these cases the traveler will be required to obtain a new Russian passport, a process that can take several months. In order to apply for a Russian visa in a U.S. passport, however, Russian consular officials normally require a person to renounce his or her Russian citizenship.

Russian external passports extended by Russian Consulates or Embassies overseas are not considered valid for departure from Russia no matter how long the extension. Bearers of such passports will have to apply for a new passport inside the country. Males of conscript age (18 - 27 years old) who are deemed to be Russian citizens may experience problems if they have not satisfied their military service requirement. [Back to Top](#)

For further information, please see the Department of State's webpage on [dual nationality](#).

**Minors:** American citizen minors who also have Russian citizenship and who are traveling on their Russian passports must have a power-of-attorney, written in Russian, allowing them to travel if they are traveling alone or in the company of adults who are not their parents. Such minors will be prevented from entering or leaving Russia if they cannot present such a power-of-attorney.

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated special procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for the child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian if not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not legally required, may facilitate entry/departure. For further information, please see the Department of State's webpage regarding the prevention of [international child abduction](#) [Back to Top](#).

**International Cruise Ship Passengers:** International cruise ship passengers are permitted to visit Russian ports without a visa for a period of up to 72 hours. Passengers who wish to go ashore during port calls may do so without visas provided that they are with an organized tour at all times, accompanied by a tour operator who has been duly licensed by Russian authorities. These special entry/exit requirements do not apply to river boat cruise passengers and travelers coming to Russia on package tours. These travelers will need to apply for visas prior to entry, and should follow the general guidelines for entry/exit requirements. [Back to Top](#)

**Extending or Replacing Russian Visas:** If you have visa problems, you must first consult with your sponsor. Sponsors are required to handle all visa problems, including extending their guests' visas and applying for replacement in the event the original is lost. Sponsors must provide consent and assistance for their guests

to extend or modify their visas. If you do not know who your sponsor is and you have lost your visa and have no copy of it, you can contact the travel agency you purchased your visa from, or the Russian Embassy or Consulate where you received your visa, and ask them for a copy of their records. The Embassy cannot substitute for your sponsor.

The Central PVU office, under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is responsible for registering, extending, or modifying Russian visas. There is a central Pasportny Stol/PVU office in virtually every Russian city. Smaller, local Pasportny Stol offices (*Otdeliniye Viz I Registratsiy*) are located throughout Russia. Pay special attention to the destination written on your visa. If your sponsor and final destination are not in Moscow, under normal circumstances you should not address visa problems in the capital. Russian officials may require that you travel to your destination to sort out your visa problems.

Americans in possession of Student or Guest visas must find out from their sponsor which local Pasportny Stol/PVU office is responsible for their visa. Commercial and Transit visa holders must go to the central PVU. Officers at Pasportny Stol/PVU do not always speak English, and the process is generally long and cumbersome.

If your visa sponsor is located in Moscow, the central PVU is located at 42 Pokrovka St., tel. (495) 200-8427, Metro Krasnie Vorota or Kurskaya. The office is closed Wednesdays.

If you are in Moscow but you do not know who your visa sponsor is, or if the sponsor is located elsewhere in Russia and you cannot travel to the region, please go to the Federal Migration Service, 4 Verkhnyaya Radishchevskaya St., Bldg 1., tel. (495) 698-0078, Metro Taganskaya.

You will need to bring a number of documents to obtain your exit visa:

- A letter (at least a faxed copy) from your sponsor stating your problem,
- Your visa (if you have it, or a copy if you don't have the original),
- Your migration card,
- A police certificate indicating that the loss or theft was reported to police (if your visa was lost or stolen),
- Your U.S. passport,
- Rubles to pay the small fines and processing fees. All fines and processing fees must be paid at the local SberBank. The officials at the Pasportny Stol/PVU office will explain this process.

Once Pasportny Stol/PVU accepts your documents and you have paid your fines and fees, the officials will advise you when to pick up your documents. Processing time can be as long as one or two weeks. Under the law Pasportny Stol/PVU is allowed up to 20 working days to process your documents. Only your sponsor can expedite this process.

Americans who ask for expedited visa processing are frequently told by Russian officials to obtain a letter or diplomatic note from the U.S. Embassy. Other than in emergency cases, the U.S. government cannot intervene on behalf of American travelers. If a Pasportny Stol/PVU officer requests an Embassy letter, please ask him/her to contact the American Citizen Services Unit at (495) 728-5577. [Back to Top](#)

## Types of Visas

There are seven basic types of Russian visas: Commercial, Tourist, Student, Guest, Diplomatic, Transit, and visas for entry into the Russian Federation for the purpose of requesting asylum. Russian visas are issued only upon presentation of the appropriate invitation (tourist vouchers or hotel reservations will often suffice) from a Russian source. Only Russian individuals and agencies (hereafter referred to as sponsors) can invite Americans to visit Russia. In doing so, the sponsor takes full responsibility for both the welfare and actions of their American guests. [Back to Top](#)

**Student Visas:** An invitation for a foreign national to enter Russia for the purpose of studying at an educational institution is issued by the Pasportny Stol/PVU upon application from the educational institution. Student visas are unique in that they do not include an exit visa, but rather require a separate application for one to the proper Russian authorities. Often, student visas are valid only for three months, with a possible extension by the local Pasportny Stol/PVU. Always stamped in passports, they allow foreigners to remain in Russia for the duration of the visa's validity, but not to leave the country upon its expiration. It is the responsibility of your Russian school to ensure timely extensions and obtain permission to exit. If you want to leave Russia before the scheduled time implied by your contract with your school, you have to notify the school visa department long in advance to give them time to file necessary paperwork with the Russian authorities. Under law that time period can be as long as 30 days. [Back to Top](#)

**Work Visas:** There are quotas on invitations to foreigners to enter Russia in order to work. These quotas are established by territorial agencies in the regions and are approved annually by the Russian Government. According to the law, quotas take into account the demographic situation in the relevant region of Russia and its ability to accommodate foreign nationals. This is theoretically based on the principle that priority should be given to the use of domestic labor. The prospective employer must initiate the application process for this type of visa at Pasportny Stol/PVU. Prospective employers who hire foreigners must also receive permission from the local branch of the Ministry of Interior's Federal Migration Service. The Federal Migration Service then issues the foreigner a document confirming his legal employment. Please note that Russian authorities may require tests for drugs and infectious diseases for holders of work visas.

There are a few categories of foreigners who can be employed without such a permit: those who have a Russian residency permit or permanent registration with police; church employees; technical experts who come for a short period to assemble imported equipment; and those who come for educational activities. [Back to Top](#)

**Temporary Residence:** Temporary residence is granted for a three-year term. The issuance of temporary residence permits (*razreshenie na vremennoe prozhivanie*) is subject to a quota established annually by the government for each separate region of Russia. Certain categories of foreign citizens are not subject to the quota, including, foreign citizens previously citizens of the USSR; foreigners married to Russians residing in Russia; and foreign investors making investments of a magnitude yet to be established.

Temporary residence permits are issued by Pasportny Stol/PVU on the basis of an application filed personally by the foreign citizen. The application can be filed either with a local Pasportny Stol/PVU or with a Russian Embassy outside Russia and should be reviewed within 6 months. In case of approval, the foreigner can get a visa to enter Russia (visas for person temporarily residing in Russia) with a four-month validity period, which should be extended upon obtaining a temporary residence permit for a period of validity of such permit.

The following documents are required to obtain a temporary residence permit: an application form; four photos; passport; police certificate; applicant's income papers; HIV certificate; and documentation that the foreign citizen is not a drug addict and does not have any infectious diseases.

Foreign citizens who are not subject to the quota for the issuance of a temporary residence permits should additionally submit: marriage certificate and spouse's passport (if the spouse is a Russian citizen); birth certificate or passport of a USSR citizen (for former Soviet/Russian citizens); document confirming that the foreign citizen has an established place to residence, or consent of Russian citizens registered in Russia at their place of residence to provide a place of residence for the foreign citizen.

A foreigner who holds a temporary residence permit is required to obtain a work permit in order to work legally in the territory of the Russian administrative unit (*subyekt*) where the temporary residence permit was issued.

Temporary residence status also has its own particular restrictions, including mandatory fingerprint registration, restrictions on change of residence within Russia, and annual registration with the internal affairs agencies.

Evidence of temporary residence permit is a stamp "Разрешение на временное проживание," or Temporary Residence Permit, put into the bearer's passport. The stamp is not/not sufficient for leaving the country. Based on the stamp the local passport authorities at the stamp issuing office only should give the bearer an exit-reentry visa. The stamp is useful and mandatory to have at the time of police document checks as a visa substitute. It will also help the person get a Russian visa outside Russia in case the exit-reentry visa is lost while traveling. [Back to Top](#)

**Permanent Residence:** Foreign citizens intending to permanently reside in Russia can obtain a permanent residence permit (*vid na zhitelstvo*) valid for five years that may be extended an unlimited number of times. Foreigners may apply for it at the local OVER/PVU based on their at least one-year residence in Russia. The application has to be filed no later than six months prior to the expiration of the



temporary residence permit.

The advantages of permanent resident status are ability to work in any part of Russia without a special permit; ability to choose a place of residence in Russia; ability to issue visa invitations to Russia for other foreign citizens in one's own name. [Back to Top](#)

## IMPORTANT

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[Changes to the Russian Visa Regime](#)

## CITIZEN SERVICES

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[Message to U.S. Citizens from Ambassador McFaul](#)

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