

The Transsiberian Railway

Q & A about the Russian train travelling



Is Russian train travel safe?

Millions of people, both Russian locals and tourists, travel safely on Russian trains every year. In many ways they are the safest trains to travel on.

- Each carriage is looked after 24 hours a day by at least one or two conductors.
- Each passenger must show their ticket upon entry and present with it an official identification document; for foreign visitors this is usually a passport.
- At every stop the train will be checked to ensure there is no damage.

With regards to remaining safe and secure, we recommend:

- If you are travelling by overnight train in a sleeping compartment, store valuables in the container under the bed or seat. Don't leave your sleeping compartment unoccupied as some compartments only have a simple lock on the sliding door. On some trains there may be an additional security device, which can be attached to the fitted handle/lock unit. There may also be a steel switch at head-height on the door panel which, when pulled down, prevents the closed door from being slid open.
- Don't agree to look after the luggage of a fellow traveller or allow it to be stored in your compartment.

If I need to collect paper tickets or exchange e-tickets, where do I go?

If you need to collect, or exchange tickets, it is best to ensure you leave yourself plenty of time as the queues can be quite long and the cashiers take regular breaks. Also ensure that you have all relevant documentation with you as the cashiers are unlikely to speak English making it very difficult to explain your situation if you have forgotten anything. The ticket desks are usually clearly marked in each station; many Russian stations also offer self-service ticket machines now. These are reasonably easy to use, and often lack the queues that are common at the manned ticket kiosks. They also have the advantage of being available 24 hours a day.

It is worth noting that you can collect your tickets at any time upon arrival in Russia; not just within a few hours of travelling. This can save the stress of waiting in a queue while the departure time edges closer. Very often we will deliver your paper tickets to your hotel in Moscow.

There are also e-tickets with electronic registration – they don't need to be exchanged for paper tickets. In this case you just have to print and present these together with an identity document upon boarding the train. This information is given both in English and Russian on the tickets themselves.

Where are the train stations in Moscow and which destinations do they serve?

There are nine major train stations in Moscow, all served by the Metro on the circle line. Each station serves a different direction, making turning up at the right station before you travel slightly easier:

Name	Russian	Serves	Metro station
Belorussky station	Белорусский	Kaliningrad, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Czech Republic	Belorusskaya (Белорусская)
Kazansky station	Казанский	Central Asia, Ryzan, Ufa, Samara, Kazan, Ulan Ude, Novorossiisk	Komsomolskaya (Комсомольская)
Kievsky station	Киевский	Western Ukraine, Southeastern Europe, Vnukovo Airport	Kievskaya (Киевская)
Kursky station	Курский	Southern Russia, Caucasus nations, Eastern Ukraine, Crimea	Kurskaya / Chakalovskaya (Курская / Чкаловская)
Leningradsky station	Ленинградский	Estonia, Finland, St. Petersburg, Northwestern Russia	Komsomolskaya (Комсомольская)
Paveletsky station	Павелецкий	Voronezh, Tambov, Volgograd, Astrakhan, Domodedovo Airport	Paveletskaya (Павелецкая)
Savyolovsky station	Савеловский	Kostroma, Cherepovets, Sheremetyevo Airport	Savyolovskaya (Савеловская)
Yaroslavlsky station	Ярославский	Siberia, Russian Far East, Mongolia, China	Komsomolskaya (Комсомольская)
Rizhsky station	Рижский	Latvia	Rizhskaya (Рижская)

Where are the train stations in St. Petersburg and which destinations do they serve?

There are five major train stations in Saint Petersburg, all of which are easily accessible by the Metro. Each station serves a different direction, making turning up at the right station before you travel slightly easier.

Name	Russian	Serves	Metro station
Moskovsky station	Московский	Moscow, Far North, Central Asia, Crimea, Caucasus region	Ploshchad Vosstaniya / Mayakovskaya (Площадь Восстания / Маяковская)
Finlandsky station	Финландский	Helsinki, North West	Ploshchad Lenina (Площадь Ленина)
Baltiysky station	Балтийский	Local and suburban services	Baltiskaya (Балтийская)
Vitebsky station	Витебский	Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Odessa	Pushkinskaya (Пушкинская)
Ladozhsky station	Ладужский	Murmansk, Volgoda, Yekaterinburg	Ladozhskaya (Ладужская)

What are the other major stations on the Russian rail network (including Trans-Siberian routes)?

There are hundreds of train stations across the Russian train network. Some of the most popular destinations are: Nizhny Novgorod (Нижний Новгород), Perm (Пермь), Yekaterinburg (Екатеринбург), Kazan (Казань), Novosibirsk (Новосибирск), Irkutsk (Иркутск), Vladivostok (Владивосток), Ulan Bator (Улаанбаатар), Beijing.

How do I find my platform and board the train when I arrive at the station?

Upon arriving at the station you will generally find that there is an electronic departures board showing the train number, its destination, and the departure time and platform. Bear in mind that your destination will be written in the Cyrillic alphabet, so it is worth learning the name of your destination in Russian to avoid any confusion or stress. Russia uses a numeral system that most will be familiar with, so reading the train number, platform and time should not be an issue.

Once you know which platform you will be departing from, head through the departure hall, following signage, where available, to the main platform area. Each platform will be clearly numbered, with some also possessing electronic boards that show information about the train that is currently present.

If you find that you are early and the train has yet to arrive, you will be able to use one of the waiting areas within the station. If you choose to do this, remain alert as all announcements will be in Russian so you may miss the announcement for your train. Alongside learning your destination's name in written Russian, it may also be worth learning it in spoken Russian too.

When the time comes to board the train, you will find your carriage by checking the numbers on the doors leading into the train. At the entrance to the carriage will be one of the conductors who will check that all of your documents (passport/ID card and tickets/voucher) are in order before allowing you entry.

There will be porters around the station who will be willing to help with any baggage you are unable to carry. They will often charge around 200 roubles for each item, though they have been known to ask for more if they feel that you can afford it.

Are the trains punctual?

Yes, Russian trains are always punctual. This is particularly impressive for trains that cross international borders such as trains 4 and 20 heading for Beijing (including border crossings) along the way.

When can I board my train?

You can board your train up to 30 minutes before it departs from the station. We recommend that you do board at this time, so that you have time to get settled before the journey begins.

Will passport and customs checks take place as I board the train?

All passport and custom checks take place at the border between the two countries you are travelling through. Generally each country will undertake their own checks, taking up to several hours in each case.

What happens if I miss my train?

Try not. If you find yourself late for your train, you will need to purchase a new ticket for the next train if you would still like to make your journey. If you have stored your baggage on-board before getting off again (to purchase snacks for instance) and it leaves before you return, you will need to speak to the Station Master immediately. He will then attempt to help you resolve this issue.

What happens if I lose my ticket?

The following information is valid only for tickets where the journey is wholly within Russia.

If you have lost your ticket, or merely damaged it, it may not be possible to replace it; for instance if you are travelling late at night when ticket offices may not be open. Always try, though, as the station staff will be as helpful as possible. If we have sent an e-ticket with electronic registration, you can just re-print your voucher. If we have sent an electronic ticket that has to be exchanged for paper ticket and lose, or damage it before exchanging it for your paper ticket, you will just need to re-print your voucher. If loss or damage occurs after this, you can pay a fee (usually around 500 roubles) to have the ticket re-issued. If you are travelling with a paper ticket, you can pay a fee (usually around 500 roubles) to have the ticket re-issued.

What are the different types of trains?

Russian trains usually fall into one of the following five categories:

- **High-speed (скоростной)** – The fastest trains on the Russian network; running as the Sapsan between Moscow and Saint Petersburg as well as Nizhniy Novgorod, and the slightly slower Allegro running between Saint Petersburg and Helsinki.
- **Firmeny (фирменный)** – Running on the most popular routes, Firmeny trains offer the best services, facilities and staff of all Russian trains. They are long distance trains that reach their destination much quicker than other trains on the same route.

- **Fast/Skory (скорый)** – Long distance trains that are not quite the equal of the Firmeny trains. They generally take a little longer to arrive at their destination because they will stop at more stations along the route. Because of this they are usually somewhat cheaper.
- **Passenger (пассажирский)** – Passenger trains generally run on shorter routes than either Firmeny or Skory trains. They are a step down again from Skory trains, both in quality and speed (they tend to stop at all the stations along their route). These are the cheapest of all Russian trains.
Elektrichka – Otherwise known as local commuter trains, they run to and from the suburban areas of major cities. They are all seated and vary greatly in quality.

How are the train carriages laid out?

There are a number of different carriage layouts that most of the trains in Russia stick to. Some may vary slightly, and some of the privately owned trains (such as the Grand Express) may vary greatly but, as a rule, the following descriptions are what you can expect:

First class sleeper

First Class carriages consist of nine cabins, each for two people sharing; though sole occupancy is possible if you buy both tickets. There are usually two lower berths in each cabin that can transform between couch and bed with a small table between them. Occasionally one berth may be above the other, in which case only the bottom bed will transform in to a couch. At each end of the carriage are toilets with washing facilities. A provodnista/provodnik will have a room in the carriage from where they will ensure the carriage is tidy and that all travellers have a point of contact for any problems. Unfortunately, First Class tickets are limited in number and very popular meaning that they are not always available. If you would like space and privacy, and it is not possible to book a First Class ticket, it is possible to book two Second Class tickets; both the upper and lower-berth in a cabin to approximate the feeling of First Class. If you are planning to travel as a group of two, and both of you purchase two tickets, you would be afforded sole use of the cabin that you have booked.

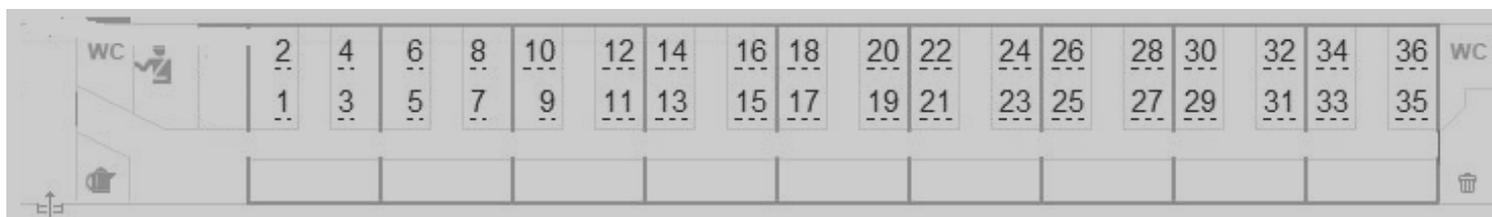


First class seated

Seated First Class carriages can generally be found on the Sapsan and Allegro trains. They offer extended leg space and are laid out in much the same way as European trains; with one or two seats either side of an aisle. Luggage space can usually be found to the rear of the carriage.

Second class sleeper

Second Class consists of nine cabins in much the same way as First Class, though there are four people in the compartment. However two passengers can buy two tickets each to use the compartment on their own. There are two lower bunk beds that, like First class, perform the function of being both a couch and a bed, with two additional fold out bunks above these; again there is a table between the bottom two bunks. At each end of the carriage are toilets with washing facilities. A provodnista/provodnik will have a room in the carriage from where they will ensure the carriage is tidy and that all travellers have a point of contact for any problems.



Second class seated

Second Class seats are laid out in a standard European train configuration with two sets of two seats separated by a small aisle. The seats are comfortable, though without the added leg room of First Class. Luggage space can usually be found to the fore or aft sections of the carriage.

Third class sleeper

Third Class is made up of 'open cabins', each with space for up to six people. Each 'cabin' offers the same two up, two down layout as Second Class (though the beds do not fold up or become sofas) with two additional bunks in the corridor, one above the other. Up to 54 people can travel in each carriage. At each end of the carriage are toilets with washing facilities.



NB! Not all trains offer first or third class tickets.

What are gender specific cabins?

On many trains travelling the Russian rail network it is possible to select to travel in a male, or female, only cabin. This may be of interest to lone female travellers who may feel awkward, or unsafe, sharing a room with men they do not know. However we cannot guarantee that single gender cabins will be available.

Are there facilities for disabled people?

On selected trains travelling between Moscow and Saint Petersburg, such as the Sapsan, there are carriages designed to enable those with disabilities to enjoy rail travel; with wider corridors and toilet facilities as well as larger cabins. Unfortunately most trains within Russia do not have facilities designed for disabled people; though this is gradually changing.

Can I travel with children?

Yes, you can. Children are welcome to travel on Russian trains and receive discounted tickets to do so. In summary, one child under the age of five may travel for free if they share their place with a paying adult. If the child requires a separate place, or they are aged between 5 and 10, then they are charged at the Child Rate; generally 50% of the regular ticket price. When travelling with children on long distance trains, such as those on the Trans-Siberian railway, it is worth remembering that there are several sections with no stops for several hours, so you may want to pack travel games and books to help keep children occupied.

Please note: When boarding the train, the child must show either their own passport, be listed in their parent's passport or have a copy, and translation, of their birth certificate. If the child is listed in a parent's passport, a photograph must be included for the child to be allowed entry to the train.

Is bed linen provided on long distance trains?

Yes. In Second and Third Classes you will find these either on your bunk, or they will be given to you upon boarding the train. They will come in a sealed pack, and you will need to make your own bed. In First Class your bed will be made for you. The bedding will include a top and bottom sheet, as well as a pillowcase and a towel. A blanket is usually placed on the bunk.

What are the WC facilities like?

In general, they are very basic, but serve their purpose. Each toilet will consist of a toilet and a wash basin. The quality can vary depending on the type of train selected, and the class of ticket purchased. On some of the privately run trains between Moscow and Saint Petersburg showers may even be provided in some classes.

At the beginning of any journey they are clean, though they will deteriorate as the journey progresses. Understandably, the level of deterioration will depend on the class you are travelling in; as there are fewer people in a First Class carriage (up to 18) they will see less use than in the more crowded Third Class (up to 54) for instance.

Remember that on most trains the bathroom facilities are locked for up to half an hour before stopping to a station, the entire time the train is stationary, and then for up to half an hour afterwards. This also means that there may be queues in the time leading up to these periods, particularly in Second and Third Class. Be sure to check any schedule that is displayed on the bathroom door so that you can avoid these times.

We recommend that you take bottled water for brushing your teeth, your own hand towel, and maybe even your own toilet roll in case the on-board provodonista/provodnik have been unable to resupply the bathroom; this is particularly worth remembering in the busier Third Class.

Are showers available?

They are available in some luxury cabins aboard trains such as the Grand Express, but generally this is not the case. Showers are not widely available, unfortunately, on long distance trains; though you may be able to access one on some trains by paying around 150 roubles to your provodonista/provodnik.

Are food and drinks available on the train?

On many (but not all) long distance trains you will find a restaurant car that will serve a number of freshly cooked local dishes, as well as hot and cold (soft and alcoholic) drinks. These restaurant cars are not open 24 hours a day so, upon boarding, you should check the opening times to ensure that you do not miss out. The prices vary depending on the train you have chosen, but everything is generally reasonably priced; usually around 15-20 EUR.

You may also find that a trolley of snacks and bottled drinks is wheeled through the train at regular intervals. These prices can vary from reasonable to fairly high.

In each carriage you will find a samovar of hot water that you will have unlimited access to. We recommend taking along tea, coffee and foods that can be eaten by just adding hot water (such as instant soup and noodles) to make the most of this. Tea and coffee may also be available from the provodonista/provodnik of your carriage for around 20 - 50 roubles. Though they are unlikely to supply you with milk.

If you are lucky enough to make friends with other travellers on-board, particularly Russian travellers, you may be invited to join them, and share their provisions (often home cooked bread or smoked meats) for dinner in their cabin.

Are food and drinks available at the stations along the route?

Each station that the train stops at along the way has kiosks and small shops located in and around the departure hall, and some are on the platform, where the train stops, at which you can buy provisions such as snacks and bottled drinks, as well as newspapers and magazines. These are unlikely to remain open 24 hours a day though, so be sure to pick up any supplies you would like during any daytime stops.

Of more interest are the local traders who often sell their produce from the train platform, or through the windows of each carriage. Most of what is on offer is home-made, giving you the opportunity to sample a selection of traditional local food throughout Russia and the Trans-Siberian routes. You will mostly find local cheese, bread, smoked meat and fresh vegetables.

Can I smoke on the train?

No. As of the 1st June 2014 all smoking on suburban and long distance trains has been banned.

Can I smoke at the train stations?

As of the 1st June 2014 smoking has been banned inside, and within 15 metres of the entrance to, all railway stations in Russia. This ban is also extended to all platforms for suburban trains.

Smoking is still allowed on platforms belonging to long distance trains.

New signage has been put in place to make clear where you can, and cannot, smoke. Please pay extra attention to any smoking prohibitions as there can be severe fines for anyone breaking these rules.

What should I pack on a long distance or overnight train?

While this may vary from person to person, we recommend that you take:

- Light clothes, such as T-shirts, shorts or jogging bottoms as Russian trains are very well heated, particularly in the winter.
 - Slippers, sandals or flip-flops as Russians prefer that you do not wear outdoor footwear inside.
 - Toiletries such as toothpaste, liquid soap and deodorant.
 - Bottled water and soft drinks.
 - Tea and coffee.
 - Dried foods to be rehydrated with hot water from the Samovar.
 - General food and snacks to suit your tastes.
 - Personal first aid kit.
 - Carrier bags to store your rubbish. These can be deposited in a bin area at the end of the carriage.
- Something with which to pass the time; books, magazines, playing cards, tablet computers or music for example.

What is the luggage allowance?

The maximum allowed hand luggage is 36kg for Second and Third Class, 50kg for First Class, and the dimensions (height, length and width) cannot exceed a combined total of 180cm.

Bear in mind that you will want to stow your luggage once on-board (in the storage provided under the bottom bunk for instance) and so you will not want it to be too big and bulky as it will not be able to fit.

Can I take a bike with me?

It is possible to transport bikes on Russian trains provided the bike can be broken down and packaged small enough (wheels and peddles removed for instance) to fit in the space allotted for luggage. The easiest solution to this question is to buy a whole cabin, First or Second Class, so that you have space to yourself for storage. Where storage within a cabin is not possible it will be necessary to purchase a ticket for the baggage car.

Are there electrical outlets?

In First Class there is an electrical outlet in every room, in addition to low power outlets in each bathroom.

In Second Class there are generally two sockets in the corridor, in addition to low power outlets in each bathroom.

In Third Class you will only find the low power outlets in the bathrooms.

Outside of First Class, the available outlets are in high demand. If you are able, we would advise taking spare batteries for your electrical devices where possible, or investing in a portable travel charger so that you do not need to rely on the power outlets.

Is Wi-Fi available?

As a rule - no. It is available, though, on a small number of trains between Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod and Helsinki such as the Allegro and Sapsan rail services. The number of routes, and services, on which Wi-Fi is available is increasing all the time.

Do I need to be able to speak Russian to travel on Russian trains?

No, you do not. While it is always helpful, and we would recommend, memorizing a few important phrases, you should be able to get by without learning any Russian.

Be aware, though, that outside of the larger cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, very few people will speak, and very little will be written in English or other languages. Even within the major cities you may find use of languages other than Russian limited.

Before leaving for your trip, it may be worth investing in a simple phrase book, or downloading one of the many translation apps available for your mobile devices.

Will I need a visa?

Yes. For any journey within Russia, or along the Trans-Siberian railway, visas will be required. There are a variety of different visas depending on how long you intend to stay in a country and how many times you intend to leave and re-enter. Usually you have to apply for a Russian visa beforehand and in person at the local Russian Consular office or Visa Center as these require now to take your finger print. We will provide you with an invitation for a Russian visa, required when applying for a Russian visa.

Will I need a travel insurance?

Yes, travel insurance is very important when travelling in Russia and along the Tran-Siberian routes. A travel insurance is also required when you apply for a Russian visa.