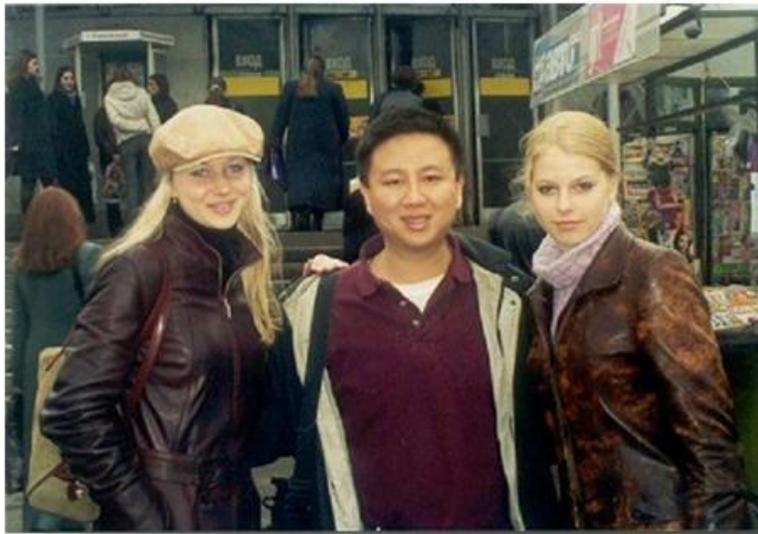


Winston's Guide to Traveling and Dating in Russia *For Men*



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Guide to Traveling in Russia

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Preface

Dear Reader,

Hello. My name is Winston Wu. I have made 3 long trips in Russia over the course of three years, been to around 20 cities, met hundreds of people, and dated many women there. Based on my first-hand experiences, lessons, observations, and advice from others along the way, I would like to share these tips regarding traveling and dating in Russia. So I present this guide for you. Though the travel tips can be used by anybody, the dating guide is geared toward men. (Sorry ladies)

Keep in mind though, that none of these rules are absolute, and only meant as general guidelines to consider. Some of it may even be outdated by the time you read this. Often you still have to just go with the flow. I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions or comments, my email is WWu777us@yahoo.com. Thanks and enjoy!

Best Regards,
Winston

Understanding Russian people, life, culture and customs

Here is a great dissertation about Russian people, their life, culture and customs that will get you acquainted with their way of life.

<http://www.womenrussia.com/russians.htm>

Inconsistency and changeability are a constant in Russia

The first thing I should tell you before you go to Russia is that there is no consistency there. Everything and anything is subject to drastic change at any moment. So what I tell you here may not apply anymore by the time you read this. That's just the kind of country it is, so dynamic, chaotic, and unpredictable that not even its own historical experts can understand what is happening in Russia or predict what will happen. It's always been that way. For example, when I arrived in Russia in August of 2004, all of a sudden black leather jackets were the new fad and almost everyone had them, which wasn't the case the year before. And Lipton Green Tea started appearing everywhere that drinks were sold, which wasn't there the year before. Then, racism and skinhead groups started on the rise that year, and started attacking and sometimes killing minorities, whereas in 2003 it was still relatively safe and I encountered almost no racism before.

Also, rules are not consistent there. One time, someone may let you do something, but the next time or the next person may not let you do the same. In such cases, arguing "but last time I was allowed to" will not hold water with them. For example in Hotel Rossia in Moscow, the largest hotel in Russia, I was allowed by one security guard to go to my friend's room to rest and stow my luggage for a while. When we came down for a few errands, the other guard wouldn't let me back up again without registration. Saying "but the other guard let me up without a problem the first time!" didn't hold water or change his mind. So we had to spend a few hours going to several offices in the hotel to register me as a guest, which involved a lot of searching and waiting, just so I could go up and get my luggage and take a shower.

So you see, things there can go wrong that you'd never expect to go wrong. That's what you have to be prepared for. That's the kind of place it is.

Crash course in learning Russian

If you're unfamiliar with Russian and need a crash course, you can start by learning the alphabet at this site below. It gives you an easy to follow crash course that will teach you how to read all 33 letters in under an hour. You can download the simple lessons as well. It's a real breeze, even if you aren't the studying type.

<http://langintro.com/rintro/index.htm>

There are also free online language courses in Russian you can take at Live Mocha:

<http://www.livemocha.com/>

Next, I would suggest getting language learning computer software and tapes as well. There are many software titles available, but the ones I would recommend based on low cost and efficient benefit, are *Instant Immersion Russian (Beginner level)* and *Rosetta Stone Russian Explorer*. Both utilize pictures and games to teach you a new language easily and naturally the way a child would learn them. Each costs under 10 dollars if you get them from Ebay (www.ebay.com) and Half.com (www.half.com). The Rosetta Stone version mentioned above is just a starter kit, and there is a complete edition available, but it costs about 100 dollars, even on Ebay. As far as Russian language learning audio tapes, they are very inexpensive as well, and you can get them at your local used bookstore for a few dollars, or just rent them from the library. In my experience though, the audio Russian spoken on the audio tapes seem far more representative of the way it's really spoken in Russia than the computer software.

Of course, there are many books on learning Russian as well, but those books can't teach you pronunciation, only reading and writing Russian. As a beginner, it is more important for you to learn speaking and listening first, before reading and writing, since your core communication in Russia will be interpersonal in nature.

Visas

You can easily get a one month tourist visa to Russia by applying directly at the Russian Embassy nearest you. The requirements and steps are outlined at this site: www.russianembassy.org. However, to save yourself the legwork, you can have an internet travel agency do it all for you so you never have to set foot inside the Russian Embassy. It will cost a bit more because of their fees, but not by much. One that I and many others would recommend is Go To Russia.net (www.gotorussia.net). They have a good solid reliable reputation and are most often used by Americans going to Russia. On their site above, there is also a toll free number you can call if you have any questions. Their staff have always been courteous, friendly, and efficient, in my experience. Other services include www.visatorussia.com.

While the one month tourist visa is easy to obtain, anything longer such as the longer visas such as the 3 month business visa, 6 month business visa, 1 year business visa, homestay visa, etc. require more paperwork and document hassle. For those, it is best to have an internet travel agency or the inviting institution handle it all for you.

A tricky issue that sometimes comes up is the problem of whether it is possible to extend your visa if you need to. People and organizations will often tell you conflicting things about this issue. Some are sure you can extend your visa without leaving Russia and others are sure you can't. I'm still not clear on the dynamics of this issue, but here's what I've gathered so far. It seems that it depends on the organization that issued your invitation letter. Some organizations, if they have certain roots or connections, have the means to extend your visa by up to two weeks without you having to leave the country. Others don't have this power. (One exception though, is if you become hospitalized or injured to the point where you can't move or board a plane, in that case the government will automatically extend your visa.) So if this might be an issue for you, it's best to speak to the organization who provided you with your invitation letter about it, or the travel agency that you used to apply for the visa.

In any case, if you find yourself needing to extend your visa and can't do it without leaving the country, you can just ride the train or bus to a neighboring country that you do not need a visa to enter into, such as Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, etc. From there, you can stay in a hotel or hostel for a while, and use almost any travel agency there to apply for a new visa back to Russia. The travel agencies there will always have English speaking staff, and depending on what you pay, the new visa could take anywhere from a few days to a week to process. Just to let you know though, Estonia and Lithuania are generally cheaper places to reside in while you do this, than Latvia or Finland.

Packing

Americans tend to have a habit for over-packing and preparing for every situation. Russians, however, tend to pack lightly and economically, so they see this American habit as strange. If you're on an extended trip or are going to many cities though, I would recommend dropping this American habit. The problem is that even if you are taking taxis or cars, you will often be dragging your luggage across distances, crowds, walkways, etc. and by then, you will wish you had lighter luggage. And on trains, the corridors are narrow so large luggage may be difficult to drag through and put in the storage bins under the seats. It is best to have either a large backpacker's backpack or one luggage cart with wheels to roll on. Also have a small backpack or handbag available for souvenirs or gifts you accumulate. For long trips, pack about 5 changes of clothes. My suggestion would be to just bring the bare essentials of what you know you will need, but with things you may or may not need, if it's something you can probably get there too, then don't bring it along just to be prepared. Otherwise, you may regret it later when you find that it is a pain in the butt to be dragging around things you don't even end up using and not having room to put your new souvenirs or gifts into.

Carrying cash and other valuables

One of the exciting things about Russia is that anything can happen, from the best to the worst. The country and environment is unstable and in a constant flux of change (perhaps this is why unstable people and misfits in American tend to fit like a glove in Russia? lol Just kidding). This also means that you could be mugged or cleverly scammed before you know it. Therefore, don't carry too much cash with you. I would suggest carrying several hundred dollars at a time, using your ATM debit card to withdraw money from the cash machines there (which they call "bankomat") each time you need to replenish your supply. And many will advise you to divide your cash among different pockets of your clothing to help protect yourself.

It is advised that you carry a hidden money belt under your shirt wrapped around your torso, or a necklace money belt. I know it feels hokey and nerdy to wear it at first, but I can't stress enough how important it is to have it. Inside the money belt, put your passport and ATM debit card (they are the most important and essential items you need!), along with some spare cash, credit cards (at least some of them), and any other important documents (such as train tickets). This money belt inside your shirt virtually eliminates pick pocketing. I can't tell you how many times I've met other tourists at the hostels I stayed at, who didn't have this money belt and lost their passport or had it stolen. If you lose your passport, you could end up having a hellish time trying to get a temporary passport and visa from your Embassy to stay here or leave the country! I've heard many terrible accounts of this happening, so be warned. And if you lose your ATM debit card, you would be toast as well since you couldn't withdraw cash anymore except with your credit card. (not recommended)

Also, if you are in Moscow or St. Petersburg, put your wallet in your front pocket, not your back pocket. In crowded areas there, such as the metro, there are pick pocketers lurking and they know how to spot foreigners. In regards to traveler's checks, I wouldn't bother with them because most places don't take them, and to convert them to cash in a bank, the department which handles that is often not open, even when the bank is.

Using credit cards and protecting them

In Russia, only the upper end establishments and businesses tend to accept credit cards. Most places prefer cash. It is best to put at least some of them into your money belt too. Here are some preparations you should make with your credit cards before your trip though.

- Before your trip, you should call all your credit card companies first (their toll free number should be on the back of the card) and let them know when you are going overseas and how long. The reason you should do this is if your credit card company sees that your card is being used overseas, they may think that fraud is taking place and freeze your account.

- Also, here is how to prepare in case your credit cards get stolen. First, remember that if you lose your credit cards, you can't use the collect call number on the back to report it to your credit card companies because the Russian phone system is not designed to let you make overseas collect calls. Therefore, you have to write on a piece of paper all your credit card numbers, their toll free phone numbers to report them stolen, the three-digit security code, any passwords, etc. and give it to a person back home whom you would trust with your life, such as a parent, family member, or relative. Tell that person that if you lose your credit cards, you will email them or call them, so that they can report it stolen to the credit card companies. Or, you can also sign up for online service with your credit card companies at their website. Once you do, you can contact them directly through the internet and report the cards stolen if necessary. It is also a good idea to do this so that you can pay any credit card bills you have online from internet cafes in Russia. (On a side note, it's also good to sign up for online banking with your bank account too, so that you can check your balances and make transfers between your accounts.)

Bringing your own medicine

Bring a supply of the medications or medical supplies that work best for you. This one is especially true if you're going to Russia in the winter or cold season. Since our body's antibodies and white blood cells are mostly adjusted to the cold/flu viruses in our own country, they will often be unaccustomed and defenseless against the cold/flu viruses in the air of foreign countries like Russia. Therefore, you are likely to get sick very easily, especially if you hang around crowded areas or ride in closed train compartments. When this happens, if you don't have your medications with you, you will deeply regret it because the tablets and syrups you get in Russian pharmacies (called Apteka) are nowhere near as effective, and some don't work at all. Therefore, you would suffer horrendously without any effective treatment. And that could easily ruin or impair your trip. At that time, you'll be kicking yourself for not bring that Robitussin or Tylenol Cold that worked for you so well back home. So don't forget this!

Crash course in getting around your first time in Russia

The first two words you need to learn in Russian, which you'll be using the most often, are "Gdeh?" (Where?) and "Skolkah?" (How much?) If you just know those two simple words, you will already be in good shape to get around places and buy things or pay for things.

If this is your first time in Russia and you hardly speak any Russian, you are apt to be nervous and confused about getting around. Don't worry though, it's easier than you think, especially when there's always people around, even in small cities, to ask for help. Here's some tips. Unless you can pronounce your destination name or address in Russian correctly, you should ask your hotel receptionist, guide, translator, friend or any English speaking Russian person, to write it down for you on paper to carry with you. Or else take the brochure with your destination on it. Also, remember to bring the information of your return destination too. (Usually, the hotel entrance card you get after registering in will do the trick, since it usually has the hotel address on it.)

When you need to find something or are lost, you just ask people around “Gdeh (name of place)?” (Where is) or if your destination is written on a paper or brochure, show it to them after saying “Gdeh?” and they will point you in the right direction. Often, it's not enough to just be pointed in one direction because your destination may require turns, which would be difficult for you to understand and them to explain. Therefore, a good idea is to walk a few blocks in the direction you are pointed in, and then stop and ask someone else so you know whether to continue in the same direction, make a turn, or walk back to take a turn you missed. If you follow this method, little by little, you will find where you need to go. It works very well.

Also, “Skolkah?” (How much?) or “Skolkah stoit?” (How much is the price?) is the other one you'll always be using as well for when you pay for things like taxis, buses, metros, hotels, groceries, souvenirs, and other costs, etc. If you didn't learn the numbers in Russian before you arrived, just ask the person to write down the price for you, or give him a pen and notepad. That will do the task.

Finally, after asking people for help or buying something, you should thank them by saying “Spashiba” (Thank you) or if you're feeling very pleased, say “Spashiba bolshoy” (Thank you very much).

Communicating

Here is where the skills of those who are resourceful or creative come in handy. Communicating with people who don't speak English can be fun sometimes and frustrating at other times. (It's fun when you're trying to get to know someone you like, but not so fun when you are trying to describe a problem, solve a dispute, or ask for your money back) Most people will have a lot of trouble even attempting to communicate here. Like most people, you will probably arrive in Russia with some phrasebooks and pocket dictionaries. However, I have found that something helps you a lot more - electronic translators. If you get them in the US, they are very expensive of course, but you can get some cheap efficient ones in Russia at department stores. Look for a section that sells electronics and ask to see them. They usually start at a thousand roubles and up depending on their vocabulary size and features. The ones that dictate words through a speaker though, are much more expensive.

The one I got says “Brilliant 2000” on it and only cost 1100 roubles (about 40 dollars) but works like a charm. It is simple, easy to use, and has a vast vocabulary range that will do what you need. In addition, it also has a simple Russian to English translation feature too, that will allow the person you're talking with to translate what they want to say back to you. And it's small and thin enough to put into the inside of your coat jacket. However, since it only translates one word at a time, you have to be a little creative in finding ways to get across a meaning. And as you might expect, some will be better at deducing what you're trying to say than others.

You will find that it also helps a lot to pay attention to facial expressions, when you can't understand what the person is saying. The facial expressions often give clues, for example if someone shrugs, has a puzzled look on his face and says “Niez nayu” you can deduce that he means “I don't know.” With practice, you will learn to read these facial expressions. Also, if you have trouble getting something across, it often helps if you use analogies or examples to illustrate your point. It takes some practice to be good at that, and even then, you can only explain simpler things, not complex things.

Communication skills are something you have to practice or be resourceful with so not everyone will be good at it. If it helps you can just hire a translator or guide, but that would often cost a lot. Fortunately, I've always been talented in games like Pictionary, Charades, or Scrabble type games, so I've been able to use that to enhance my communication skills. For people like me, translators are often unnecessary. But for others, they may help a lot in making things more comfortable and easy to deal with. So if you need it and can afford it, I'd say go ahead and get a translator. However, I should tell you that the translators working for marriage agencies tend to be more expensive than independent ones or city tour guides.

Whatever the case, when speaking English in Russia, do not speak your normal fluent English, even with English-speaking Russians. Instead, speak slower and more carefully than you normally do, and avoid slang such as “how come?”. Talk as clearly and simply as you would with a little child.

Customer service - what to expect and what not to

Before you go to Russia, you must first drop the notions you have in the US of “excellent customer service to please the customer” or “the customer is always right” type of philosophies. That way is not the norm in Russia, and for many Americans, this comes as the first culture shock. If you're a Westerner, one of the first things you'll notice about Russia is that the service seem rude, cold or apathetic, and don't seem to care to try to please you. The truth is, outside of luxurious 5 star hotels, customer service in Russia is unlike anything in the states. Russian businesses usually go by the book on everything, even if it involves small trivial things. Rarely will they go out of their way to do something extra for you. You usually have to pay for every little thing, even for butter, ketchup, or sometimes sugar cubes. Even if the staff wanted to be generous to you, often they can't because their bosses are very strict and stingy, and wouldn't allow it. The staff would be scolded, reprimanded or fired if they didn't do everything that way, even to please a customer. That's the mentality most Russian business owners have. Therefore, don't expect that customer service people will bend any rules to please you. It happens occasionally, but most of the time, it won't.

Also, in disputes, the customer is not always right like in the states. In fact, the customer is almost always wrong. Even if the staff or business messes up on something, they will not take any losses for it. Instead, you would have to take the loss for it. And if both of you are at fault, such as due to miscommunication, then you most definitely would have to take the loss, not them. Often, it is not worth it to argue with them about it, unless it has to do with a great sum of money.

Therefore, when these kind of things happen, try not to take it personally or get offended. It's not happening because they don't like you, nor are they trying to give you a bad time. It's just how they do business over there. And that's nothing personal. In fact, many of these workers are much more friendly, lively, and free-spirited once they are off work. (It is a cultural quirk that is inverse to the states, where people are friendlier at work when they are paid to be than off work when they don't have to be)

Remember that this is not America, and that Russians do not have the same concept of fairness and justice that we do. In fact, besides this issue, many of the pros and cons you are used to in America are reversed in Russia. There are way too many for me to list, of course, but finding these things out is one of the fascinations of being there, because you learn something new everyday. So even in the bad times, try to see the positive in it. (And if you think they have it bad there, just remember that they don't have to deal with health insurance, car insurance, or mortgages like we do, which makes them a lot more stress-free and less likely to “lose it”. I told you the pros and cons were reversed :))

In addition, things in general are just not as efficient as in America, so don't expect them to be. When something goes wrong, people there usually just shrug or laugh and say “It's Russia” because they are so used to such bureaucracies and inefficiencies that they have learned to not take things too seriously anymore. That's the mentality there, and part of what makes people so free-spirited and playful over there.

Hotels

In almost any Russian hotel, there is a tight security system as follows. Each floor has a concierge lady, dressed like a maid, who guards and manages her assigned floor. After paying for your room, she takes your receipt and hands you the key to your room. When you are leaving, you are supposed to leave her the key, while she gives you a hotel pass for you to carry on you. This pass lets the security doorman know that you are a resident there

before letting you up again. All this may seem like control-tight security to a first time Westerner in Russia, since our hotels are not so closely guarded and controlled. But it has its advantages in keeping you safe.

Regarding the floor concierges, they usually have 24 hour shifts, and not only take and give you your key, but also changes your sheets, bring you hot boiling water for your coffee or instant noodles, and may do your laundry for a negotiated price. Keep in mind though, that in the cheaper hotels, the concierge ladies may be much more grouchy and unpleasant, giving you dirty looks and looking for excuses to scold you all the time. But don't take that personally, as they are way overworked and underpaid, especially in the cheap hotels. And furthermore, I hear their bosses treat them badly too.

As in any big city, the further from city center you go, the less expensive the hotels are. (Sometimes, 10 - 15 minutes further down can mean the difference between hundreds of dollars!) This is true, of course in Moscow as well. If you look at the metro map of Moscow, you will see many metro lines crossed by a circle line around the center (known as brown line # 5). The hotels within that circle are SUPER expensive, and can start at 200 dollars or more. (The only exception I know of is the Rossia, the biggest hotel in all of Russia, located right next to the Kremlin Red Square. They sometimes have rooms for 50 dollars.) Outside of that ring, the prices go down to as low as 30 - 50 dollars.

If you're on a tight budget, you can consider hostels, which are dorm style accommodations for backpackers and travelers on a shoe string budget. They cost between 17-22 dollars per night and you get a dollar discount per night if you apply there for a Hostelling International card, which costs only a few dollars. Although you won't get much privacy in them, you will get to meet a lot of intelligent people from around the world, who are usually open, friendly, intelligent, and like meeting new people too. If you're alone, it's a great way to meet people to go on outings with. There are plenty of them in Moscow and St. Petersburg (email me for a list of them if you need them). I have used most of them. In St. Petersburg, the two main hostels, International Hostel Holiday and St. Petersburg International Hostel, are about the same cost and very close to a metro station, except that Hostel Holiday has a nice front view of the river. Their contact information and address can be found at www.hostels.com but here is some brief contact info that I have.

St. Petersburg International Hostel, Phone: +7 (812) 329 8018, Email: ryh@ryh.ru
International Hostel Holiday, Phone: +7 (812) 327-1070, E-mail: info@hostel.spb.ru, Website: <http://www.hostel.ru>

There is also supposed to be a new hostel in St. Petersburg called Prestige Inn that costs even less, but I haven't been to it. The only information I've found for them is:

Prestige Inn
14, Dobrolubov Ave.
St. Petersburg 198199
reservations@prestige-hotels.com

In Moscow, there are even more hostels to choose from. They each have their pros and cons, but my favorite one to use is Hostel Asia. There are three reasons, 1) It is the only one that is a one minute walk to the metro station (Ryazansky prospect), 2) There is a free phone in your room that you can use, which is even able to call to a mobile number (not all phones can do that, see the section on making calls in Russia), 3) There is a café open 24 hours that you can get food and drinks at anytime you want. Here is their contact information:

Hostel Asia in Moscow, Phone: +7 (095) 378-0001, Email: hostel-asia@mtu-net.ru, Website: <http://www.hostel.ru>

For a list of contact info and address for the rest, email me or check www.hostels.com or go to www.google.com and enter in the search engine "Hostels in Moscow". Outside of the big cities in Russia, hostels are rare, but if

you're still on a budget, don't worry. You can usually find a regular hotel there for between 15 and 20 dollars a night by asking around.

Also, another option for the budget conscious traveler are homestays, which are rooms you can rent in people's homes for about 10 dollars a day. You can find them at the train station in many cities by looking for people holding up signs at the platform. If you can't read Russian, just walk up to someone holding a sign and use your communication skills to ask if they are offering homestays. The easiest way I can think of to do this is to pantomime yourself sleeping by leaning your head on your palms folded together, and asking "Moznah?" (Can I?). If he/she nods, then ask "Skolkah stoit?" (What's the price?) They should be able to deduce from that that you're asking for a room. Or you can ask around to see if anyone knows someone who provides homestays.

If you can afford more luxury and wish to rent an apartment with western-style amenities, there is an American ex-patriate I know named Moscow Rick who rents them out. They include cable satellite TV and are located close to city center. Here is his website with his contact info: <http://www.enjoymoscow.com> There is also another American in Moscow named Robert who has apartments for a bit less. His site and contact info is at: <http://www.apartmentinmoscow.com>

A nice inexpensive hotel complex in Moscow that I know of is called "Izmailovsky". It is a complex of about 5 hotels situated in a plaza, located right off metro station "Izmailovsky Park" (on the dark blue line in the northeast corner of the metro map). I recommend it because it has some features and advantages. First of all, you can usually get a suite for two for about 30 dollars. Second, since there are 5 hotels in the complex, you can almost always get a room somewhere. Third, it has complete amenities and services.

An extensive list of accommodations in Russia can also be found at www.waytorussia.net, which is a comprehensive site which has guides and info for many aspects of Russia.

Now here's another secret. There are also what are called "hidden hotels" in Moscow that only Russians know about and go to, which don't seem to advertise to foreigners (don't ask me why) though you can stay in them. They can vary in quality, but are fairly inexpensive even if located near city center. Here's one I know that is close to city center. I don't know the name of it, but it's situated in the same building as the famous Traveler's Guest House youth hostel, located near metro stations Prospect Mira and Rizansky Prospect. (see www.hostels.com for exact address or email me for directions) In fact, almost all the youth hostels in Moscow are situated inside these unknown hidden hotels because they rent floors from them. Therefore, if the staff of the hidden hotel don't speak English, you can always get the receptionist of the youth hostel (they are required to speak very good English to work there) to help you. Anyway, this hotel is fairly close to city center, but get this. The rooms you rent there are actually two rooms adjacent to each other by your own private bathroom hallway! One is a bedroom, and the other a living room. However, the couch in the living room folds out into a bed. This means that it can accommodate up to four people, for the price of a single room! And at 30 dollars, that's a steal!

This would also be a good option if you are staying with a woman who is not comfortable or ready (or too religious) to sleep in the same room with you yet, as it saves you from having to pay for two separate hotel rooms. If you are bringing a guest or woman to your room who isn't registered to stay there, that person has to sign in with the doorman security. Usually, there is a curfew at which time they must leave. Otherwise, the guest can stay longer if a fee is given to the doorman.

Now for something a little shady. It's something to do if your girl dumps you, or you are feeling depressed or bored, and you want to do something besides drink the blues away. Almost every hotel in Russia or Ukraine has "call girl" services. You can ask the doorman for it, or if you walk around the hotel lobby for a while looking bored, they will usually offer it to you. How it works is that the security doorman will ask you to go to your room, then he makes a phone call. In a short while, there will be a knock on your door and you will have several women in a line-up for you to choose from (kind of like it is in the Nevada cathouses). I don't know where these girls come from exactly, some might live in the hotel while others have a driver who shuttles them

over. After choosing the girl you want, another girl usually takes the fee, which is usually only between 500-700 roubles (about \$15-20) per hour if you're not in Moscow or St. Petersburg (otherwise, it's considerably higher in those cities) and leaves, giving the hotel its cut. Discounted rates for all-night are also available. Usually, safe sex is a requirement and the girl will have condoms for you to use. When your time is up, one of her colleagues will knock at the door or call your room. All of this is perfectly legal though, so don't worry about getting in trouble with law enforcement.

You can find information for hotels in any Russian city online. However, the ones that advertise online are usually the most expensive ones. To find less expensive ones, you would have to rely on word-of-mouth, local people, or asking the taxi drivers there.

Free accommodation in Russia and around the world

If you are on a real tight budget, I have found a solution to accommodation expenses. It's a solution that even beats cheap backpacker accommodations. There are many sites now where you can stay with hosts and families all around the world for FREE - for culture exchange and making new friends! Most of these hosts are travelers themselves; open-minded, broad-minded people, who in turn get hosted by others on the site when they travel. It may sound too good to be true, but it is because I've used it. It's great, fun, easy, and there's no catch. I guess the only catch is that you gotta love meeting new people and you gotta be comfortable living with strangers you just met. Most Americans don't know about it though, because it is non-profit and non-commercial, so people only know of it by word-of-mouth. But nevertheless, membership on these sites is huge. All you have to do to use them is to register and create your free profile. There are no hidden strings or catches, other than remembering to be polite, considerate, and courteous to your hosts. Here are the sites where you can get free accommodation.

These three sites are the biggest and have the most members.

www.hospitalityclub.org

www.couchsurfing.com

www.globalfreeloaders.com

Other smaller but growing sites:

www.stay4free.com

www.place2stay.net

Budget traveling in Moscow site

If you're a budget traveler like me (except when out on dates with girls I want to impress of course :)) you may find Moscow a bit expensive for your tastes, especially if you stick with the touristy areas, so here's a site with a lot of useful tips and recommendations.

<http://www.cheap-moscow.com/>

Taxis

In Russia, there are two types of taxis. The official ones are unmistakable, and then there's unmarked "gypsy" ones, which can be private taxis or just drivers deciding to stop on a whim to make some extra money. If you

are new to Russia, you may be tempted to fear the unmarked cabs because you were always taught never to get into a car with a stranger like that. However, understand that using them is normal and considered basically safe in this country. The unmarked gypsy cabs also tend to give you lower prices (they don't have overhead and middlemen costs like the official ones do) and are more open to bargaining. Just make sure that the driver is alone. It is recommended by most travel guides that if you are alone, do not get into an unmarked cab that has two or more people inside, or else your safety could be jeopardized. Also, using unmarked cabs is especially more risky for women, as they are a more likely target for predators, so they may consider opting out of this option if they are alone and don't feel confident.

Here is the standard way to hail a cab in Russia. Just stand on a street with moving traffic, and hold your arm out about waist length with your open palm facing down. If you're looking for a gypsy cab, just do this until one stops. If you only want an official cab, just wait until you see one before hailing it. If you're staying in a hotel, you can ask the receptionist to call a cab for you, but it will be more expensive than if you hail one on the street. (they will tell you that their cab services are safer though, since they have a vested interest in doing so)

In most cities outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, they are very inexpensive, costing between 50 and 70 roubles per ride. You can expect this far to be consistent there. However, in Moscow (and St. Petersburg is getting up there too) the taxis can cost anywhere between 70 roubles and 1000 roubles or more, depending on the distance of your destination, the traffic, what the driver feels like quoting you, how greedy he is, etc. Therefore, taxi rates in Moscow are VERY variable and unpredictable. That is why it requires bargaining skills to ride taxis in Moscow. It's simply a must, unless you are so rich that it's not an issue for you. Normally, it's best to take the metro, since it's cheap and doesn't always take longer than a taxi (the reason is because the heavy traffic in Moscow sometimes slows the taxis down to being not much faster than the metro). And you'll find that it's the case in Moscow, that getting anywhere takes a long time. It's inescapable and something you have to accept when you're there.

But if you find yourself in a situation where you have to take a taxi there (such as if the metro is closed after midnight, your legs are too tired to walk, you're with a girl wearing high heels, you have heavy luggage with you, etc.), here is what you need to do. After hailing a cab, if you can't pronounce your destination and street name in Russian, have someone write it on a piece of paper for you, or show them the card/brochure with your destination on it, and then ask the driver "skolkah" (how much) or "skolkah stoit" (how much is the price). Seeing that you are a foreigner, the driver will usually give a higher than normal price, such as 500 roubles. (Most of them know how to quote prices in English) Then you counter with a low price and offer 100 roubles. Usually they will say no way. So you work your way up and offer 200 roubles next, and so forth. Usually, they will cut it down a bit for you. If not, then just say thank you "spashiba" and then close the door, and hail another one. Usually, within three tries, you will find one that is decently priced. If not, then perhaps your destination is far away enough that it requires a higher fare. Oh and if he can't quote prices in English or you in Russian, just use a notepad and pen to write the numbers to show each other.

Also, when getting off a train station, avoid the hustling taxi drivers trying to offer you a ride. They are usually very shady and attempt to quote you prices way above the standard, hoping that you don't know any better. Many have quoted me 20 dollars at first, for a 3 minute ride, hoping that I didn't know it was only 3 minutes away, to which I laughed in response. Be warned though, they are very insistent, but don't give in. Instead, if you need a taxi, go to the street and hail one down. Or, if you're like me, avoid the hassle and try to use the metro or bus if it's convenient for you and your luggage is light. Outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg though, taxis are relatively inexpensive, so you can use them more often.

Now here is where the dilemma comes in. If you are with a Russian woman, it looks bad to her, even if she is a nice good person, to be bargaining with the taxi driver in front of her. Not only do men need to appear generous in front of a Russian lady, but they need to appear not concerned about money, regardless of whether they are rich or poor. And it embarrasses some Russian ladies to be next to a guy who is bargaining. Therefore, if a driver attempts to scam you, then you are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the driver is giving you an inflated price because you are a foreigner with extra cash to spare for them. But you can't defend

yourself against it because it looks bad to the Russian lady with you. So what do you? It's not an easy dilemma to resolve. But here's what I would try. Don't have the Russian lady talk to the driver first (although it's tempting to just let her tell him the destination). Instead, you tell or show the driver your destination, asking your woman's help if needed, and then negotiate from there, but be quick about it. If you don't take too long, it won't look as bad to her. That's all I can say.

Oh and one more thing. Most Russian women are accustomed to walking and have strong feet (some even have blisters and veins on their feet to show for it :)). They are accustomed to taking buses, trolley, minivan buses, or metros and therefore won't have a problem with it. But there are a few though, who are too lazy to walk, ride buses or take the metro, and think they are princesses who deserve the high class treatment of riding taxis. In this case, you will have to make a decision as to whether you want to pay the price of keeping her, and if she's worth it. Normally, it's best to use both forms of transportation. For example, using buses and metros in the day when there's time to walk and sightsee, and using taxis at night after a long day when both of you are tired. However, there are some women who will ONLY ride taxis, and they are usually the same ones who like to order wine all the time too. That's when you have to make a judgment call about whether you want to expend the resources to keep someone like that or not. If you're not on a budget and are only there for a week or two, then it may not matter to you. Otherwise, it's another story.

Warning about taxis at the airport

Most people who fly to Russia are probably either arriving at the airport in Moscow or St. Petersburg. If you land there, keep something in mind. The taxi drivers outside who are waiting to hound you, are not standard taxis. They are monopolized by some company or mafia group, and will charge you at least 40 dollars and up to get you somewhere. You will also find them incredibly pushy and aggressive in getting you to ride with them. My advice is not to take them because they will rip you off (and in worse ways than the ones at the train station). Instead, you can easily take a bus into town that will get you to a metro station that will get you to where you need to go (and if not, you can just take a regular taxi from there the rest of the way). However, the problem comes when you arrive at the airport at 11pm or midnight, because that's about when the city bus service from the airport stops. In that case, you could be forced to take one of those rip-off taxis or sleep in the airport waiting area until morning, neither of which are nice prospects. Therefore, if you know your flight will arrive after 11pm, it's best to arrange some kind of pickup on your own. If no one you know is able to pick you up, many hotels and even youth hostels have airport pickup services that will cost about 20 or 25 dollars.

Getting from the airport to the city

For the first time traveler, a nervous concern may be how to get from the airport at Moscow or St. Petersburg to the city or nearest metro station. As mentioned above, the taxis at the airport waiting to hound you should be avoided. There are several types of public transportation and buses that you can use instead. However, if you arrive too late at night they may not be in service, so try to avoid that if you can. You can read about how to get from the airport to the city at this site below, which also contains other information about public transportation in Russia.

<http://www.sv-agency.udm.ru/index.htm#arrival>

Riding the bus or metro

If you're on a budget like me, you may find yourself taking buses and metros. They are much cheaper than taxis, very inexpensive, and sure beats walking. In almost any Russian decent sized city, the bus system is very comprehensive and frequent, and will get you to near almost any place. The fare is usually between 5 and 7

roubles per way, and students with a pass get on for free. During commute hours, you may find yourself packed tightly with too many people and no breathing space.

If you are new to Russia, here are some tips for learning to get around on buses. Again, as in the suggestion for riding taxis, have your destination name or bus stop name written down on a piece of paper or brochure. There are two ways you can do this. One is to show your destination to the bus driver, and then use some pantomime signals (by either pointing to your ear or mouth) to tell him to alert you when they reach your stop. Not all drivers will be able to understand you, but the ones that do are usually very reliable in remembering to alert you for your stop. The other more easier way is to ask a person on the bus to alert you when your stop approaches. Or they can tell you how many stops it will be before you get off. It's best to approach a younger person for help with this, since they are more likely to know some English. Then thank them by saying "Spashiba bolshoy". If you find that you just missed your stop, go up to the bus driver and say to him "Astanovka pajalst" (stop please or next stop please).

When you get on the bus, a ticket taker lady will usually approach you to collect the fare and issue you a thin paper ticket. On some buses though, there is no ticket taker and they use the honor system to collect your fares. You are expected to go to the front of the bus and give the driver the fare. But of course, many do not do that and simply enter and exit from the back of the bus. Also, during commute hours when buses are so packed that you can't move around, the ticket lady may not come to you to collect the fare. In that case, you can just get off without paying, cause there will be no way for you to do so. But be warned though, in some cities (such as Novgorod) they have a rule that if you forget to pay the ticket lady, she is allowed to fine you for 50 roubles as a late penalty fee. Sometimes, they may purposely not collect from you at first so that they can have an excuse to fine you, especially if you are a foreigner, in order to squeeze some extra cash from you.

In Moscow and St. Petersburg, you can take the metro subway system, which will get you to within walking distance of most places and main streets, though sometimes you may have to take a transfer bus from the station to your destination. The last time I was there, the fare was 7 roubles per way, but if you buy them in bulk quantity (with credits on a metro card in Moscow and tokens in St. Petersburg) the price goes down. For example, if you buy 10 credits at once, the price drops to 5 roubles per way, or 50 roubles total. When you're at the ticket window to buy the credits to the metro, you can just use your fingers to indicate how many credits you want to buy and put the cash under the window. She will give you your change and the metro card or tokens. It's best to learn how to say numbers in Russian though, in case you are buying more than ten credits. I would suggest buying at least ten credits each time though, since they are so cheap and it saves time to not have to stand in line each time you ride the metro.

At first glance of the metro map, especially at the one of Moscow, it can look intimidating and you may fear getting lost in a maze. But don't worry, it's easier than it looks. The Moscow metro, in fact, is claimed to be the most efficient system in the world. Your hotel or travel guide may have a metro map for you. If not, it is best to get a wallet sized copy of it to have ready, which is easily obtainable in stores around the area. Or, you can just print one out at these online links.

Moscow metro map:

<http://www.hotels-moscow.ru/metro.html>

St. Petersburg metro map:

<http://www.hotels-moscow.ru/spb/metro.html>

When you need to, you can pull it out and ask people for help by pointing to your destination station. The beauty of the metro is that there is never a shortage of people around to ask for help. And again, try asking a young person because they are more likely to know some English.

(It is best to be get acquainted with the Russian alphabet first, so you can read the metro signs in Russian. You can get acquainted with the whole Russian alphabet in two hours by going here: <http://langintro.com/rintro/null.htm> The lessons you go through there acquaint you almost effortlessly.)

With the metro, use a similar strategy to riding the bus. When you descend the long escalator into the metro station, you will first have to decide whether to take the train on the left or right. Look at the signs above. They list the names of the stops in both directions in Russian. Look for your destination station name on your piece of paper or brochure, and find the matching one on the signs to know which train to take. If you're lucky, it will be on the same line. If not, you will have to transfer lines to get to it. If you don't already know the station you're at, look at your metro map card to find it, then your destination station, and then plot a course using a transfer route to get there. If you need to transfer lines, focus on the transfer station between the line you're on and the line you need to transfer to. (Note: Although your metro map may have the names of the stations also written in English and Russian, the metro signs will only have them written in Russian, sorry :)) Then follow the arrows on the signs and take the train heading in that direction.

Onboard the train, you will usually find a copy of the metro map along the wall. Stay near that map, and count the number of stops to your destination or station. Pay attention each time the train stops, so you will know how much further it is to go. At this point, if you learned the Russian alphabet, it will come in handy because you can listen to the intercom which announces each station as it stops, to gauge where you're at on the map. Listen for these words at each stop "Stanzai (station name at this stop). Sleduchei stanzai (Next station is.....)" If you get confused or lose track of which station you're at, ask someone nearby. Point to the station currently outside, and then the map and say "Gdeh?" (where?) or "Stanzai zavut?" (station name?)

By the way, if you're boarding or leaving a train, and you hear the words "Asteroznah divi zakravaitsa" then hurry up because it is cautioning you that the doors are about to close! If you hear this and you're still outside the train, you may start pushing the crowd in front of you a little to hurry up and get in. It is common practice in Russian metros for people to push their way in before the doors close, as long as they do it gently and firmly. Otherwise, the doors could close in on your body, which can be unpleasant. Believe me, it's happened to me before.

If you arrive at your transfer station, you will now need to look for which direction to walk in to get to your transfer line. You can do that by looking for the color of your transfer line, however that may be a bit tricky in Moscow because the color shades of the metro lines are not consistent and may confuse you. In the St. Petersburg metro though, the metro line colors are more consistent. Therefore, I would suggest looking for the metro line number instead, which is much more reliable. You will see the line numbers on your metro map. For instance, the brown ring line that goes around the center of the Moscow Metro is labeled as line # 5. The signs above will show you the colors and numbers of the various transfer lines you can go to. Follow the arrow to your transfer line. Be prepared for a long walk through tunnels and stairs. And if you get lost, just ask people around for help, especially a young person. When you get to the other line, follow the same strategy as before to find the direction of the train that you should take.

This might all seem a bit tedious at first, but don't worry, it gets a lot easier with practice. You don't need to be brilliant to figure it out, you just have to pay attention. And when in doubt, it's best to ask someone near you for help, otherwise you could waste a lot of time being lost. Even if they don't speak English, they will try their best to help you. Remember that in Russia, people are not so individualistic or stuck on privacy like in the West, so it is ok to directly approach a stranger for help. So don't be shy or too proud to ask for help.

Finally, here's some warnings to keep in mind. Beware of pick pocketers in the metro station. They tend to lurk where it is most crowded. For example, in St. Petersburg, at the transfer station from the red line to Nevsky Prospect station, which is at the heart of the city center, there is a train door where tourists commonly pass through. The pick pocketers know this and hang out there, hoping to catch foreigners with cash and valuables on them. I had my bags unzipped there before, and paper pulled out my back pocket as well. So it's best to have your cash and valuables either in your front pockets, secure pockets, or passport protection belts tucked inside

your shirt (see the section on Carry cash and other valuables). Avoid putting your wallet or cash in your back pocket.

Although the St. Petersburg metro entrance gates utilize a nice round carousel structure that you just push and turn, the Moscow ones are quite different. There, you have to slide in your metro card, take it out, wait for the green light to appear, and then walk through. Now here's what to watch out for. If you forget to take out your metro card when it pops up and try to walk through the gate, the barrier gates imbedded in side slots will spring out in front of you. Many new people to Moscow, both Russians as well as foreigners, make the mistake of forgetting to take their card back out. Remember that you always have to take the card back out, even if you've just finished the last credit on it, to activate the green light that lets you go through. It is not like the subway system in San Francisco, for example, that eats up your last ticket if there's no more money left on it. People can easily confuse that kind of system with the Moscow one.

Now, if the barrier gates spring out in front of you, all you will get is a little shock or surprise. However, if you're walking too fast through it, it can actually nab you in the sides. Ouch! Some guys at my hostel have told me that when they were nabbed by these gates, that it seemed that it was aimed at their crotch area, which was very unpleasant. (I guess the powers that run the Moscow metro system like to use fear to condition people to obey laws?) Fortunately, I haven't experienced that, only the shock of having them spring in front of me when I was new. The point is, it's best to walk through those gates at a normal pace, so that even if you do everything correctly, if there's some case of malfunction, you don't get nabbed in the sides by these barrier gates. I've noticed two types of barrier gates. One type looks like old plastic or wooden boards that spring out firmly, but wouldn't hurt as much if you got caught between them. The other kind though, which are made of crude metal and spring out in a triangle shape, are the ones that can hurt if you get nabbed in the body by them.

Traveling on long-distance overnight trains

Unless you're rich enough to be taking planes everywhere, trains are one of the joys of traveling in Russia. They are both cheap and efficient. Also, they are reliable and timely, and unlike Amtrak, extremely inexpensive. An overnight trip that goes for 10 hours usually costs about 10 dollars or 300 roubles for the "placard" class wagons which have open door bunks sections. The higher class "kupei" wagons on the other hand, have closed sliding door bunk sections and can cost up to double in price. If you can, get the kupei class wagons, especially for longer rides. There are several advantages to them. They have cleaner living quarters and hallways, more comfortable beds, cleaner bathrooms that are NOT locked up during sanitation stop zones (a huge inconvenience in the placard wagon if you really have to go!), food service carts that are wheeled to you, and close proximity to the restaurant wagon (about one or two wagons away, whereas if you are in placard, you may have to cross up to 9 or 10 wagons to get to it!)

The kupei wagon is usually several hundred roubles more in price. However, it is well worth it. The ticket lady at the train station will usually quote you one price for placard and another for kupei. But sometimes, if you ask, you can get a lower price kupei seat at the same quality as the standard price. I don't know how they do it. But the ticket lady seems to have the power to fudge the prices a little if you ask her to. (But again, don't do it if you're with a Russian lady you're trying to impress :))

Regarding purchasing train tickets at the station, here are some tips. First of all, check with your hotel because sometimes they will have a ticket office for the train. There may have a little fee for booking through there, but it's well worth it because it saves you the hassle of going all the way to the station and back, which can take up to a few hours with the long walks and lines.

Otherwise, if you can't speak Russian or aren't going to the station ticket office with a Russian person, have someone write the name of your destination city on a piece of paper, the train class you want, and the day you want to depart. Now, if you are in a city beside Moscow and St. Petersburg, there will probably be only one train station in the city that you go to. However, if you are in Moscow or St. Petersburg, you will first have to

find out which of their many stations your train departs from in order to know where to buy them at. Ask your hotel/hostel staff or guide about it. Once you find out the station, ask the name of the metro station next to it. Here is a site that lists the train stations in Moscow, their location and the metro station name that takes you to it. If you need to, you can print it out.

http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials_arriving_by_train.htm

Belorussky Station

Serves Kalliningrad, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and some trains to Latvia.

Address : 7 Tverskaya Zastava Ploshchad

Phone : 251-6093, 973-8191

Metro: Belorusskaya

Kazansky Station

Serves Central Asia, Ryzan, Ufa, Samara and Novorossiisk.

Address: 2 Komsomolskaya Ploshchad

Phone: 264-6556

Metro: Komsomolskaya

Kievsky Station

Serves Western Ukraine and Southeastern Europe.

Address: Ploshchad Kievskogo Vokzala

Phone: 240-1115/0415

Metro: Kievskaya

Kursky Station

Serves Southern Russia, Caucasus nations, Eastern Ukraine, and Crimea.

Address: 29 Ul. Zemlyanoi Val

Phone: 916-2003, 917-3152

Metro: Kurskaya

Leningradsky Station

Serves Estonia, Finland, St. Petersburg and northwestern Russia.

Address: 3 Komsomolskaya Ploshchad

Phone: 262-9143

Metro: Komsomolskaya

Paveletsky Station

Serves Voronezh, Tambov, Volgograd and Astrakhan.

Address: 1 Paveletskaya Ploshchad

Phone: 235-0522/6807/1920/4109

Metro: Paveletskaya

Rizhsky Station

Serves some trains to Latvia.

Address: 79/3 Rizhskaya Ploshchad

Phone: 971-1588

Metro: Rizhskaya>

Savyolovsky Station

Serves Kostroma, Cherepovets and some trains to Vologda.

Address: Ploshchad Savyolovskogo Vokzala

Phone: 285-9005
Metro: Savyolovskaya

Yaroslavsky Station

Serves Siberia, the Russian Far East, Mongolia and China.
Address: 5 Komsomolskaya Ploshchad
Phone: 921-5914/0817, 262-9271
Metro: Komsomolskaya

After showing this information to the lady, she will usually write the price in roubles for you on a piece of paper. When you pay, she will then print out a beige colored ticket with information on it. If this is new to you, you will need to bring this ticket to an English speaking Russian person to explain what each of the numbers on the ticket mean. Once you get familiar with that, you will be able to read it yourself. On the other hand, if you didn't go prepared and have to wing it, here is what I suggest. Try your best to pronounce the name of the city you're going to (If it's Moscow or St. Petersburg, you should have no problem :) or write it on a piece of paper. Then write the date you want to leave (remember to write the date in their format of day/month/year, and not in ours!) and then say either "placard" or "kupei" class, followed by "skolkah stoit?" (how much is the price?)

If after you do these things, you still have trouble, then don't worry. At the ticket lines, there are likely to be many people in line. The odds are extremely high that someone there speaks English. Just ask for help, and don't be shy about it. Remember that Russians are not hung up on privacy and space from strangers like we are in the West. People will not be defensive if you approach them directly. Walk around and ask who speaks English or say "Vi gavarite pa angliski?" or if you want something simpler to remember "Pa Angliski?" Even if they only speak a little English, they can help you still. It's best though, if you bring along either a map of Russia so you can show your destination, or have a travel guide book such as Lonely Planet with maps inside the pages.

Finally, remember to leave for the train station early, especially if you're in Moscow or St. Petersburg. In those big cities, getting places often takes longer than you expect, and you need a good margin of error in case you run late, because the trains there leave exactly on time. If you're rolling luggage around the metro to the station, it will slow you down considerably. Or if you're in a taxi to the station, you may hit heavy traffic that will slow you down, causing the driver to rush and risk getting into an accident. So leave extra early! Or else you could regret it and get into a frenzied rush.

Traveling on long-distance buses

I don't have as much experience with this form of transportation, but here is what I've gathered. Buses between cities are available, but usually only between cities within close proximity. Don't look to them for very long distance travel, unless you want to make lots of transfers. They tend to be cheaper than trains, but also a lot less comfortable too. The buses are often rickety, low in quality, and the seats are not even cushioned comfortably. However, if you're going to Europe and ride on the European line bus charters such as Eurolines or Ecolines, that's a different story. Their buses are high quality, the seats are much more comfortably cushioned, and there is a stewardess on them to attend to your needs.

To get tickets for these buses in Russia, just follow the same steps as in the last section for getting tickets for long distance trains.

Flying between cities

More affluent Americans can choose to fly between cities as well. The Russian airline Aeroflot has flights between Russian cities. For tickets or inquiries, go to a nearby travel agency or Aeroflot office. Aeroflot's website and contact information is: http://www.aeroflot.org/e_aero.htm

Arranging accommodations and transportation through marriage or adoption agencies

If you dealt with Russian marriage/dating agencies or adoption agencies before coming to Russia, no doubt you would consider having the agency arrange the trip for you, providing accommodations and transportation. (By the way, adopting a child in Russian is getting to be more common now among Western parents because the wait time and bureaucracy is much shorter and simpler, and the biological mother can't take the child back later if she changes her mind, unlike here in the West) Generally, the accommodations and transportation that they arrange are going to be much higher in price than if you arranged it yourself. After all, they get commissions off their referrals or profit from service charges, and of course the higher end hotels are the ones that can afford to give the agency commissions.

Now, if you have a lot of money to spare and prefer the peace of mind of having it all arranged, then by all means let the agency handle it for you. But if you're on a budget like me, then I should let you know that it's not really necessary to have the agency arrange these things for you. It is very easy and often fun, to do the legwork and arrange it yourself. You can try to arrange accommodations over the internet, but keep in mind that usually the higher end hotels are the ones that can afford to advertise on the internet and take reservations. I'd suggest getting a Lonely Planet travel guide of Russia to take with you. They usually have a list of addresses and contact information for hotels from the low end to the high end for you to choose from. But keep in mind that the guide does NOT contain all the hotels that exist in each city, and that the prices in it are often outdated as prices often change in Russia. You can also ask people in the city you arrive in, as to which hotels they recommend at the price range you're looking for. And in regards to train tickets, you can get them yourself using the methods I described in an earlier section above.

Ordering in cafes and restaurants

In cafes and restaurants, it can often be frustrating to be dealt with menus in Russian. Most places do not have English menus, so you will encounter this very often. One way to avoid this is to find the cafeteria type cafes which serve food in lines where you pick what you want and put it on your tray. Those work well and since food usually tastes the way it looks (if you have some experience in eating it before) you can tell what to get. Some cities have many of these cafeteria type cafes, while others have very few of them.

Another way is to have a set idea of what you want beforehand, have someone write it down on paper for you, and show it to the waitress. She will tell you if it's available or not. Remember to be as specific in the description as possible, or else you may not get something you like!

Still, if you have to deal with a Russian menu, it's best to be with someone who can explain it to you. If you are with an English speaking Russian, then here's a good way to do it. First, if you have an idea of what you want, then say it and have your companion look for it on the menu. Otherwise, it would be too long and tedious for someone to translate every item on the menu to you. Instead, ask them to name the various category sections on the menu, such as "salads, soups, meat dishes, fish dishes, desserts, etc." Then, pick a category, such as soups for instance, and have them translate each item in that section for you until you find something you want.

Tipping is not the custom in most Russian cafes and restaurants, except for the higher end ones in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As a general rule, if you feel pleased with the service, then tip what you want.

Making phone calls and getting mobile phone (cell phone) service

In Russia, no doubt you will be using the phone to call people. There are several ways you can do this.

Calling from your hotel

If you are staying at a hotel, there is usually a phone in your room that will allow you to make free local calls. If you need to make long distance calls to another city, you will have to ask the hotel for a prepaid calling card that will usually have an access number and pin number on the back of it. Just walk up to the reception counter of your hotel and say “Telephone kartichka pajalst” (Telephone card please). They usually come in denominations of 50 roubles to several hundred roubles. The rates taken off the card depend on the city you’re calling too. The farther the city, the higher the rate, but it’s usually not that much to bother calculating it out. If you ask though, they sometimes have a book binder with the phone rates per minute to different cities and republics in Russia. You can also use it to call internationally, but with much higher rates though.

Remember that the calling card from the hotel usually can not be used at the outside public pay phones, and only within the hotel at either the phone in your room, or the public hotel phone in the lobby. First, use a coin or key to scratch off the grey layer over the pin number. Next, you will see two access numbers on the back of the card. One of the access numbers will take you to a live operator on call 24 hours (but she sometimes takes breaks so there will be no answer :)) who will take your pin number and the number you want to call. If you select this option, you had better hope you’ve learned the numbers in Russian, because there’s no guarantee that the operator will understand numbers in English. **(Here’s a quick reference guide for numbers in Russian though: 1-“ahdin”, 2-“dvah”, 3-“tree”, 4-“chitree”, 5-“pyat”, 6-“shest”, 7-“sehm”, 8-“vosseem”, 9-“diyvet”, 10-“disset”)** The other access number takes you to an automated machine that will prompt you to enter your pin number and then the number you want to call. Now, even if you don’t understand the Russian automated voice instructions, you can deduce the instructions easily. Just remember that the first prompt is asking for your pin number, and that the second prompt is asking for the area code and number you want to call. To call outside the city, dial 8, wait for the tone again, and then the area code and number. To dial outside the country, dial 810 + country code + area code + phone number.

Of course, if you don’t read Russian letters, you may not know which access number on the back of the card is which, so just try both of them to figure it out. The access number for the live operator usually has a word in Russian letters that looks similar to “operator” next to it. If you get stuck, ask for help from among the hotel staff. The security guard at the hotel entrance will usually try to help you out with it if you just show him the number you are calling.

Calling from a pay phone

You can buy prepaid calling cards for public pay phones from the metro station booth (if you’re in Moscow or St. Petersburg), certain stores and stands, or at the telegraph office inside the post office. Again, ask for them by saying “Telephone kartichka pajalst” and then by selecting the denomination you want, which can start at 50 roubles or more. These cards usually have some artsy design on them, and a little silver or gold square chip on one end that registers your credit meter. To use them, just look for public pay phones that have a slot for inserting cards in them. There are usually a row of them inside the metro stations of Moscow and St. Petersburg (if you’re there that is). Now, not all public pay phones with card slots in them are designed to take the metro calling card. There is a uniform design for it that you will eventually recognize after being there for a while. When I was last there, the uniform design was a light blue or gray rectangular structured pay phone that lined up near the metro entrance.

When you find the right kind of public phone, just slide the card in with the silver/gold chip end on the left side of the card in first, then pick up the hand receiver. You should see a credit total on the gray screen of the phone. It is difficult for me to describe what it looks like, but you will learn to recognize it eventually to know if it is operating and ready. If you are making a local call, just dial the number without area code. If you are making a long distance call to another city, again dial 8, wait for the tone, then the area code and phone number. If it doesn’t work, try again. Now, when it rings and someone at the other end picks up, REMEMBER THIS: He/she will NOT be able to hear your voice until you push a connect button on the pay phone, which is a button usually in a bright color or distinguished somehow from the rest of the buttons. (I can’t remember exactly what this connect button looks like, but I remember that it is marked or colored in a way that distinguishes it from the rest of the buttons, making it very easy to find) When you push the connect button, the credit meter on the screen starts the countdown, and you can start talking. If you can’t find the connect button, ask anyone nearby for help. Even if they don’t speak English, just have them observe you making the call, when it comes time to push the connect button, they will point to it.

Again as above, the call rates depend on where you are calling, but in general these metro pay phone cards are more expensive and have higher rates than the hotel prepaid cards. They get eaten up really fast, I might say. So if you are budget conscious, the hotel calling card is more economical than this option. Also, if you call someone and no one answers, in some cities your calling card STILL deducts a few credits for trying. That's kind of tacky, I know, but hey it's Russia. :)

Calling from the telegraph office

A more economical alternative to the calling cards above is to make calls from the telegraph office inside the post office. Their rates are usually very cheap, even if you're calling abroad. The problem though, is that one may not always be near you, so they are only convenient to use if you are in the part of the city they are in. To find it, ask for the local post office or telegraph office. Once inside, you will see rows of phone booths with a service counter. Now, if you don't speak Russian, this can be kind of tricky. First, line up at the counter. When you reach the service person, say the name of the city you want to call. Then, depending on how long you plan to talk, give the operator an arbitrary amount of cash. 50 or 100 roubles should be enough for most calls. This just gives you credits for the call. Any unused credits at the end of the call are refunded to you in cash. Next, the operator will print out a white receipt for you, which will have the phone booth number to use it at, and the pin code on it too. Unless you are exceptionally brilliant, it's best at this point to get some help from someone nearby, because you may not know which numbers on the receipt stand for what. Even if the person doesn't speak English, he/she should at least be able to direct you to the assigned phone booth, and will usually help you enter the pin code and make the call. Russians are very hospitable and understand that as a foreigner, you won't know what you're doing in this situation. Not even I have figured out the telegraph office process, as it can be a bit confusing if you're not familiar with it. So it's best to get help until you are familiar with this process. Remember to keep the white receipt and not throw it away, for after you're done, you will need to get back in line and turn it in for a refund of the remaining credits, if you have any that is.

Calling from a home or landline phone

If you are fortunate enough to be able to use someone's home phone or landline phone for your call, remember this. Local calls are usually free, so you don't have to reimburse the owner of the phone line. But if you're calling another city in Russia, the rate is about 5 roubles per minute, so count the minutes you use and offer the owner the equivalent amount (if he wants it). Again, to dial outside the city, dial 8, wait for the tone, and then the area code and number.

Depending on the situation, you can sometimes ask to use the phone inside a business. If they are busy and not inviting though, they will usually not let you use their phone, even for local calls. But if it's a quiet relaxed office that you're waiting in, or you have good rapport with the staff, they may let you use it, but only for local calls.

Calling to a mobile number in Russia

You might not have thought that there would be an issue to this, but I'm sorry to say there is. Most mobile phone numbers in Russia are what's called "federal numbers" which have an across the board rate when you call to it. These federal numbers usually start with an 8, followed by numbers such as 902, 903, 904, etc. Now, the problem is that SOME landline phones are not set up to dial to mobile phones. Only certain ones are. You can ask which phones can call to mobile numbers, or just test it anyway. Don't ask me why, it's just how the logistics are set up.

In addition, not even all public pay phones can call mobile numbers. In fact, you will shake your head at this, but some public pay phones even have these "moods" where one day they will dial to a mobile number and the next day they won't be able to! And we are talking about the same pay phone too! I have seen this happen with several pay phones. Seriously. It is pretty bizarre to say the least, and frustrating as well when you need to make an urgent call.

Buying and using mobile phone service in Russia

Now, this option is what I recommend the most. Buying or bringing a mobile phone with you is more convenient and saves you the trouble of dealing with “moody” public pay phones and calling cards. Now, here’s what you need to know first. In Russia, the mobile phone GSM frequency is 1800 and 1900. If you are bringing your cell phone from the US, you will have to make sure it is a “world phone” first because the standard GSM frequency in the US, 2100, is not compatible with the GSM frequency in Russia. If it isn’t a world phone, it won’t function in Russia. A world phone operates on three GSM bands: 1800, 1900, and 2100. If you aren’t sure if you have a world phone or not, look in your cell phone manual or call the customer service number of your cell phone provider. (I do know though, that the popular Motorola V60 and V66 series flip phones are world phones.) A world phone usually has a slot behind the battery to hold SIM cards, so make sure you have that too. In the US, the providers I know that use SIM cards are *Cingular Wireless*, *T-Mobile*, and *AT&T Wireless*’ new GSM service phones. But remember though, not all phones that use SIM cards are world phones, only the ones with tri-GSM capability!

If you have a world phone to bring to Russia with you, just take it to a mobile phone store, and buy a new SIM card and number. Preferably, pick a national provider like *Beeline* or *Megaphone*. The SIM card gives you your new phone number as well. To get it, you will usually have to show your visa and passport to register your name under it. There may be a small registration fee too. The first SIM card usually comes with packaged minutes to start you off with (usually between one and two hours of talk time). When those minutes expire, you just have to buy prepaid cards that come in different denominations with pin numbers on them, to reactivate the minutes on your phone. There is also usually a three digit number you can dial to check your remaining minutes. Ask the sales staff to show you how. The usual rates are 4 or 5 roubles per minute, which doesn’t differ by much between local and long distance calls nationwide. There are some pay by month phone plans in Russia, but they are rare and complicated, and not usually worth the hassle.

Keep in mind that the city that you buy your new SIM card and number in will only give you standard rates if you stay in the coverage area. If you step outside the coverage area and make calls, you will be considered to be “roaming” and the rates will go up substantially. So make sure to get the SIM card from the city you will be in the most during your stay. Then, when you are outside your coverage area, use it for exchanging SMS (short message service) text messages with people, or for emergency calls. That is how most Russians do it.

I should note though, that if you don’t speak Russian, this transaction of getting new cell phone service in Russia will actually be a lot more difficult than I described. I mean, it is one thing for a non-English speaking Russian to point you the way somewhere without speaking your language, but another to discuss cell phone rates, coverage, plans, and terms. (I know that for me, it was a very frustrating process) Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you bring a translator with you to do this! Otherwise, it could turn out to be a big headache for both you and the cell phone staff!

Now, if you don’t have a world phone to bring, it is a great opportunity to buy one in Russia. Here’s why, especially if you’re an American. In the US, you can’t usually buy a cell phone without a contract of 1 or 2 years (2 year contracts are more common) which is a huge commitment. The contract helps subsidize the cost of the phone, or so they say. Abroad though, you can usually buy a cell phone by itself without a contract, at an affordable price. Russia is one of the countries you can do that in. So it is a great opportunity to get one so you can use it in the US and worldwide. (In the states, if you already have a world phone, you can buy month to month service without a contract with certain providers such as *Cingular Wireless*) Of course, a world phone is going to cost more than a non-world phone in Russia. If you just want to get something that works and don’t mind that it’s not a world phone, you can get a mobile phone in Russia starting at 70 dollars and up. World phones, though, average around 200 – 300 dollars or more. However, when I was in Russia, there was one world phone I got which was an exception to that price. It was the *Ericsson T200* model and cost only a little over a hundred dollars. For a world phone, that was a bargain. It worked well, had good reception, and had easy to use menus too. I don’t know if that model is still available there for the same price, but it was a good bargain when I got it, proving that such is possible.

Whatever phone you get though, make sure to ask the retail staff to change the menu language to English first, before you leave. And again, it's strongly recommended to bring along a translator for this process of buying a phone, especially if you're going to be asking about the features of the cell phones. Otherwise, good luck!

Here are some other things to remember. In some countries, the receiver of a call to his/her cell phone doesn't ever pay for the call. Unfortunately, Russia isn't one of those countries. Like the US, if you answer a call to your mobile phone, you will have to pay for the call in credits too. There is one exception though. If a caller calls your mobile phone from his/her mobile phone, then the call is free to you, and only the caller has to pay for that call. However, there is an exception to this too. If you are outside your coverage area, and answer a call from a mobile phone, then some minutes are deducted from your account (I'm not sure how much though, I just remember that some minutes were deducted from my account when I was outside my coverage area and answered a call from a mobile phone, because I checked my minutes before and after.) You can see if a mobile phone is calling you by looking on your caller ID screen, which will usually have an 8-90* number if it's from a mobile phone.

I'm sorry these rules are so complicated, but that's the way it was when I was there. Now, don't take what I've said here as written in stone. The coverage rates and terms are subject to change. What I said applied to when I was there in 2003. And furthermore, what I said may not even apply to every mobile phone provider there, though it's likely to be similar at least. The provider I used for which these terms applied to was called *Beeline*, which was reputed to be a good service provider. In any case, it's best to ask about the current coverage rates and terms when buying mobile phone service.

Calling abroad from Russia

If you need to make an international call from Russia, the above options will work but it will be very expensive, as much as a dollar per minute even! The most economical way I know of to call abroad from Russia is to use internet calling cards that have local access numbers. At only a few cents per minute to most countries, it's practically unbeatable in price. There are many different kinds on the internet (I even promote my own calling card shop in this article) but only a few kinds have access numbers in Russia, usually in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Here are some I know of with access numbers in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Check the site for info and rates to different countries.

<http://www.easterntelecom.net>

<http://happierabroad.pushline.com> (My own calling card shop, select "Russia" in the Call From list and the country you want to call in the Call To list to get list of available cards with access numbers in Russia)

Hospitals

Most hospitals in Russia use crude methods of treatment (don't even ask) but are so cheap that you can just stand in line in a waiting room and pay a few dollars to get a visit. However, I have recently found information about medical centers that give Western-style medical care, but they are mostly in the big cities. You can find information about these centers at this site of the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia below:

<http://www.amcham.ru/page.php?pageid=129077032227631>

It's a good idea to print out the information on that page before going to Russia, in case you need it.

Laundry

Unfortunately, there aren't really any coin-operated public laundromats over there. So the only way to do laundry is to either use the hotel services, wash them yourself by hand, or use someone's laundry machine in their home. Most hotels will have laundry services if you ask, and even if they don't, the concierge or maid on each floor is usually willing to wash them for you (either by hand or with the machines used for washing bed sheets) for a

negotiated price. If she can't understand you, just tell her what you want by showing her a piece of clothing and mimicking the action of washing them with your hands. She will get what you're asking for sure and offer you a price.

You can also wash them by hand with soap or detergent, but I would avoid this since it's tedious and often doesn't clean well (though it's ok with socks and underwear). But if you experience and practice at it, be my guest. It's a useful skill to learn because sometimes you may have no choice. You can also ask someone you know to let you use their laundry machines if you know this person well, but if not, then offer them a little money in exchange. However, most people's laundry machines are small and not designed for big loads.

Public restrooms

I don't like discussing this topic, but some things need to be said about it. In Russia and other Former Soviet Union countries, most public restrooms are not free. A collector at the entrance takes a fee of between 5 and 10 roubles. Now here's what you should remember. Some of these public restrooms have NO toilet paper inside them! The thing is, you have to ask for it from the fee taker before you go in. Otherwise, if it happens to be the case, and you don't know about it, you may find yourself in a situation where you need it and it's not there. At that point, it is tedious and inconvenient to have to go out and ask for it. Therefore, before going in, ask the fee collector if there is paper in there or if she has to give some to you. Just point to the restroom and ask her in an inquisitive tone "Boomnaga?" (paper) In any case though, it's best to bring along your own supply of toilet paper tissue, in case the restrooms don't have any tissue at all. After all, this is Russia and you can't expect the same efficient quality control methods you are used to in the West.

Showering without hot water

One of the inconveniences of Russia is that during the summer, the cities often shut down the hot water lines to fix the pipes so that they'll be operational when winter comes. This shutoff can last anywhere between a few days or a few weeks, and can be an inconvenience. Here are some ways I've dealt with this problem.

First of all, if you're renting an apartment in the area, ask if you can get one with a "kolonka" in it. A "kolonka" is a gas heater tank placed in the shower bathtub that when lit, heats the water going through. It's simple to operate with matches and levers, and you can ask the owner or caretaker to show you how to use it.

Sometimes, part of the city will be without hot water, while another part will continue to have it. If convenient and economical, you can phone another hotel or hostel in the area and ask if their hot water is working. Otherwise, if you're in an apartment without a "kolonka" tank, you will have to resort to the old fashioned way of boiling the hot water. Simply find a clean pot or bucket, boil several kettles of hot water, pouring them into the pot/bucket, and then mixing it with cold water just enough. Then use a cup or saucepan to shower yourself with the warm water.

If, on the other hand, you're stuck in a hotel or hostel and can't boil hot water to shower with, then don't worry. There is still a way to shower without going directly under the cold water directly (ouch!). Unless you don't mind taking a cold shower directly, get into the shower with the cold water running, but don't go under the running cold water. Instead, stand just far enough in front of it to be out of the water stream. Then, cup your hands to scoop some of the cold water, and slowly rub every part of your body with it, to gradually adjust your body to the cold water. When you're done, do the same with the soap, rubbing yourself all over with the foam lather. Finally, rinse off the soap with the cupping water by hand method again. Next, shampoo your hair by just leaning your head into the cold water stream without putting your whole body under it. That's it. It's that simple.

Getting a haircut

If you think it's practically impossible to get a good haircut from someone who can't speak your language, well I've got good news for you. You're wrong :) I thought at first that it would be impossible too, but there is an easy way to do it. It's similar to the techniques you used to find your way around Russia. First, you write down in English on a piece of paper the instructions for how you want your hair cut, being as specific and descriptive as possible, including details such as clipper length numbers, sideburn trimmings, etc. Then, take those instructions and have your hotel receptionist, guide, or any English speaking Russian person translate them into Russian for you on a piece of paper. Put that translated note into your pocket, wallet, or somewhere you can easily remember to find it. Whenever you need a haircut, just pull out that note, show it to the barber or stylist, and ask "Panimayish?" Usually, they'll nod their head and do a good job. That's it! You can keep that note and use it whenever you need it again. I used the same translated note for 5 months of haircuts, in fact.

Oh and many hair styling places, even in Moscow and St. Petersburg, are dirt cheap and do a good job too. You can get a basic haircut in most places for 100 to 150 roubles. Just ask around for one.

Being stopped by police or militsia

If you are stopped by the police or militsiamen there to check your documents, remember not to be defensive or argumentative with them. That only makes it worse. Instead, act cool and lighthearted. Joke around with them a bit too. Russian men tend to be easily amused and are eager to kid around with you. If you can get on their light side, they are much more likely to let you off without any hassle. They are not required to do things by the book, and often make judgment calls. And if you give them a good impression, they will often make the call in your favor.

Remember that in Russia (and many other countries as well for that matter) when you deal with a cop, it is not like dealing with an enforcer of the law who does things by the book like it would be in the US. Rather, it is like dealing with someone on a personal level in an informal setting. Just have a conversation with him as an ordinary person in a polite respectful manner. Try to get on his good side. Talk to him as though you were talking to an old buddy.

It seems to me though, (and I've heard this from others as well) that if you have an American passport, they will often let you get away with things (such as registration problems) more easily than if you have a passport from a different country. I don't know why. There might be political or social reasons behind that.

However, if the officer seems very harsh and grumpy, just act like an innocent tourist. If you shrug and say "Ya ni panimayu" (I don't understand) to everything he says, most of the time they will just let you go. But it depends. You will have to make a judgment call. If he is asking something you understand and can easily show evidence to satisfy him, then go ahead and do it. But if you don't get what he's saying, just shrug and keep saying "Ya ni panimayu". Most of the time, they'll give up and let you go.

If, however, he attempts to extort a bribe from you, [see the strategy I outlined for dealing with that here](#).

Finally, I've noticed that when you are in the company of a Russian woman, it seems that they rarely stop you to check your passport (perhaps because they don't wish to bother the lady). Therefore, if you're out walking by yourself (especially in Moscow) and you see a suspicious policeman or militsiaman in your path, look around for the nearest female pedestrian and try to walk beside her for a while as though you two are together until you pass the view of the cop. (and yes, that may be a good way to meet someone new too. :)) It will greatly minimize your chances of being stopped.

Dealing with street scams and bribery extortions

Although Russian people are extremely friendly, playful, and uninhibited, there are shady opportunists and scammers you need to be wary of.

If you're from New York or Chicago, you may already have good street smarts, but if you don't or are from the sheltered suburbs, you will have to learn to recognize them for they may use tricks that you aren't accustomed to.

Some of these people are pros who make their living off of scams, so they are going to be good at it, utilizing polished slick moves. There are the simple ones such as pick-pocketers, and then there are the more elaborate ones as well. You can view my guide to understanding, detecting, and avoiding such scams here: www.happierabroad.com/Russian_Scams.htm.

Below is a run down of common types of scams and bribery attempts you may encounter.

Hit and Run Scams

Pick-pocketing

These are the most simple to counter. Basically, the pick-pocketer singles out a foreigner in a high traffic area by the way he/she dresses, carries himself/herself, looks and behaves. They usually hang around crowded metro/subway areas, crowded buses, streets, or train stations. Then they try to inch close to the foreigner and snatch anything they can out of their most accessible pockets. Sometimes they work in pairs, with one bumping into you to serve as a distracting decoy, while the other tries to pickpocket you at the same time.

To counter this, simply put your wallet in your FRONT POCKET (many tourists in Russia don't even do this), not your back pocket. Place your passport, credit cards, and most of your cash inside a "passport protector belt" worn under your shirt, which you can buy in most luggage stores. Only leave expendable items in your jacket pockets and back pockets. And please do NOT put your passport in your back pocket or jacket pocket. That seems like common sense, but you would not believe how many tourists I've met in Russia who did just that, and lost their passport, leaving them to go to their country's embassy to get a temporary one, making getting around much more difficult. Also, if someone accidentally bumps into you, immediately place your hand over where your wallet is, to guard against a pick-pocketer reaching for it.

The Lost Wallet Scam

This is a quite common scam which I've seen several times. One person runs past you, dropping a wallet or bundle of cash in front of you, but before you can pick it up, another person does, and offers to split it with you 50/50. But first, you must follow him to a more secluded area, such as a back alley or behind a building. There, before he can give you your cut of the prize, the person who lost the wallet or cash finds you both and demands to get it back. The other person denies having it, so the accuser looks to you. When you deny it though, he doesn't believe you, and insists on seeing the contents of your pockets. If he sees cash in your wallet, he may insist that it is his. And while he argues for it, the other co-conspirator puts the large amount of found cash in your back pocket, leading you to think that if you give him the cash in your wallet, that you've still made a profit from the lost cash in the hundreds. If you do, then they take off, leaving you to find out that the cash wad left to you was a fake. There are several variations of this though.

Here is another variation of it, as told to me by another foreigner who has lived in Russia for years:

"Another scam - You are walking down the road. Someone walks past you in a big hurry. While he passes he drops a small packet (as if it fell off from his pocket). Obviously, you would try calling him "hey you dropped off something" but he wouldn't listen (remember he's in a big hurry!). You would be confused what to do. Maybe you would even pick up the small packet to chase the guy and give it to him. There is another thing about this pack! It is transparent and you can see at least a 20\$ bill bundled up inside (supposedly with more money). Suddenly you would notice another guy just walking close to you!

He would look to you and will pick up the bundle / pack himself. He would try to shout to the other guy with a suppressed voice. Obviously that guy is gone now. Now you two are left with this pack. he would say since we both saw this let's share the money inside. You would say probably you don't want it and try to go your way. But he would try to lure you into this. Finally you might say "alright!" He would ask you to get in to

some lane to share the money. As soon as you go into this lane the first guy who dropped the packet would come running back and say "some lady saw you pick up the packet I dropped". Before you can say something, the second guy would immediately reply "no, no we never saw any pack!" and make you a party to this lie! Then the first one appearing to be irritated and very annoyed would want to check your pockets and shoes. To prove to him you didn't take any money, you would agree. He would then ask you to show your pockets, purse and ask you to remove your shoes too just in case you hid his money there. As you do this the second guy would drop that pack on the ground. Now the first guy would say "see, I knew you took it! and I'm going to the road to call the cops!" He would run towards the main road pretending to stop some patrolling car! The second guy would tell you let's run in different directions!! Standing dumbstruck all this while, without actually having done anything bad, you become a victim of all this drama. You can't run immediately as you still have to put on your shoes! Lol! The two guys disappear and you wanna get the hell out of this place as soon as possible lest these buggers bring back cops on you for something you haven't done and try to frame you in a stupid scandal!

You also run/go away, feeling relieved that you got out of this unnecessary mess! But this is not the end of the drama. The finale is ahead. As you feel relaxed, guess what!! You check your wallet / purse pockets, and find that the money that was there has now disappeared !!! You start searching for it and become amazed on how where could have they gone? Then only you realize that while the first was checking your pockets / wallet for his money, he was actually unnoticed was stealing yours!

You think "what a fool I am!" But no! There are more ways to these scams and hell these guys are innovative!! This one happened to me when I first came here. :))

But during all these years, I haven't met a foreigner who wasn't scammed in one way or the other here!!

Here they say Americans have plastic smiles and no depth of mind or heart. There is nothing to talk with them about. But I think one thing that the Americans don't have is this kind of deep scam thinking! Lol!"

If this scam happens to you, don't try to argue with the finder of the cash who offers you 50/50 that you know his game plan. If you do, he will merely be persistent, even going so far as to grab you. Instead, tell him to go away or fuck off, and then yell for the police, which in Russian is "militsia". That should scare them away immediately.

Leading you into an ambush scam

This happened to me once, but it failed fortunately. However, a similar version of it did succeed for a while a year later, but the Russian police got my stuff back and then the media put me on national news, making me famous. You can read the story about it here: [The Cherepovets Assault](#)

Anyway, the group ambush works like this. In the middle of the night, some men approach you on the street, wanting to make friendly acquaintance. Then they invite you to go somewhere with them, to have fun or meet some girls. If you, they will try to lead you into a secluded area so they can beat you, knock you unconscious, and steal whatever valuables are on you.

If this happens to you, simply tell the men that you are busy, and if they persist, threaten to call the police "militsia" with your mobile phone. But if possible, avoid walking the streets alone at night. If you aren't with company, take a taxi at night instead.

Train compartment mugging

This happened to a Dutch backpacker I met in a hostel in Moscow. He related to me that over a week ago, he boarded a train to China through Siberia. But when he got inside his compartment, two men entered. One shut the door, and the other grabbed him from behind, covering his mouth as well. Then the other assailant choked him into unconsciousness. When he awoke, his passport belt was gone, along with his passport inside and cash. Without a passport, the train concierge kicked him off. Apparently, the two robbers had bribed the concierge to get onto the train to rob him too. Since then, he has had a difficult time getting another passport and visa arranged for him to board the train to China again.

Now, this didn't happen to me, fortunately. And I would say that such incidents are rare, since I rode Russian trains hundreds of times without anything like that happening. But here is how I would guard against it. When boarding a train, if the compartments have sliding doors, do not enter your compartment if no one is in there yet. Instead, hang out in the hallway until the train starts moving, or until other passengers go into your compartment. By the way, I heard that in Russia it is legal to carry pepper spray too.

Train station platform hold up

This happened to a British traveler I met. When he got off a train from Siberia to Moscow with his two female companions, as he walked the platform toward the Kazansky station, someone held him up from behind with a solid object pressed on his back, which supposedly was a gun. The thug asked him to empty his pockets. Not wanting to risk getting shot, he complied and lost a lot of valuables, including his British passport. As a result, he was unable to buy train tickets to St. Petersburg without a valid visa in his passport.

Fortunately, this didn't happen to me, but I know the mega Kazansky station complex (off metro station Komsomosky) which comprises a total of three main train stations, serving as a gateway to the rest of the continent. And as such, it happens to be a seedy area infested with thugs and pick-pocketers. So it's never been a place I've felt comfortable around. But to guard against it, I would suggest that when getting off the train there, keep a distance from the other people walking by. If someone comes near you, walk away briskly with your luggage, and if you feel a tap or grab from behind, simply behave as though you are in a rush and didn't notice it, and walk on quickly. Even if you do get held up, chances are that if you pretend not to understand what's going on and walk away, they probably won't shoot you in a crowded public area, since doing so wouldn't accomplish anything for them, since their main objective is to rob for profit, and gunning down someone would require that they run away immediately afterward. Besides, if they just wanted to shoot you, they could do it without holding you up in the first place. But don't quote me on that though. That is simply my assessment.

Another thing you can do, which you can also use in the lost wallet and ambush scams, is to carry a decoy wallet with you, which is a cheap throw away wallet with very little cash usually under five dollars. If someone pulls a gun or make the quick grab, they will be fairly satisfied with this decoy. You can also put a few things in there too - phone number cards, fake credit cards you get in the mail from credit card companies, etc. The bigger the wallet is the better.

Skilled Larceny Scams (involving confidence games)

The inside jacket pocket retrieval scam

This happened to me just before I left Moscow. While sitting in a secluded section of the Time Online internet café underneath the Red Square in the Ahot Marriot mega mall, someone stole my mobile phone by squeezing it out of my inside jacket pocket which was hung over my chair while I was sitting in it. I didn't think such a feat was possible, because the mobile was deep inside a concealed pocket which I often had trouble getting out. But it happened nevertheless, or at least it's the most plausible explanation that fit the scenario of my stolen mobile. You can read the full details about it in my account [2 Professional robberies I experienced in Moscow](#) under the section "The mystery of my stolen mobile phone."

Before the thief stole it, he tapped me a few times to ask me to watch his stuff while he left momentarily. Unknown to me at the time, this was a confidence game he was playing with me. By asking me to watch his stuff, he was in a sense creating a false sense of trust between us, implying that we were a team on the same side. That led me to lower my guard against him when he made his move to steal whatever valuables I had in my inside jacket pocket, with my back turned. It was a very sneaky, skilled, and amoral tactic, but worked nevertheless.

To protect yourself, I would avoid sitting in secluded section of internet cafes, first of all. Instead, sit in the main areas below where other patrons and administrators have watch over the area behind you. Also, since these thieves

are skilled at snatching items from even deep pockets, you might want to wear your mobile phone around your neck on lace strings, instead of stowing it in your jacket pocket. Sometimes that makes it uncomfortable, but it heightens the safety measure. And finally, if someone asks you to watch their stuff, watch out. As soon as he returns, leave, for I have heard that such is a common confidence game.

The drugging your drink to rob you scam (erasing your memory as well)

This happened to a fellow American I met in a hostel and hung out with, which you can also read about in the account [2 Professional robberies I experienced in Moscow](#). Basically, these predatory women meet men in bars and nightclub, and while socializing they slip a certain type of drug into their drink which makes them drowsy and blocks their memory as well. This drug, designed to lower blood pressure, can have lethal effects when mixed with alcohol, and has been used by aggressive con women for years now, as has been reported in the Russian media. It has also known to be used as a rape drug by men too. Once under its effects, the con woman then suggests to the man to leave and go to his or her place. The man usually complies (not surprisingly) and once in secluded quarters, she waits until he dozes off before robbing him of cash and other valuables. The man, under the influence of the drug, remains drowsy and dazed for about 48 hours, giving the woman plenty of time to do her thing, and if they are in his home, God forbid, she also then has the chance to take anything she wants from there as well. And when he awakes, his memory, having been inhibited by the drug, doesn't even recall what happened, not even remembering the appearance of the con woman. However, he usually deduces what happened after finding his cash and valuables gone.

Embarrassed to say, I witnessed all of this happening right in front of me to the fellow American I hung out with that night, described in the account above. Amazingly, though awake and sober, I never noticed the con woman extracting his cash while asleep. She was so highly skilled and executed it in a flawless manner, using misdirection, angles, and confidence games to quell any possible suspicions from me and the hostel owner as well. I was completely stunned and speechless when it was discovered what had happened later, right under my nose. I would highly recommend reading the full account at the link above. This also happened to one of the managers at an English school I taught at in Moscow, who related a similar story to me.

I guess the moral of this is to keep your drink away from the Russian women you are meeting in bars and nightclubs, or else don't have a drink around them at all.

Police and Customs officers Bribery Extortions

Police Scams

I hate to admit that in Russia, even those working as law enforcement are involved in scams, swindles, and bribes. Although it's pretty ironic that those whose job is to protect you and uphold the law, are also trying to scam you of cash, that nevertheless is what you have to deal with, especially if you are of non-white ethnicity. This just goes to show the extent of the deeply rooted corruption in Russia. And in fact, the corruption there is beyond what most Americans can imagine.

The Russian policemen, known as "militia", target foreigners, especially non-white ones, by checking their passports and visas. While doing so, they look for reasons to declare problems with their visa or registration, to use to ask for bribes. Sometimes they will make up a reason, even if there is none, knowing that the foreigner probably isn't familiar with all the laws. Though most common among Moscow militia, it is now becoming more common in other cities as well. Ever since the incidents of Chechnyen terrorists hit the country, it gave them an excuse to beef up security even more, allowing the opportunistic militia more leeway for this. They walk up to obvious foreigners or even to Russians from out of town, and ask for "documents" (the word in Russian is the same). They especially like to target Asian tourists for two reasons: First, if they are Japanese or Korean, they tend to be more compliant and unquestioning of authority, preferring to pay rather than deal with conflict. Second, they tend to be more likely than blacks or Siberian Russians to have a lot of money to scam from.

As a minority, I've been approached many times by militia, even been hauled to the police station once, so here are my suggestions and strategies for dealing with this.

- Try to dress like the Russians around you, emulating them so you don't stand out. Don't be obvious tourists, and don't wear khaki pants, fanny packs, or have cameras dangling from your neck. Also try to walk like them and have the same stoic facial expressions. If you are of white ethnicity, you should be able to blend right in without being noticed as a non-Russian. However, if you are non-white, you will still be a noticeable foreigner.
- When walking around areas where Russian militia are posted (and in Moscow they are posted almost everywhere now), try to walk with a Russian woman, for the militia rarely stop men in the company of Russian women. If you are alone, try to scurry up beside a Russian woman walking in the same direction, even a stranger, so that you can appear to be with her.
- Don't carry too much cash on you. Try to keep it under 200 dollars, in case you get scammed or robbed successfully. And if you keep most of it in a passport protector belt tucked underneath your shirt, you can tell a bribe-seeker that you have too little cash in your wallet to bother with.
- Keep the registration dates in your passports connected, leaving no more than three day gaps between them. Otherwise, they can use that as a valid basis to fine you. The travel agency that arranged your visa should have offices that you can register in. Also, hotels, hostels, and government registration offices can also register you. Sometimes, if you pay the hotel a little extra, they will register you for weeks or months.

If you are stopped by a Russian militia to be checked for your passport and visa, here are some strategies for dealing with it.

- If you speak some Russian, don't. Just pretend that you only speak English. The militia usually don't speak English and don't like to try to communicate in it. Most of the time, they will simply check your "documents" and leave you. But if they know you speak Russian though, they can use it against you, interrogating you to find loopholes or excuses they can use to find fault with you or your documents, to ask for bribes as penalty fines. Therefore, it's best to only speak to them in English.
- If that doesn't work, and they find fault with your documents, try to get on their good side. Russian militia are easily amused and entertained. Say something funny, silly, or corny to lighten them up. Play buddy with them, compliment them, joke with them, ask if you can pose a photo with them cause you admire their spiffy looking uniform, etc. If you can get them in a playful mood, they will treat you much better. At worst, you can even pretend to be gay (call yourself a "blue man" or "galuboy" in Russian) and come on to them, which will almost always gross them out so they leave you alone.
- If that doesn't work, and they insist on a cash fine from you, or if they threaten to haul you to the station, then get out pen and paper, and start taking down their police badge number or name. This shows them that you are not to be messed with, and that you will take action to report him to his authorities if he continues this behavior. Use this tactic ONLY if you know he doesn't have a valid reason to fine you, otherwise, it's probably better that you don't. In most cases, it will scare him off, for if his misconduct is reported, it's likely to get him fired.
- If that fails, then threaten to call your lawyer or the police station. Tell him you are calling your "jurist" which means lawyer in Russian. If that doesn't work, then ask to be taken to the police station.
- If all else fails, and you end up being taken down to the police station, remember this. a) Technically, if you are taken to the police station, they are required to pay for a translator to come talk to you. Otherwise, they can't do anything to you if you are charged with a misdemeanor. So if you wait it out there, they will not be willing to do that and just write you up and let you go. b) Usually, the bribe-seeking officer who takes you to the station does not want his police chief to know about this, for he may get in trouble if discovered attempting to get a bribe. Therefore, he will probably not keep you around for long anyway, and may just mock around at you for a while before letting you go.
- If they still insist on you paying them a cash fine, tell them that you are broke and have little cash, which you need to use for food and shelter. Act serious about it, whine and cry if you have to, anything to

convince them of it. After a scuffle, they will usually let you go. Most of the time, they will not search you for cash.

The above should up your chances tremendously of getting off without having to pay a bribe or fine. Please note though, that you should not quote me verbatim about Russian visa and registration laws, as they are constantly changing and being revised, which is no surprise given the highly volatile state of things in Russia. What is true one day may be different a few months later. And this ranges from ice cream flavors, best selling drinks (e.g. whereas Lipton Iced Tea was nonexistent last year, it suddenly fills shelves all over the country this year), to customs laws.

Customs Officer Scams

The Russian customs officers, posted at airports and at the nation's borders, are also known to scam foreigners and ask for bribes. As the case is with the militia above, they also tend to target Asians for the same reasons. To deal with them, following the same strategies above, keeping in mind several things.

- Remember to keep the registration stamps in your passport connected, leaving less than three days gap between each. Otherwise, they can use that as a valid basis to fine you. The travel agency that arranged your visa should have offices that you can register in. Also, hotels, hostels, and government registration offices can also register you. Sometimes, if you pay the hotel a little extra, they will register you for weeks or months.
- Don't carry too much cash on you. Keep it under a few hundred dollars. Otherwise, they may try to confiscate it (and have a party with it afterward).
- Also remember to speak only English, and if you have to, write down their badge numbers or threaten to call your lawyer. Playing or joking with them though, is usually ineffective, as these customs officers are usually too serious and stoic for that.
- If you are on a bus or about to take a plane, they will usually not keep you too long to avoid holding up the vehicle or aircraft.
- If they still insist on you paying them a cash fine, tell them that you are broke and have little cash, which you need to use for food and shelter. Act serious about it, whine and cry if you have to, anything to convince them of it. After a scuffle, they will usually let you go. Most of the time, they will not search you for cash.

Finally, it has been reported that in some airports like in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, the check in staff may try to scam you by finding problems with your ticket, and asking for a payment fee to fix it. Since I haven't been in such situations, I don't know if the above strategies for dealing with police and customs officers will work, but having a Russian person travel with you will help, as they will be less likely to pull it on him or her.

Cultural differences in spending and saving money

One of the biggest causes of conflict and misunderstanding between Russians and Americans is the issue of spending money, especially since many Russians mistakenly think that all Americans are filthy rich with a bottomless supply of cash, thanks to the image Hollywood gave them. Americans are taught to spend money wisely and efficiently, and saving it for future long term use. Russians, however, live for the day and are more likely to spend their surplus cash without regard for efficiency or savings. Most of them don't have enough to save up anyway. And they can better afford to splurge too, because they don't have the kind of bills and payments that Americans are used to, so they have no understanding of the pressures Americans have either! Therefore, both sides do not understand each other in this area. It is difficult, therefore, for both sides to respect and understand each other on this issue because of their different mentalities and conditions.

One thing you need to keep in mind is that no matter what you say, many Russians see you as rich and always having filthy amounts of spare cash. Therefore, if they see that you are budgeting, or reserving money aside for tomorrow's expenditures, etc. it looks like you are stingy or greedy to them. (It should also be noted that the Russian definition of "greedy" is different than the Western definition. By Western standards, a greedy person is someone who has an insatiable desire to acquire wealth, power or material assets, while by Russian standards, it refers to people who are economical and who try to withhold spending their money.) Even if you claim that you aren't rich or that you have limited resources, they still won't believe you. In their minds, if you have money to travel and visit their country, then you must have plenty of cash to spare at all times for all situations and all people. And it doesn't matter if you've already spent a lot of money the day before or if you will have to spend a lot tomorrow on something else or someone else, because that's never a factor to them in what you will spend now.

The reasons for this, as far as I've been able to gather, are several. It's not that they are dumb about money matters. Their mentality of it is different from ours because of their environmental and societal conditions. Many Russians are unable to comprehend saving or budgeting because they've never made enough money to utilize those concepts themselves, so they have a hard time relating to your concept of it, especially when they see you as being a millionaire with lots of extra cash on you at all times. Here is how an Ukrainian American man explained it to me, which is probably a bit closer to home than my explanation:

"A few things to add: the reason Russians are like this with money is also as follows: their culture is cash oriented, not credit-oriented. They do not like debts. Hence, they are not used to monthly bills. Also, they lived under socialism (not Communism- they never achieved it) so the supply of money was guaranteed and jobs were guaranteed by the Constitution. Hence, there was no pressure to save for a rainy day. No fear to lose one's job as you had to commit a crime to get fired. Everything was also very cheap. And, one did not need to have big amounts of money to have the basics-food, shelter, family/love. Since many human beings are happy with those-that is how it was. Most families had dachas- summer homes- in the countryside to provide them with agricultural commodities so again there was no need to save- just plant and then you have your own food."

Also, on a more abstract metaphysical note, I have been told that it also has to do with the nature of the Russian soul. I haven't been able to fully understand that yet, but here is what I surmise in theory. Russians do not see money in terms of numbers that are added and subtracted from your wallet or a balance in your bank account, like we do in the West. They don't see spending money as losing money. Instead, they see spending as releasing pockets of energy that are not lost, but just converted into another form or bounce back to you. In essence, you could say it's a higher view of reality that takes into account your friends and loved ones, rather than the individual. The collective interconnected energy of their group, to them is what it's all about, rather than just individuals fighting for their own needs. So if this situation arises, try to be understanding about it and remember that they didn't grow up in the same conditions as you.

This can create a theoretical dilemma. On the one hand, you can't be economical or efficient with money without the risk of appearing stingy or greedy. On the other hand, since scarcity is real and money is not unlimited, you also cannot behave as though money is never an issue and is unlimited, (unless you are super wealthy) or else you will soon lose a lot more than you planned, or even all of it. Such a dangerous reckless habit or mentality could bankrupt you easily, as it would only be a matter of time before reality caught up with you. So the question is, how do you balance the two? Where do you draw the line? It's not an easy question to answer, and you will have to make some judgment calls based on the situation. But as I discussed in an above section, generally if someone treats you like you ought to spend freely, or like you have an unlimited supply of cash, that is a bad sign. A nice self-respecting person who cares about you would never do that, regardless of how rich they think you are. So if you are constantly pressured to spend more than you want to, that is not a good sign about the company you are in.

The most logical and safe solution I think, is to take a middle ground rather than one extreme or the other. Be a little more generous and less economical than you usually are, but not so much that it gets out of control. Of course, in reality things are not always so cut and dry, and sometimes the line between frugality and stinginess will not be clear, nor will it be drawn in the same place by everyone. In that case, you will have to rely on your sense of

judgment and gut feeling. If you mess up, just learn from your mistakes, and remember that those who truly care about you will forgive you, while those who don't aren't worth your time anyway.

If in the presence of Russians, you don't wish to spend your money on something, don't try to justify it to them by saying that you can't afford it, or explaining anything about budgeting or saving money. Just simply say you don't want to, and leave it at that. It's the safest and cleanest way to do it. Most Russians will not ask why or pressure you for a reason. Instead, they will usually just let it go and accept that you have your own reasons.

Finally, if you find yourself in a situation where you are pressured to spend money that you don't want to spend, here's a trick you can try. Don't put all your cash in your wallet. As mentioned in the section on carrying cash, divide your cash up into different locations on yourself so no one knows where and how much reserve cash you have. Keep a small amount of cash in your wallet. Then, if you need to, pretend that you don't have enough cash on you by taking out your wallet and showing the person that you don't have enough cash for the situation that he/she is pressuring you to spend for. However, if you find you are constantly in this kind of situation, you either are hanging out with the wrong people or too stingy for your own good.

Some local customs

Here are some local Russian customs to be aware of. If you are invited to a Russian home, remember to take off your shoes inside. And it is also customary to bring gifts when you visit people's homes. Small gifts of food or wine will do. And if you bring flowers, remember that the stems have to be in odd numbers, but usually the florist will only sell them to you in odd numbers anyway.

When out with a woman, the custom is that the man has to pay for everything. However, also remember that if she asks you to buy something for her that you didn't offer, you have a right to say no. And don't believe her if she tells you that you are obligated to buy her whatever she asks for. That is NOT the custom in Russia. She is lying, and probably knows it, so you should dump her. This custom also means that if you are out with a large group of only women, that you are supposed to pay for ALL of them too! Therefore, if that would be detrimental to your finances, you'd better avoid that kind of situation unless you can afford it. Remember that a good Russian woman would not try to put you in that situation either, for she knows what you would have to do under the custom.

If you wish to familiarize yourself with more Russian customs and get acquainted with their superstitions too, here is a link to a site with a long list of them. However, some of these in my experience, are either outdated or malleable since I've seen many Russians violate these customs.

<http://www.geocities.com/fsubrides/page36.html>

Meeting people

If you're shy or don't know anyone in Russia, don't worry. In general, meeting people in Russia is a whole different dimension than it is in the USA. In America, strangers are strangers and people don't like to meet you unless it's through an organization like work, school, clubs, common friends, church, etc. and even then, it's not always easy to get to know them or become a part of their social circle. In a countries like Russia on the other hand, people have the attitude that they like to meet new people, especially foreigners, and are very direct about it. Differences arouse curiosity there. Almost no one is a stranger. That's the attitude they have. In fact, when I arrived in a new city in Russia, it would usually only take a few hours to already know some people, get some contact information, and have plans that night. Just doing the normal things will usually create natural, effortless opportunities that get you acquainted with people. When you see how easy it is, you will soon become less shy and more direct yourself. People in Russia are totally UN-cliqueish, which is so refreshing when you're new.

This applies to meeting beautiful women too. Western men who arrive in Russia are often amazed at how open Russian women are to meeting strangers. In North America, women tend to be very defensive and stuck up toward

strangers. As a result, trying to meet them feels awkward, unnatural, and inappropriate. But not so in Russia. Russian women are more naturally curious, intellectual, and uninhibited than their western counterparts. There, meeting women comes easily and naturally, which is a delightful surprise to Western men who are accustomed to the opposite. It almost seems too good to be true, but it is, so many men think to themselves “My gosh. Where have I been?!”

For the guys out there, let me share a secret with you. Here is the main difference between meeting women in Russia vs. America. In most parts of America, when you see attractive girls that you want to meet in a public place, it is a form of silent torture because you can't really do anything about it. If you go up and try to meet them, most of the time they will see that as inappropriate and see you as some kind of creep, resulting in a defensive posture and vibe. This of course, make guys become more shy and erodes their confidence toward attractive women. In Russia, on the other hand, it's not like that at all. More often than not, the attractive girls you see in public that you try to meet will often want to meet you too, even if they look like models. And when they give you their number or agree to get together later, they usually follow through (rather than giving you their number and then screening out your calls like many American girls do). And even if they aren't interested in meeting you, at least they don't make you feel like you are doing anything inappropriate, so you don't feel like you've lost anything or violated anything. And besides, there are enough girls there that want to meet you anyway, to keep you motivated and confident enough to keep trying all the time. Therefore, in Russia you don't feel the torture of seeing an attractive woman and not being able to do anything about it because you CAN do something about it which isn't inappropriate or unnatural! Now guys, which attitude would you prefer from attractive women?

Getting used to a new image and status level

Finally, I hate to sound pretentious, but in Russia/Ukraine and the surrounding countries, you'd better get used to being as a status symbol of power and wealth. This means you'll be getting attention in both good and bad ways, that you may not be used to back in your own country back home (if your status in your own country is average or below that is). Beautiful women out of your league will be giving you more attention and interest, and greedy scammers will be singling you out as a bigger target as well. Some hate the extra attention, while others thrive on it. But you'll be getting it whether you like it or not, so be prepared for it. It is inevitable, unless you are totally able to blend in as a local, looking like one and having the accent of one (which for most foreigners would be impossible). People who are very private may hate this kind of attention, while those with social inadequacies in their home countries, or who love attention and socializing, may love it.

Now, it doesn't matter whether you really are rich or not, because in THEIR MINDS, you are rich, at least in comparison to the average person in Russia. (Some of this perception is fostered by Hollywood too, of course.) And it won't make a difference if you tell people there that you aren't rich or that you're poor. They won't believe you and will think that you are either being modest, or trying to cop out of spending money. So either way, you'd better get used to it. :)

And of course, beside being a symbol of higher status, your status as a foreigner has novelty appeal as well, as there are still many Russians (especially outside the big cities) who have never met a foreigner before. To them, you are their chance to meet one, ask questions about other countries, or practice their English.

Calling Russia from abroad

If you make phone calls to Russia, here is the cheapest way to do it. You can use Skype or buy prepaid internet calling cards online that give you much lower rates than your long distance phone provider. There are many of them online, but the cheapest ones I've found so far are from Masterbell for only a few cents per minute.

I happen to have an affiliate account with them, so I will provide you the link to it of course.

<http://happierabroad.pushline.com>

At the page above, everything is self-explanatory. Select the countries you're calling to and from to get the list of rates and calling cards available. There are also great rates to Europe and Asia, as well as domestic US rates of one cent per minute nationwide. Anyone should be able to use the site with no problem, but if you do, feel free to email me with any questions at WWu777us@yahoo.com.

Also, if you're calling someone in Russia or another country, and aren't sure of the current time there, you can go to this site here which will have current up-to-date time zones for the major cities of the world.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>

Most of Western Russia is under the Moscow Time Zone. From there, you can calculate the difference between your time zone and theirs. Or you can check this chart to see if your city is listed.

http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials_time_zones.htm

My Photos and Videos of Russia (a visual masterpiece)

If you'd like to view my Photo Collage and Photojournals of my adventures in Russia, you can do so at the links below. They contain thousands of photos and stills covering a dozen Russian cities of interesting exotic scenery, architecture and beautiful Russian women of course. It'll give you a great idea of what awaits you in Russia if you've never been there before. You can read rave responses to it from other viewers on this page www.happierabroad.com/ebook/Page86.htm. It'll inspire you to view them I'm sure ☺

<http://www.happierabroad.com/ebook/Collage.htm>

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Photojournals.htm>

I also have a video series you can watch of me interacting with Russian people and meeting girls so you can get an idea of what they are like and see how approachable, friendly and open they are. Here is the series embedded on this page:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/film.php>

And I have a dating abroad slideshow of girls in Russia I met and dated as well:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/slideshows>

You can see my other videos here:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Videos.htm>

If you like the videos, you can purchase a DVD copy of all 38 hours of footage I shot in Russia. Here is the price list and ordering info: http://www.happierabroad.com/Video_List.htm.

Important addresses and contact information

It is best to put all your contact information; business, personal, and miscellaneous into a computer file so you can print it out to bring with you, save it onto a disk, and upload to your email account as backup. Here is some important contact information you should include.

[American Embassies](#)

US Embassy in Moscow
Consular Section
19/23 Novinskiy Bulvar
Moscow 123242
Russia
Email: consulmo@state.gov
Phone: (095) 728-5577

US Embassy in St. Petersburg
Furstadtskaya ul., 15
St. Petersburg 191028
Russia
Phone: (812) 275-1701

For other foreign embassies in Moscow and St. Petersburg, see this site:
http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials_foreign_embassies.htm

Aeroflot airline offices in Moscow

Phone: (095) 1568019, 7538030

Website: www.aeroflot.ru

Lufthansa airline offices in Moscow

Airport office
Phone: 095-737-6415

Office in Hotel Renaissance (near Prospect Mira metro)
Phone: 095-737-6400

For other offices in Russia, see their website at: www.lufthansa.com

Bus charters between Russia and Europe

Eurolines www.eurolines.com
Ecolines www.ecolines.com

Western style medical centers in Russia

To find address and contact information for Western style medical centers in Russia, check this site:
<http://www.amcham.ru/page.php?pageid=129077032227631>

Also, here are some ones listed by Go To Russia Travel's website
(http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials_medical_help.htm)

Western-style Clinics

While Western health care comes at a price, charges are often comparable to those in the United States, and you may be able to have the bill sent directly to your U.S. or European insurance company (inquire at the specific clinic.) Here are some options:

British American Family Practice & Urgent Care

Address: #7 Grafsky Pereulok St. Petersburg 191002 Russia
24 Medical Helpline: 7-812-327-6030
Fax: 7-812-327-6040
Hours: 24 hours a day/7 days a week
Email: info@british-americanclinic.com

Home of St. Petersburg's only American and British Doctors
<http://www.british-americanclinic.com>

European Medical Center

Medical Center address: 10 2nd Tverskoi-Yamskoi Pereulok, 125047 Moscow,
Phone: 787-7000
Dentistry Center address: 34 Konushkovskaya Ul., 123242, Moscow,
Phone: 797-6767

International SOS Clinic

Address: 10th Floor, Polyclinic No. 1, 31 Grokholsky Pereulok, 129010 Moscow
Phone: (7-095) 937-5760
Emergency Phone: (7-095) 937-6477
Contact: Maxine Ash, 937-5760

E-mail:

now.marketing@internationalsos.com to make an appointment or askthedoctor@internationalsos.com for free medical advice.

Russian-American Family Medicine Center

Address: 10 2nd Tverskoi-Yamskoi Pereulok, 125047 Moscow
Tel: (7-095) 250-0646/9373/8318
Fax: (7-095) 250-8403
E-mail: contact@rafmc.ru

American Medical Center St. Petersburg

Address: 10 Serpukhovskaya St., 198013 St Petersburg
Phone: (7-812) 326-1730
Emergency Phone: (7-812) 326-1730
Fax: (7-812) 326-1731
Open: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
Regular Office Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Contact: Alex Sokol
E-mail: stpetersburg@amcenters.com

Address of internet cafés in Moscow

Image.ru

16 Novoslobodskaya Ul.
Metro: Mendelejevskaya
Phone: (7-095) 737-3700
e-mail: cafe@image.ru

Chevignon

14 Stoleshnikov Pereulok
Metro: Teatralnaya
Phone: 733-9205
Fax : 733-9205

Internet Cafe

15 Tshayanova Ul.
Metro: Novoslobodskaya

Phone: 250-6169, 973-4456
e-mail: cafe@rsuh.ru

Internet Club

12 Kuznetsky Most
Metro: Kuznetsky Most
Phone: 924-2140, 292-5670

Newmail.ru
Novaya Potshta
3/1 Ul. Zabelina

Metro: Kitai-Gorod
Phone: 923-0863
e-mail: cafe@newmail.ru

Additional notes on internet cafes:

- They usually cost between 30 and 60 roubles. Moscow's internet cafes tend to be a bit toward the 40-60 roubles range, but in almost all other cities, the price averages between 30 and 40 roubles. In some, you have to prepay for the time you're going to use. In others, you pay after usage. Obviously, the latter is better. With the prepaid ones, if you're working on something and the time is up, you usually lose everything unless you've saved it. Some of them don't even warn you that your time is almost up too!
- At the internet cafes that are open 24 hours, they usually have a discounted nighttime rate, and many even have an "all night" special where for a flat low price you get to use the internet all night from say 9pm or 10pm til morning.
- In Moscow, the main internet café that is easiest to find and likely to be in your path is the one in the big mall underneath the Red Square Kremlin and it's called "Time Online". When you get off at the metro station "Ahot Marriott", ask where the underground mall is. If you are at the Red Square, walk around its perimeter and look for a dome structure. If you see it, you'll know the entrance is near. Inside the mall, take the escalators to the bottom level and next to the big food court, you will see signs pointing to it. It's a sleek classy 24 hour internet café with flat screen monitors, but it's a big pricey at about 60 roubles per hour prepaid. They do have a lower night rate though.
- Another option in the Red Square area is a little café where you have free internet access in exchange for ordering food from their menu. I don't remember the name of it, but to get there, just look for the big canal fountain next to the Kremlin. It will have a row of restaurants and cafes in it, including McDonald's. From there, take the stairs across the fountain to the bottom level and look for a sign that says "Free Internet Access". Inside are sleek looking flat screen monitors where you order food from a menu on the screen. After doing so, a staff person will bring you a keyboard for you to use the internet on there. As you might expect, the food there is kind of expensive, but the cheapest thing you can order there is a small beer bottle for 40 roubles. For ordering small snacks, they give you about an hour of internet time. For meals, you get a bit longer. But if you order beyond that, they give you unlimited time. I'm not sure if the time usage is set in stone, or at the staff's discretion, but they seem to be liberal about it.
- Most internet cafes there charge by the hour. However, a few charge by megabytes transferred from the web. This system is a bit shady and very hard to calculate out as neither you nor them can estimate how many megabytes you are going to be using up on the internet. And it can end up being very expensive if you don't understand the rate at which they accrue charges. Therefore, try to avoid this type of internet café. But if you get stuck in one, ask the staff to go into Explorer and turn off the graphic images (if you don't need them that is) to save megabyte transfer space, and check periodically with the staff to see how many megabytes you've used up.

Helpful and Useful Links

If you have questions or need information that wasn't addressed in my article, you can email me at WWu777us@yahoo.com. However, I've put most of what I know here, so if it's not here, I probably won't know and can only give you educated guesses. For more help or information, here are some links you might want to check out.

Go To Russia Travel, the most reputable and widely used travel agency in America to arrange your trip to Russia or Ukraine. Full service including airfare bookings, visa support services, etc.

<http://www.gotorussia.net>

They have a section on their site that covers a lot of important travel essentials.

http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials.php3

Another online service providing visas to Russia

<http://www.visatorussia.com>

Website for ex-pats living in Moscow

<http://www.expat.ru>

Sites with general travel information about Russia. Some operate as travel agencies too.

http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials.php3

<http://www.waytorussia.net>

<http://www.travel2russia.com>

<http://www.travel-in-russia.com>

<http://www.russia.com>

<http://www.traveltorussia.com>

<http://www.unclepasha.com> (includes personalized guide and insider tips on Moscow)

<http://www.destinationrussia.com>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/russia/>

Sites you can search Airfares on to find the best deals

<http://www.happierabroad.com/airfares.php> - Airfare search engine on Happier Abroad

<http://www.bt-store.com>

<http://www.justfares.com>

<http://www.gotorussia.com/tickets.php3>

<http://www.airfarenow.com>

<http://www.cheaptickets.com>

<http://www.priceline.com>

<http://www.skyauction.com>

<http://www.lowestfare.com>

<http://www.qixo.com>

<http://www.farefinder.com>

Sites to find hotels by city and country

<http://hotels.happierabroad.com> – Hotel search engine on Happier Abroad

Employment and Teaching English in Russia

If you are interested in teaching English in Russia, here are some sites that post job openings:

<http://www.eslcafe.com/joblist/>

<http://www.eslteachersboard.com>

<http://www.viewesl.com>

<http://www.eslemployment.com/country/esl-jobs-russia.htm>

For general employment:

<http://themoscowtimes.com>

<http://www.sptimes.ru/>

<http://www.jobs-in-europe.net/russia.html>

<http://www.expats.ru/vacancies.php> (This site has office / media jobs for Americans and native English speakers!)

Employment Agencies in Russia:

<http://www.unistaff.ru/>

<http://www.personnel.ru>

A website with a large list of contact information for many employment agencies in Moscow:

<http://www.bworld.spb.ru/mosagency.html>

A website with a large list of contact information for many employment agencies in St. Petersburg:

<http://www.bworld.spb.ru/spagency.html>

Finding a roommate or flat in Russia

There is a new site now where you can find a roommate in Russia or a flat to rent. Here is the link.

<http://flatmates.ru/eng/>

* In any case, I cannot list every site with useful information, so the best thing to do is to go to Yahoo.com or Google.com and type in the search box "Travel in Russia" or whatever search words you need, and it will bring up many websites with information and help.

Thanks,
Winston

Note: Questions or comments can be emailed to me at WWu777us@yahoo.com.

Feel free to share your comments and feedback in the [Guestbook](#) or [Forum](#).

Guide to Dating in Russia

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Preface

Dear Reader,

Hello. My name is Winston Wu. I have made 3 long trips in Russia over the course of three years, been to around 20 cities, met hundreds of people, and dated many women there. Based on my first-hand experiences, lessons, observations, and advice from others along the way, I would like to share these tips regarding traveling and dating in Russia. So I present this guide for you. Though the travel tips can be used by anybody, the dating guide is geared toward men. (Sorry ladies)

Keep in mind though, that none of these rules are absolute, and only meant as general guidelines to consider. Some of it may even be outdated by the time you read this. Often you still have to just go with the flow. I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions or comments, my email is WWu777us@yahoo.com. Thanks and enjoy!

Best Regards,
Winston

Dispelling the myths about Russian women

First of all, if you are still under myths such as that Russian women are desperate to leave their country and American men seeking Russian women are losers, make sure to read the info. on this site first so you can learn the truth about all that.

<http://www.womenrussia.com/myths.htm>

And even if you don't harbor those kind of myths, it's a good read for background information anyway.

Geographic factors and considerations

Although no one claims that all people in one region are the same, there are geographical differences that one should consider in regards to Russian women. After all, it would be just as foolhardy to claim that everyone is the same everywhere you go (something usually uttered by people who don't travel much). I've always found that denying differences between people has to do with ethical values rather than factual observations anyway.

The consensus among most men as well as my own experience, is that the women in Moscow and St. Petersburg are more Westernized, materialistic, and spoiled than in the smaller cities. And you won't be as much of a novelty to them since they have been much more exposed to foreigners. In addition, the local women in Moscow and St. Petersburg tend to be from a higher income level, so they may be more spoiled and hold you to higher standards. On the other hand, in rural areas and villages, the women may be less spoiled, more humble and innocent, with stronger family values. However, people from primitive areas may be very simple or barbarian-like, which means you won't have anything in common with them, so it will not be a good match. The best solution is something in the middle, such as small to mid-size cities.

Outside of the big cities, women will see you as a fascinating novelty, since they rarely see foreigners, and thus be much more open and friendly to you. Or they may relish the chance to practice their English.

Therefore, it is usually advised if you're seeking a Russian woman to look outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, where the women are better wife-material. And based on my experience of being in many Russian cities, I would have to agree. I found that in Moscow, a high percentage of women are spoiled, stuck up, and less approachable. In St. Petersburg though, it wasn't as bad, but somewhere in between. In fact, after approaching and meeting many women in Russia, here is what I would estimate. In Moscow, about 10 percent of the women I approached

responded positively toward me, in St. Petersburg about 20 – 30 percent, and in the rest of Russia, between 50 and 90 percent! That's a huge noticeable difference. So there is no use in pretending that people are the same in all areas, just because it's more ethical or politically correct to do so.

Again, keep in mind that these are not absolutes. Occasionally in Moscow and St. Petersburg, you will meet nice quality women who are friendly, curious, or interested in you, of course. It's just that the percentages of it happening there are lower than in other cities. And you will find materialistic gold diggers in the smaller cities as well. Of course, there are gold diggers lurking in all cities of Russia, so be aware of that. I just wanted you to be aware of the patterns based on many people's observations and experience, including mine. The reasons for these differences probably have to do with culture, upbringing, environment, and living conditions.

Translating correspondences with Russian women

A lot of basic advice has been written about the subject of do's and don'ts of corresponding with Russian women, especially on marriage agency websites (www.womenrussia.com has a very extensive list) so I won't rehash what they usually tell you, but I will add a few things they don't usually tell you.

First of all, avoid using marriage agencies that don't have a physical address or phone number. That in itself is very shady and suspicious. Some marriage agencies or translation services that solicit you by email, may not even have a website in addition to not having an address or phone number! Those you should definitely avoid, because they are probably scams. If you get contacted by such posing agencies, offering translation services for letters with beautiful women they want to hook you up with, ask them for their website, physical address, and phone number. If they decline, that's a big red flag.

If you are corresponding with a Russian woman directly through her email address, without the service of an agency, and she doesn't know much English, you can use a free online translation program to translate your and her letters. A free one is Google Translator at <http://translate.google.com>. For letters, you can just copy and paste text in and out of the program. You can also translate foreign websites into English through that site, by entering the URL. Keep in mind though, that translation programs are imperfect and often make many mistakes in translation. Here are a few tips to minimize translation errors though.

- 1) Keep sentence structures and grammar as simple as possible, as if you were writing to a child, being careful to be simple and clear.
- 2) Avoid words that have more than one possible meaning, because the translator will often translate a different meaning of it than the one you intended. For example, rather than saying "I am like a tiger", say "I am similar to a tiger". So when writing a letter to be computer translated, check every word to make sure it has only one meaning, and change the ones that don't or rephrase them another way.

Finally, watch out for this common scam tactic. If a woman you're corresponding with falls madly in love with you too quickly, telling you how much she loves you, dreams about you, thinks about you, etc. and flatters you unusually, then watch out! She may very well be setting you up to ask you for money later, either to pay for her visa to come see you (not possible) or to help a sick relative. It's a form of the oldest trick in the book where someone attempts to hype up your emotions to the point where your clear-thinking senses are subdued, so you will just go along with whatever comes next. Sales people, advertisers, multi-level marketing recruiters, preachers, and scam artists use this tactic all the time. It's a classic brainwashing trick, and no different with Russian con artists who want to scam you.

The human nature tendency to believe the worst

I can't believe how often I have to tell this to people. People tend to want to remember and believe the worst about others. It's human nature for some reason. For example, if you do nine good things and one bad thing, people will focus on and remember that one bad thing. And they will assume that the one bad thing reflects the REAL you,

while the nine good things earlier were a fake cover up. That is totally untrue and illogical, yet that is how most people view things. Be FAIR people! Don't think like that and don't let human nature cloud your judgement like that. Look at the big picture. Don't just focus on the negative. If someone does nine good things and one bad thing, assume for now that they are 90 percent good and 10 percent bad. That is the logical way to view it, which while not necessarily accurate is much better than the common human nature way of viewing it!

Also, if you are corresponding with a Russian woman, and she sends you one beautiful gorgeous photo of herself, and then you see one terrible photo of her that looks the exact opposite, DO NOT assume that the bad photo represents the way she really looks and the good photo was a fake distortion! Chances are, her true appearance is somewhere near the MIDDLE of those two photos! The more pictures you see of her, the better idea you'll get of what she probably really looks like. And remember, at least half the people in this world do not look like their photos. Even before I went to Russia, I knew this from experience of meeting many girls from online. Therefore, keep that in mind before you instinctually judge someone from their photo. As a matter of fact, I should tell you that most of the Russian women I met looked much better than their photos.

How to recognize and guard against email scammers

When corresponding with Russian women, you will undoubtedly run into a lot of scammers who attempt to swindle you without ever meeting you. (You can see my article on dealing with these types at: http://www.happierabroad.com/Russian_Scams.htm) They may be women you wrote to, or who sent you a form letter anonymously. Here is how they work so you can spot them. Within the first three letters to you, she will start professing her strong feelings for you, telling you how much in love she is with you, and describing how much she thinks about you during the day. She will also seem to not have even read your letters to her, not answering any of your questions or addressing anything you say, except maybe one thing occasionally. Her letters will seem like canned generalized form love letters designed for anyone. She is probably sending those canned letters to many people at a time, hoping to use the law of probability to snare a few people at least. At that point, you should be on your guard, for it is very likely that she is attempting to set you up by clouding your mind and emotions with infatuation for her, so that your judgement will be inhibited when the time comes for her to pull the scam.

Soon she will find an excuse to ask you to send her money by Western Union, usually in the range of hundreds of dollars or even a thousand. Some common excuses typically used are that she needs money to get a visa and ticket to your country so she can come see you (sorry but it doesn't work that way), or that she is sick and needs an operation and wants you to prove your devotion to her by paying for it, or that her mother needs an operation. Other excuses I've seen are that she needs the money to pay for internet usage (which are a total joke since internet costs are only 1 or 2 dollars per hour in Russia) or to buy a mobile phone (cell phone) or land line phone so that you can call her.

At that point, it is hoped by her that you are so in love or infatuated, that you will just go along with it without thinking about it. She may even claim that it is a test of your devotion to win her heart. Essentially, it is the same classic tactic that salespeople, advertisers, get-rich-quick schemers, multi-level-marketing recruiters, and junk mail scams use, which is to hype you up with lots of emotion first to inhibit your judgment so that you'll go along with whatever the salesperson or scammer asks you to do next. This is just a variation of that classic tactic disguised in the name of personal love. I want you to be aware of that so you know how to recognize this when it happens.

Anyway, the rules you must follow which are advised by everyone I know in this process, are:

- NEVER EVER send money to a woman you're corresponding with whom you haven't met yet no matter what, unless it's maybe 10 or 20 dollars to help pay her costs of using internet cafes to write you (In Russia, using the internet costs between 1 to 2 dollars only!). And even if you've met her before, you should still be wary. Remember that whatever problem a Russian woman may have, she can usually find a way to afford fixing it, even if it requires surgery. The costs in Russia are nothing like they are in the states.

- If she asks you to send her money for a train or plane ticket to see you, you shouldn't comply. A normal Russian woman has no problem riding the train, which is dirt cheap in Russia and affordable in most cases. You can just offer to reimburse her when she arrives. But it is better for you to visit her in her home city. A Russian lady who insists on flying instead is probably a high maintenance princess or gold digger, and you are probably better off without her. But if you must pay for her transportation in advance, at least do this. Buy the plane/train ticket directly yourself first, and arrange to have the company mail the tickets to her. Most companies will have a refund policy if she doesn't use them, so make sure to inquire about that. If she doesn't like that idea, that's a sign that something is suspicious.

Here are some tips to help screen out the scammers:

- Ask her questions about herself. See if she answers them, or just sends you canned love letters that sound fake. Some scammers won't answer any of your questions while others do, but this will at least help narrow them down.
- Ask for her phone number so you can call her (you can use a calling card from my shop at the link near the end of this guide). Many scammers are not even women, but men, and will find excuses not to give you their phone number. Now, it is true that some women in poor countries do not have a phone number, neither a landline nor a mobile phone. However, if this lady is truly interested in you, she should be willing to go to a friend's home or grandparent's home that has a phone to receive your call as long as you are willing to set up an appointed time. (Remember to calculate the time zone difference, e.g. Moscow time is 11 hours ahead of the Pacific Coast time zone most of the year, for example) Or she can use an internet café and talk to you on Skype or Yahoo Messenger. After you talk to her on the phone and hear her voice, it will at least confirm that it is not a man scamming you.

If she isn't willing to cooperate with any of the above, it is a suspicious sign either of her (or his) intentions, or lack of interest at least. These tips should help you narrow the field down and weed out scammers so that you don't waste your time, energy or money. After all, it can be quite disheartening to think that you are having a great relationship with a woman only to find out later that she wants you to send her money, rendering all the time you put into it as wasted.

How to deliver poetic justice to a scammer

If you do meet a scammer who asks you to send her a large amount of money, here is an idea that will deliver her deserved bad karma, and teach her a lesson that crime doesn't pay:

- Tell the scammer that you will send her the huge amount of cash by Western Union as she wants and give her a pick up date, along with a fake Western Union 10 digit tracking number. Plus, if she asked for 300 dollars, tell her you'll give her 800 to 1000 to get her revved up. On the pickup day, she will go to the bank to pick up the large sum of cash in extreme excitement and anticipation, only to find that no such funds are waiting for her there in her name, which will leave her in disappointment, anguish, and a huge let down. Then, when she writes you to ask what happened, tell her you fixed the problem, and it should be ready tomorrow. She will go again tomorrow and the same emotional frustration will be repeated. Keep this up on her for however long it takes. The scammer will suffer a lot of emotional anguish, which will be well deserved. By doing this, you help teach her a lesson that crime doesn't pay, deliver her rightly due karma, and hopefully discourage her from doing this again to other men.

Or, if you want to try to give them a dose of their own medicine and maybe profit a bit by it, then ask them to send you \$20 or \$30 by Western Union first, as a token of trust, before you'll send them the thousand dollars they want. Test their greed. If they send it, keep the money and drop them, to teach them a lesson.

There are also services where you can do criminal and personal background checks on the Russian lady you are serious about. However, they cost from 30 dollars on up per person, so it wouldn't be economical to run a background check on every woman you're corresponding with, just the ones you are serious about. Many agencies advertise such services or contain links to them, so they should be easy for you to find.

In any case, my advice is to not take email correspondences too seriously. No matter how well you think you know the person, you don't. You only have an image of that person in your mind. Once you meet, the chemistry and dynamics could be totally different. Personally, I wouldn't even invest too much time in email correspondence unless you have the time. The reason is because the in-person meeting will either work out or it won't. Everything hangs on the in-person meeting, no matter how long or deeply you've been corresponding. The duration of correspondence beforehand will not usually increase the odds of there being chemistry between you two. Therefore, I would not put too much emotion, hope or dedication into the pre-meeting correspondences. The correspondence, while better than nothing, should just be used to set up the basics of the meeting, and getting to know each other briefly. Anything beyond that isn't usually a fruitful use of time and energy, in my experience at least.

Visiting one woman vs. many

This is a common dilemma that Westerners encounter or soon face when beginning the process of corresponding with Russian women. It has also been discussed in many articles, discussion lists, boards, etc. The issue is whether one should correspond and develop relations with one woman at a time, or several at once. The abbreviated terms on the internet for these two methods are WOVO (Write One Visit One) and WMVM (Write Many Visit Many). There are no absolute rules of course, but here is what I have learned regarding this issue.

Most men (and especially marriage agencies since they have a vested interest in it) suggest the WMVM approach. The rationale is simple. If you "put all your eggs in one basket", you are taking a big unwarranted risk and could end up being disappointed and wasting a lot of time and money in the process. It just doesn't seem sensible to put all your chips on one person, especially if you haven't met her yet. Besides, there are just too many horror stories of men who went to only visit one woman he corresponded with, only to have things not work out, and then he realizes he bet all his chips on her for nothing and has to start the process all over again. Therefore, it seems more sensible to correspond with several ladies, and visit them all on one trip to narrow down the field. This way, it ups the odds in your favor and broadens your choices, giving you more "backups" if things don't work out with certain ladies. However, this can be seen as unethical and make you look sort of like a "cheating two-timer" in the eyes of some (particularly women), and some men's conscience won't allow them to do it that way. Hence, the dilemma.

In addition, one runs the risk of spreading oneself too thin if he visits too many women at once. And if visiting them in the same city, there is the risk of them finding out about each other, which would be a big time embarrassing disaster. Still, the consensus of most experienced people is that before going to Russia or Ukraine, you at least narrow down the field to about 3 ladies with high compatibility potential. That seems to be the general wisdom you'll find from most advisers in this area. I would agree with this advice in general, as I believe that you aren't required to be exclusively faithful to someone until you've met them and spent some time together. Therefore, my own suggestion is to use the WMVM method but narrowing it down to a few good potential prospects, with perhaps some "backup" women or introduction agencies to call if none of them work out or you find yourself with some extra time on your hands.

However, if you find that your conscience prevents you from using the WMVM method, and you only feel comfortable with the WOVO approach, then I would suggest that you at least bring contact information with you for some marriage/dating introduction agencies in the area you will be in. That way, if things don't work out, you can call them to arrange on-the-spot introductions or other services, so that you can meet and date other prospects. And even if you're using the WMVM approach, it's good to have this contact information ready on hand anyway, since you never know when you might need it.

Put all the contact information you need in a word processing document, print it out to carry with you in hard copy form (though don't let any of the ladies see it), and put a copy onto a CD or memory stick to carry with you as backup. Also upload it as a file to your email account as well so you can retrieve it from any internet cafe. I usually format them out like this:

Russian woman's full name
Telephone number
Email address
Home address
Location, City
Any other miscellaneous notes you need to make about her

Introduction agency name
Telephone number
Email address
Address, location, city
Staff to contact

Etc. Etc.

You can do it your own way, but you get the idea. Do this for everyone you know in Russia whom you might need to contact for any situation, including lawyers, old friends, other ex-pats you know, people with information on apartment rates, hotel rates, translator guides, etc. You never know when you might be in a situation where you need to contact them. And as you meet more people there and develop more contacts, add their contact info to your list either by hand or typing.

Deciding whether to use a translator on a first date

When dating Russian women from marriage or dating agencies, the issue of whether to use a translator on the first date will often come up. In fact, the agencies will usually offer it to you, so they can make some extra money. Whether to bring one on a first date or not is a tricky issue, and I can't give a firm yes or no answer. But here are some things to consider.

If you aren't confident of your communication skills, and are meeting a lady who can't speak any English, then it may help you feel more comfortable to bring a translator. However, there are some pitfalls to using a translator on your first date to consider, which I've noticed.

- 1) First, some women depend so much on the translator, that they only talk to him/her and rarely even look at you. This makes the date very awkward, and you even feel like you're dating the translator rather than your date. And it also makes it hard for you to read the lady's body language as well, since it's mostly geared toward the translator rather than to you.
- 2) Second, it makes the date more like a crowded three than a romantic two.
- 3) Third, as I mentioned above, the purpose of the first date is to see if there is enough chemistry or attraction for a second date. A translator will not usually make a difference in that (though some may disagree with me). Chemistry and attraction tend to be subjective things, and finding out more basic facts about each other isn't usually going to influence that.
- 4) Finally, if there is no chemistry and no second date, then the money you spent on the translator would have been a waste, since you could have found out the same thing without one.

Therefore, what I suggest is that if you can deal with the basic communication, save the translator for subsequent dates, when you two have more serious and in-depth things to talk about.

But if you're going to use a translator, I have been told that it's much better to hire a male translator (and one that doesn't work for a marriage agency) than a female one, because a female translator will usually watch out for your date's interests over yours, as that's how women are (at your expense of course, since you're paying her). Thus, she will likely side with your date, even if she doesn't have your best interest at heart. On the other hand, a male translator is more likely to watch out for the guy. Buy him a beer, befriend him, and he will watch out for you, so they say. Of course, this can be difficult as the majority of translators are female. But you should be able to find a

male translator though, in the classifieds as many Russian males advertise their services as personal guides, and their rates are much lower than what a marriage agency charges.

Flowers on a first date?

In regards to giving her flowers, some will advise you to bring flowers with you on a first date in order to make a good impression, as it is Russian custom. However, I disagree with that because in my experience, I have NEVER seen flowers make a difference in how well a first date went. After all, if there's no chemistry, flowers are not going to create chemistry or attraction. And if there is chemistry, not bringing flowers will not make things any less either. Simply put, I have NEVER seen flowers create attraction in a Russian woman who didn't like me, and I have also NEVER seen not giving flowers make a Russian who truly liked me, like me less. Therefore, I think it is best to bring flowers later on down the line if you continue seeing each other. If you do, it seems more special to her and she seems to appreciate it more, because you will have waited to show your affection and appreciation of her, and therefore it becomes more meaningful.

Also, remember that in Russia, you have to buy a woman an odd number of flower stems, because even number ones are for funerals. Usually, the florist will know this and only sell you them in sets of 1, 3, 5, etc., but keep it in mind anyway.

The rule of progressively elaborate dates

On a first date with a Russian woman, you should keep it simple. Unless you are sure that you two are hitting it off well, try to avoid restaurants, wine, or expensive things. Instead, keep it simple by going for a walk, getting ice cream, sitting down at a cafe for drinks or snacks, etc. Here is why. The purpose of the first date is to see if there is enough chemistry between you two for a second date. Sometimes there will be enough chemistry or attraction for a second date. Other times, there won't. If there's no chemistry or she pretends to like you and doesn't show up for a second date, then there would be no point in having an elaborate first date. The money you spent on the restaurant, wine, etc. would have been wasted and meaningless. With a nice normal woman, how much money you spend on the first date will not be a factor in whether there is a second date or not. (Remember you want to find someone who likes you for you)

Therefore, spending a lot of money on a first date is not necessary. Instead, if there is some chemistry and attraction between you do which leads to a second date, then you can start making it more elaborate each time. With each subsequent date, if things are going well, be more generous each time. After all, it will have been warranted. Being creative and romantic is nice too.

Being familiar with local customs

Here are some local Russian customs to be aware of. If you are invited to a Russian home, remember to take off your shoes inside. And it is also customary to bring gifts when you visit people's homes. Small gifts of food or wine will do. And if you bring flowers, remember that the stems have to be in odd numbers, but usually the florist will only sell them to you in odd numbers anyway.

When out with a woman, the custom is that the man has to pay for everything. However, also remember that if she asks you to buy something for her that you didn't offer, you have a right to say no. And don't believe her if she tells you that you are obligated to buy her whatever she asks for. That is NOT the custom in Russia. She is lying, and probably knows it, so you should dump her. This custom also means that if you are out with a large group of only women, that you are supposed to pay for ALL of them too! Therefore, if that would be detrimental to your finances, you'd better avoid that kind of situation unless you can afford it. Remember that a good Russian woman would not try to put you in that situation either, for she knows what you would have to do under the custom.

If you wish to familiarize yourself with more Russian customs and get acquainted with their superstitions too, here is a link to a site with a long list of them. However, some of these in my experience, are either outdated or malleable since I've seen many Russians violate these customs.

<http://www.geocities.com/fsubrides/page36.html>

Cultural differences in spending and saving money

One of the biggest causes of conflict and misunderstanding between Russians and Americans is the issue of spending money, especially since many Russians mistakenly think that all Americans are filthy rich with a bottomless supply of cash, thanks to the image Hollywood gave them. Americans are taught to spend money wisely and efficiently, and saving it for future long term use. Russians, however, live for the day and are more likely to spend their surplus cash without regard for efficiency or savings. Most of them don't have enough to save up anyway. And they can better afford to splurge too, because they don't have the kind of bills and payments that Americans are used to, so they have no understanding of the pressures Americans have either! Therefore, both sides do not understand each other in this area. It is difficult, therefore, for both sides to respect and understand each other on this issue because of their different mentalities and conditions.

One thing you need to keep in mind is that no matter what you say, many Russians see you as rich and always having filthy amounts of spare cash. Therefore, if they see that you are budgeting, or reserving money aside for tomorrow's expenditures, etc. it looks like you are stingy or greedy to them. (It should also be noted that the Russian definition of "greedy" is different than the Western definition. By Western standards, a greedy person is someone who has an insatiable desire to acquire wealth, power or material assets, while by Russian standards, it refers to people who are economical and who try to withhold spending their money.) Even if you claim that you aren't rich or that you have limited resources, they still won't believe you. In their minds, if you have money to travel and visit their country, then you must have plenty of cash to spare at all times for all situations and all people. And it doesn't matter if you've already spent a lot of money the day before or if you will have to spend a lot tomorrow on something else or someone else, because that's never a factor to them in what you will spend now.

The reasons for this, as far as I've been able to gather, are several. It's not that they are dumb about money matters. Their mentality of it is different from ours because of their environmental and societal conditions. Many Russians are unable to comprehend saving or budgeting because they've never made enough money to utilize those concepts themselves, so they have a hard time relating to your concept of it, especially when they see you as being a millionaire with lots of extra cash on you at all times. Here is how an Ukrainian American man explained it to me, which is probably a bit closer to home than my explanation:

"A few things to add: the reason Russians are like this with money is also as follows: their culture is cash oriented, not credit-oriented. They do not like debts. Hence, they are not used to monthly bills. Also, they lived under socialism (not Communism- they never achieved it) so the supply of money was guaranteed and jobs were guaranteed by the Constitution. Hence, there was no pressure to save for a rainy day. No fear to lose one's job as you had to commit a crime to get fired. Everything was also very cheap. And, one did not need to have big amounts of money to have the basics-food, shelter, family/love. Since many human beings are happy with those-that is how it was. Most families had dachas- summer homes- in the countryside to provide them with agricultural commodities so again there was no need to save- just plant and then you have your own food."

Also, on a more abstract metaphysical note, I have been told that it also has to do with the nature of the Russian soul. I haven't been able to fully understand that yet, but here is what I surmise in theory. Russians do not see money in terms of numbers that are added and subtracted from your wallet or a balance in your bank account, like we do in the West. They don't see spending money as losing money. Instead, they see spending as releasing pockets of energy that are not lost, but just converted into another form or bounce back to you. In essence, you could say it's a higher view of reality that takes into account your friends and loved ones, rather than the individual. The collective interconnected energy of their group, to them is what it's all about, rather than just individuals

fighting for their own needs. So if this situation arises, try to be understanding about it and remember that they didn't grow up in the same conditions as you.

In regards to dating, I have been told by many that to a Russian woman, the biggest turn-off is a man who appears stingy to them. Some women even see the word "economical" as a bad word, believe it or not, especially since they assume that a foreigner always has plenty of cash to spare. According to my Russian friend Alina, in Russian culture a man with a woman must behave like the following. "When he spends money, he must not show any remorse or displeasure on his face. Instead, he must appear generous and happy, even if he is giving his last ten roubles. That is what a woman likes to see."

This can create a theoretical dilemma. On the one hand, you can't be economical or efficient with money without the risk of appearing stingy or greedy. On the other hand, since scarcity is real and money is not unlimited, you also cannot behave as though money is never an issue and is unlimited, (unless you are super wealthy) or else you will soon lose a lot more than you planned, or even all of it. Such a dangerous reckless habit or mentality could bankrupt you easily, as it would only be a matter of time before reality caught up with you. So the question is, how do you balance the two? Where do you draw the line? It's not an easy question to answer, and you will have to make some judgment calls based on the situation. But as I discussed in an above section, generally if someone treats you like you ought to spend freely, or like you have an unlimited supply of cash, that is a bad sign. A nice self-respecting person who cares about you would never do that, regardless of how rich they think you are. So if you are constantly pressured to spend more than you want to, that is not a good sign about the company you are in.

The most logical and safe solution I think, is to take a middle ground rather than one extreme or the other. Be a little more generous and less economical than you usually are, but not so much that it gets out of control. Of course, in reality things are not always so cut and dry, and sometimes the line between frugality and stinginess will not be clear, nor will it be drawn in the same place by everyone. In that case, you will have to rely on your sense of judgment and gut feeling. If you mess up, just learn from your mistakes, and remember that those who truly care about you will forgive you, while those who don't aren't worth your time anyway.

If in the presence of Russians, you don't wish to spend your money on something, don't try to justify it to them by saying that you can't afford it, or explaining anything about budgeting or saving money. Just simply say you don't want to, and leave it at that. It's the safest and cleanest way to do it. Most Russians will not ask why or pressure you for a reason. Instead, they will usually just let it go and accept that you have your own reasons.

Finally, if you find yourself in a situation where you are pressured to spend money that you don't want to spend, here's a trick you can try. Don't put all your cash in your wallet. As mentioned in the section on carrying cash, divide your cash up into different locations on yourself so no one knows where and how much reserve cash you have. Keep a small amount of cash in your wallet. Then, if you need to, pretend that you don't have enough cash on you by taking out your wallet and showing the person that you don't have enough cash for the situation that he/she is pressuring you to spend for. However, if you find you are constantly in this kind of situation, you either are hanging out with the wrong people or too stingy for your own good.

Escorting your date with taxis

If you are with a Russian woman, it looks bad to her, even if she is a nice good person, to be bargaining with the taxi driver in front of her. Not only do men need to appear generous in front of a Russian lady, but they need to appear not concerned about money, regardless of whether they are rich or poor. And it embarrasses some Russian ladies to be next to a guy who is bargaining. Therefore, if a driver attempts to scam you, then you are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the driver is giving you an inflated price because you are a foreigner with extra cash to spare for them. But you can't defend yourself against it because it looks bad to the Russian lady with you. So what do you do? It's not an easy dilemma to resolve. But here's what I would try. Don't have the Russian lady talk to the driver first (although it's tempting to just let her tell him the destination). Instead, you tell or show the driver your destination, asking your woman's help if needed, and then negotiate from there, but be quick about it. If you don't take too long, it won't look as bad to her. That's all I can say.

Oh and one more thing. Most Russian women are accustomed to walking and have strong feet (some even have blisters and veins on their feet to show for it :)). They are accustomed to taking buses, trolley, minivan buses, or metros and therefore won't have a problem with it. But there are a few though, who are too lazy to walk, ride buses or take the metro, and think they are princesses who deserve the high class treatment of riding taxis. In this case, you will have to make a decision as to whether you want to pay the price of keeping her, and if she's worth it. Normally, it's best to use both forms of transportation. For example, using buses and metros in the day when there's time to walk and sightsee, and using taxis at night after a long day when both of you are tired. However, there are some women who will ONLY ride taxis, and they are usually the same ones who like to order wine all the time too. That's when you have to make a judgement call about whether you want to expend the resources to keep someone like that or not. If you're not on a budget and are only there for a week or two, then it may not matter to you. Otherwise, it's another story.

Gauging her level of interest in you

At some point you might wonder whether your date or love interest is interested in you. You could just ask her of course, but depending on the culture, some women do not tell their feelings upfront. Instead, they show it by their ACTIONS and BEHAVIORS.

According to experts I talked to, body language is the most important tell tale sign. You can't just rely on what she says, since some women pretend to like you to be polite, telling you that they had a great time and that you're interesting, promising a second date, etc. but then suddenly they don't show up for the next date or get too busy to see you again. But body language doesn't lie. If while with you, she shows an open posture, leans toward you, has dilated pupils while gazing at you, etc. then those are good signs. On the other hand, if she has a closed posture, always folds her arms while walking, leans away from you, gets irritated by little things, etc. then those are bad signs. Remember to look for patterns, not just one or two examples.

Also, if she likes you or is attracted to you, she will put out certain vibes and pheromones which you can sense. The best way I would describe it is this. When someone is interested in you, you will feel that their energy is being directed toward you. But if they're not, then you feel like their energy is being directed away from you or kept at a distance. That's the best way I can put it. Those with a lot of experience in dating and human relations, are able to pick up on these kind of things. Therefore, body language, vibes, and pheromones are much better indicators of a woman's interest level in you, than the words she says (which could just be uttered out of tactful politeness). So you should learn to read and sense them.

I would say that in most cases, if she is interested in you, she will at least be taking your arm, holding your hand, or kissing you goodnight, by the third date. You've probably heard the saying "actions speak louder than words". Well it's true, but be careful not to misinterpret another's actions or jump to conclusions either.

Generally though, if you are in doubt about her interest in you and question it, it's not a good sign and probably means she isn't. At that point, you can cut your losses and lay the real test on her by telling her you are about to leave, and watch her reaction to it. If she really cares about you, it will show. If not, then cut your losses and move on.

Good and bad signs

While you are dating potential mates, it is wise to watch for and learn how to detect and read good and bad signs about a person's intentions and character.

In Russia, I was told by advisors that a nice woman in a restaurant or cafe with you usually will order something about the same price that you order, and not much higher. It is the proper and polite thing for them to do. I have found this to be true, and a good tell tale sign. However, if they attempt to order something much more expensive

than you, such as expensive wine or seafood, that is a bad sign indeed. However, I should warn you that some of the women who do this will order something expensive without your permission, speaking to the waitress in Russian so that you can't understand what she's ordering. You can help avoid this by asking her what she'd like before you order.

Decent Russian women with self-respect will not ask you to buy anything for them. In general, Russian women with sincere intentions who have self-respect and truly like you, will usually do most of the following:

- a) They won't ask you to buy them gifts or give them money, even if you truly are rich.
- b) They won't treat you like a cash cow or bank, but like a person to respect.
- c) They'll introduce you to their friends and family, rather than conceal you from them.
- d) They aren't preoccupied with where you are taking them or how extravagant your date is going to be. Instead, they don't care where you go or what you do as long as you are together.
- e) If they can't make a date with you, or are too busy to meet, they will suggest another time they are available, rather than just giving a simple no.
- f) They will be good about keeping even little promises they make, following through on them rather than flaking out on them.
- g) They don't keep making excuses to avoid physical intimacy. Even if they are the shy and slow type, they will at least gradually warm up in a steady progression, regardless of the pace, rather than give you hot/cold treatment. At the very least, by the second date, she should be willing to take your arm or hold your hand.

On the other hand, here is a list of bad signs and red flags outlined by the owner of the Russian Women Abroad Forum, Natasha:

http://www.russianwomenabroad.com/forum_eng/index.php?sid=cecac74d7c9772e386426cf1b62ae8b4

Here are some signs, which can enlighten you that she is not attracted to you:

She looks very frustrated when she first sees you. She does not smile;

Even after you spend some time together, she still does not want to hold hands. When you try to touch her, it looks as though it irritates her... Here I should say that it is wrong to think that Russian women don't like "holding hands". They do, but only if they like you. I remember my close friend told me about one of the foreigners who visited her. She said, "you know, when he tries to touch my hand, I feel repulsed..." In another situation, when she liked a guy, she would love "holding hands"!

Here are some other Red flags:

During your stay, your Russian friend will prefer to spend all of your evenings in night-clubs or restaurants, instead of spending "quality time" together with you getting to know each other (don't confuse this with her attempting to be hospitable and showing you the town);

Will try to make you buy as much stuff for her as possible, will complain and show her dissatisfaction in case you don't get her something she wants;

Will show a change in her mood very often (ex. Will be happy and excited when you are in public, but sullen and silent when you are alone);

Will act like she is very busy and could devote only a short time to you, in particular meeting you at restaurants or bars only;

Will be reluctant to discuss your future together, and make serious plans;

Will have sex with you on the first date, but won't kiss you on the lips or will accept sex passively

(remember “Pretty woman”?))

Also, I wish to assure you that if your Russian friend will be willing to have sex with you on the first date, it does not prove anything. She may really like you, or she may just believe that it is the only way to get abroad.

One more point: on our Women’s forum we discussed if any of our women were really “in love” when they agreed to marry their husbands, 95% admitted that they were not in love. Some said that they developed love and respect throughout their life with their spouses. Those, few who replied that they did fall in love before the marriage, were met with distrust and disbelief. Many said that it is impossible to fall in love with a stranger whom you met on-line. Surely, many (if not all) of these women assured their future husbands that they were “in love” before the marriage. This is something to think about!

There is a lot to consider in developing any relationship. Of course, it’s nice to be very positive and open to the possibilities, but in order to avoid great disappointment afterwards, I would advice you to use your judgment, insight and maturity when arriving at this crucial step in your relationships.

Keep in mind though, not to read too much into one single good or bad sign. You have to look at the circumstances and take into account the overall patterns of signs from her to get a more complete picture. It is also said that intuition, while inherently unreliable in solving logical or technical problems, tends to be very accurate in predicting whether a relationship is working out.

Opportunistic gold diggers

Russian opportunistic gold diggers and leeches meet foreign men either through marriage agencies and social tours, the internet, or in bars and clubs where foreign men hang out. Though they pretend to be seeking serious relations, their true intent is to be showered with money, gifts, and fancy dinners. They tend to pick the most expensive activities and places to go, and are total shameless takers, perceiving money as an aphrodisiac. They are not ashamed to directly ask for presents, or cash gifts and loans. And they treat men as cash cows with no regard for their feelings.

Sometimes, they use mind-control techniques, such as calling the man “greedy” if he refuses to buy them what they want or spend freely, staring at him with a hypnotic gaze that induces guilt in him. Unless they are attracted to the man, they will make excuses not to have sex, ranging from her parents being worried about her being out late, to saving sex for marriage, to claiming that she moves slowly, etc. They will sometimes accept sex for money, with the price in inverse proportion to their level of attraction to him. In other words, the less attracted to you she is, the more money she will ask from you.

Now, if you find yourself dating an opportunistic type of Russian woman that is seeking “financial support”, here’s my suggestion. If you plan on using them for sex or companionship in exchange for gifts or cash, make sure that she at least TREATS YOU RIGHT. If she is fair, honest and treats you good, and makes you feel good, then you can work out a deal, short term or long term, with her. Many relationships in Russia are like this.

But if she treats you bad, looks annoyed around you, acts impatient, is inconsiderate, and tries to give you very little in return for taking a lot, then don’t bother. Such a person will only frustrate and drain you.

When entering into this type of “arrangement” with a new woman you don’t really know well, establish the parameters early on. Otherwise, if they have it their way, they may attempt to extract from you without giving anything back (unless they find you attractive). Sometimes such women are without honor, will not think anything of screwing you over, and may not even keep their part of the bargain. Or they may give you really bad “service” in bed, putting nothing into it. If possible, try to get her to put out first, so you have the upper hand. Otherwise, if she gets what she wants first, she will not feel any pressure to make you happy in bed, unless she plans to see you

again. It's a game you have to play. If you find that you get emotionally drained by it, then you are probably with a person who is a bad match.

Also, if you don't know her well, before she leaves your flat or room, don't unlock the door until you make sure that none of your valuables are stolen. Some poor people have a "Robin Hood mentality" and do not think it is wrong for them to steal.

A common lie from a gold digger or user

This one is very important. I hate seeing people take advantage of others. If a woman you meet in Russia attempts to ask you or pressure you to give her money or expensive presents, and tells you that this is normal in Russia and that the man is obligated to comply, DO NOT believe her! She is lying or deluding herself! The reason I know is because I have discussed this issue with many people in the 9 cities I visited in and they (the good people) have all told me the same thing. They told me that in Russia, it is NOT polite or proper for a woman to ask or pressure a man for gifts or money, and that any woman who attempts to tell you otherwise is lying or trying to use you, or else they are foolish and inconsiderate. Either way, they told me that a nice normal woman would not do such things. Those that tell you otherwise, are expecting that you don't know anything and hoping to take advantage of that. You can trust me on this, as every credible person I met in Russia explained this to me. Therefore, if anyone attempts to deceive you and tell you that such behavior is normal, tell them that enough credible people in Russia have explained the truth about it to you, and therefore they cannot deceive you. If they become moody after you tell them this, just move on because there are many other nice ladies out there that won't do this to you.

In fact, if you don't want to just take my opinion for it, here are the responses of three Russian women I've polled. I asked them if it was acceptable behavior in Russia for a girl to ask for a mobile phone (cell phone) as a present, and what I should do next time it happens to me.

From Olga of Izhevsk:

"As for girls and mobiles, you are right, it isn't natural behavior. Maybe they just saw a foreigner and thought he had plenties of money. I don't know how to explain that. Of course, if you needn't buy them everything they ask for. Just say no. And ask her why she thought you would buy her a mobile. Where did you meet such insolent and stupid girls? Maybe they thought you are in love with them and would do everything they asked."

From Oksana of Izhevsk:

"Dear Winston,
it's a pity that you met such mercantile girls, the only thing I can advise you is to be careful with people, not all of them are kind & honest as I am. (I'm not shy by the way:)))). As you remember Igor often told you about it.

As for the definite situation you have, I think you just should say "no", with out any explanations.
I wish good luck, & good people on your way!

Regards, Oksana"

From Tanya of Cherepovets:

"It's not normal when a girl asks to present her a mobile phone (or anything else). it is not a girl, but a whore (or it is a joke). As for me I am too proud to ask my boyfriend to buy me even ice-cream (as I can buy everything I need by myself). If a girl asks you to buy her anything, run away from her, as she needs your money, not you."

(Note: Contrary to Tanya's opinion though, I think that a girl asking for snacks, food or drink is acceptable, provided that you've known each other for a while.)

From Tanya of Cherepovets again in a follow-up email:

“Hello Winston!!!!

Thank you for your letters, I am glad that you haven't forgotten me.

As for your questions, I can say that ask your boyfriend to buy you even a trifle is not common (you can ask only your husband) but everything depends on a person, on personal up-bringing. For some person it is normal to ask somebody to buy food or smth like that, but among my acquaintances there are no such girls. My friend are too proud to ask when they can afford it themselves. Maybe you met the girls of another sort. But I don't know what kind of girls predominate: those who are proud or those who are idiots.”

In spite of all this, there are a certain percentage of women in Russia who genuinely believe that true love is measured by how generous a man is with money and presents to them. While such a standard in the West would not be considered a sign of genuine love/affection, nevertheless in these women's minds, it is. These kind of women are not necessarily trying to deceive or use you, in their minds, and they can be just as good, sweet, or nice as anyone else. It's just simply part of their mentality and belief. If you meet many women in Russia, you will inevitably come across this kind. They may ask for things by giving you hints such as “It would be so nice and convenient for me if I had a mobile phone”, “I've always wanted a mobile phone”, etc. Or else they may be bold enough to directly ask for things. My advice if you run into this type is that unless you want to have this kind of woman, don't bother with them because there are plenty of other women in Russia who are not like this and will never ask for presents or money as a sign of your love to them. The culture clash and difference in mentality between these kind of women and the average Western male thinking is just too great, in my opinion.

Remember that you while you ought to be generous with Russian women you date within reason, when it becomes excessive, you always have a right to say no. But when you do, keep in mind never to say that you can't afford it or it's too expensive. To say that to a woman in Russia is just considered too culturally rude. If you say no to something a woman wants, and she becomes moody or loses interest in you, you're better off without her. Why waste your time on someone like that?

The line between custom and inappropriateness

As you will undoubtedly discover, in Russia it is customary for the man to pay for everything when out on a date or even a friendship meeting, with a woman. That custom is agreed to by everyone, so there is no dispute on that. However, since everything has its boundaries and limits, here is a good rule of thumb to follow. When out on a date or meeting with a Russian woman, pay for what you are supposed to, including meals, snacks, transportation, entrance fees, entertainment, etc. You will have done your part by doing so. Then, if she attempts to ask you for expensive gifts or presents (small gifts are ok though), that is where the line is being crossed. Some of them will act like you are obligated to comply, but the truth is, you are not. Simply tell her “Ni hachu” which is Russian for “I don't want to.” and leave it at that. Stand your ground. She will either accept that, or leave you and look for other bait. Don't be used. Small gifts under 100 roubles though, are another matter, and it is more acceptable for her to ask for them, but not so often that it becomes a shopping spree.

Remember that although Russians see you a foreigner as rich with lots of extra money to spare, the nice self-respecting ladies who care about you are NOT going to treat you like you have a bottomless supply of cash in your pocket, even if they think you really do. The ones that do treat you as if you had a bottomless supply of cash in your pocket are either greedy, users, or fools, and you should put them aside before they give you problems in the long run. And one tell-tale sign of them is if they ever call you “greedy” or “stingy” for not complying with their demands. As my experienced advisor Brad (who himself is married to a great Russian woman) told me in a post once:

“First, a RW (Russian woman) that is REALLY interested in you

will NEVER accuse you of being greedy or stingy. Only those women that want to try to shame you into spending more money on them will employ such a tactic. It's a HUGE red flag and grounds for immediate dismissal of the lady from your universe of potential brides.

It's an easy concept to remember, no well-intended RW would ever encourage you to "spend freely" on them.....PERIOD!"

Nevertheless, I can tell you something from my experience. When I analyze the pattern of the behavior of the Russian women I dated, here is what I've noticed. The nice women who have values and a decent conscience will at least occasionally ATTEMPT to offer or insist on paying their way or for both of you, on little things such as bus/metro fares, taxi fares, snacks, or public restroom fees. This is true even if they have little money. People who have a conscience and self-respect do not like seeing other people paying for 100 percent of everything, regardless of the local customs, so they like to show their generosity or appreciation in some way, such as offering to pay their way or your way for some of the little things. You can and ought to refuse this offer from them of course, but the fact that they attempt to do this tells you that they have some conscience and self-respect, which usually turns out to be the case.

On the other hand though, the ladies/girls who, when they are with you, refuse to ever spend even one rouble on the smallest thing, never even offering to, are usually the ones without much of a conscience, self-respect, are lazy, user-types, or just don't really care about you. Although these women are not violating any Russian customs, they are showing a sign of inconsideration or laziness, and in my experience, those who fit this criteria do tend to turn out in the end to be what I described.

Those who religiously adhere to Russian customs or to customs in general may flame me for saying these things, but understand that I am not advocating violating any customs here, only giving my observations on what kind of women exhibit what kind of behaviors. As they say, often the little things that people do or try to do says a lot about them. That's what this is about.

Of course, this is only a general guideline based on my experiences, and shouldn't be used as a basis to judge a whole person on. It is just one thing to take into consideration along with everything else a person does, in forming your opinion of that person.

Finally, believe it or not, there are a small percentage of Russian women who insist on paying their own way or even paying for your meal. I've had this happen a few times before, but on the internet, you will never seem to read about it. It seems that no one acknowledges the existence of these kind of Russian women, except me. lol I don't know why though. Common sense should tell you that in every society, there are always SOME people who don't believe in following every custom to the T, and like to step outside their bounds or bend them. Some Russian women even admit to this.

2 indicators of whether an online relationship will work offline

Here are some tell-tale indicators, based on my experiences, that I've observed about whether an online correspondence with a Russian woman will work when you meet her. For those of you experienced in the below situations, let me know if your experiences concur.

1) If you have corresponded with a woman for at least a while through letters, photos, and phone calls, but she tells you later that she doesn't know if it will work out or not, or that you have to meet before she decides, or if she says something like "I can't say if I will love you or not without meeting you first", then usually it won't work out.

Chances are, when you meet, she will decide that she doesn't have feelings for you or that you are not the right person for her. I say this because usually if the woman will love her foreign male prospect, she will know so BEFORE meeting him and tell him so, without having to express doubt, ambivalence or second thoughts. In my case, the one relationship I had which began online and became serious later worked out this way. She knew she loved me long before we met during our correspondence.

That's the pattern I've seen with meetings from online relationships. The ones that work usually have the woman knowing beforehand that he was her man, and she was in love with him. Usually, their intuition is good enough to know this before having to meet to test the vibes. But if they have to resort to practical common sense and say that they aren't sure until they meet you, or are already having doubts, it's a bad sign for she is lacking the intuitive sense that she will have feelings for you. In such case, though they don't want to make a choice either way yet, the likelihood is that there won't be enough chemistry for romance, love, or attraction when you meet, if she has to be that overly practical about it.

2) If a Russian woman you come to visit puts you in a hotel or directs you to one, it's not a good sign if you've already been corresponding for a while. The reasons are because a) it's impersonal and makes you feel like you are on some kind of business trip, having to deal with hotel staff and security everyday, and b) it shows that she has little or no emotional investment in you and is too lazy to go through the trouble of arranging something better and more personable for you and her. Furthermore, it shows that you are low on her list of priorities and that you are just something that casually came up for her whom she will fit around her schedule, rather than someone important. And it indicates an attitude from her that, "It's his problem. Let him deal with it at his expense."

On the other hand, a Russian woman who really cares about you and values a serious relationship with you will either arrange a flat for you, a room in a flat, accommodations in her home, or some combination of the above. She will prefer getting a flat for both you and her to stay together, to allow real relations to develop in a more natural setting, if you are truly valuable to her. Otherwise, going out with you and then dropping you off at your hotel is impersonable and distant, showing that her intentions aren't so serious.

Those are things to consider.

Scientific courting strategies

If you're into science, evolutionary psychology or biology, you might want to consider what these researchers in those fields have to say about the effective mating strategies for males which have been consistent throughout time and across the species on this planet. Here they are below. They include strategies for attracting short-term and long-term mates, as well as do's and don't, and links to the site of these findings.

http://www.geocities.com/protopop_1999/evde.html

What are some techniques for attracting a female short-term mate?

1. Immediate resource display
2. Denigrate rival's resources
3. Wearing costly clothing
4. Displaying commitment (persistence, kindness, nurturance toward children (????), fidelity, love)-though not as effective as when used to attract long-term mates
5. Displaying physical prowess
6. Displaying bravado and self-confidence
7. Sneak or satellite strategy-pretending to not be interested or dominant, and then switching when the opportunity arises

What are some techniques for attracting a female long-term mate?

1. Displaying potential for acquiring resources (ambition)
 2. Denigrating rival's ambition
 3. Wearing costly clothing
 4. Displaying commitment (persistence, kindness, nurturance toward children, fidelity, love)
 5. Denigrating a rival's fidelity
-

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Troy/1813/faq_tre.htm

What is the main error committed by men while courting women?

Detailed recommendations are given in the Treatise itself, here - just briefly:

- One should not neglect his self-dignity out of desire to serve and to please. Self-humiliation is absolutely unacceptable! As well as any action lowering one's visual self-esteem.
- One should not be afraid of a woman! Perceiving a woman as a rigorous boss is almost a warranty of failure.
- One should not show hunger for female attention. The most attractive men are the "satisfied" ones - "to him who has much, there will be given more, from him who has nothing - the least will be taken." It's not desirable to express this satisfaction verbally (especially - to lie about the subject - discovery of such a lie would be a disaster!), it should be expressed indirectly in gestures, intonations and actions. But one should distinguish between "satisfaction" and "lack of appetite" - "appetite" should be present.
- Gifts should seem as getting rid of surplus, but not as giving away one's last property. Self-sacrifice won't be appreciated, on the contrary - it will be a minus.

How to charm Russian women

Here is a simple technique I have for trying to seduce Russian women. While on a date, when you sense that she is interested in you, slowly reach for her hand and caress it, rubbing it gently and tenderly. If she doesn't let you, then just try again later when you think it might be a good moment, or when more chemistry develops.

As you rub her hand, start by sweet talking her. Then, at some point, lean in to kiss her cheek. If she doesn't let you, just tell her that you want to tell her a secret and she will put her ear close to you (virtually ALL Russians are very quick in leaning their ear close to you if you want to tell them something, I don't know why). When she does, give her a kiss on the cheek instead, as the "secret" you wanted to tell her. (Remember that in Russia, it is far more acceptable and romantic to be persistent than in the states, in fact, many women there find persistence a turn on, rather than creepy. This was told to me by others as well.)

Usually her first reaction to that kiss will be to giggle and blush. Then pull back for a while, make a humorous and slightly cocky comment, and then do it again, but this time, deliver several quick tender kisses in a row on her cheek. At this point, if you can sense that she is getting aroused, then plant your next kisses more toward the direction of her mouth than before. Keep doing that until you get to her mouth. If she is aroused, she will kiss you on the lips. From that point on, if you're a good kisser, she may begin French kissing you too. Pull away occasionally, to make her want you more.

If you can get to this point, then your chances of getting laid have been upped tremendously. Even if you are ugly, this technique should still work sometimes.

Before or after doing this, if you can, try to buy her some alcoholic drinks or take her on a roller coaster ride to stimulate her adrenaline; that increases your chances as well. While I don't usually try to use alcohol as a seduction method, many Western men do and tell me that it's the best strategy.

Also, there is supposed to be this technique called "mirroring", written about in a best selling book for women to seduce men, but should work either way. Simply put, you try your best to mirror the other person's body movements and posture, to create a sort of "bond" between you two. You might want to try that as well.

Hope you find this helpful.

Analysis of the infamous 3-5 date sex rule

Although I try to keep this article rated G, I feel I should address an issue regarding physical affection and intimacy. Now, we all know that each woman has her own style and timing (based on her preferences, comfort level, experiences, values, maturity, etc.) regarding expressing physical intimacy to a man she is involved with. However, there are some guys out there who have been to Russia, who frequently advise on the internet some time/action rules. One of these infamous rules is called "The Five Date Sex Rule". It states that "If a Russian woman you're dating doesn't have sex with you within five dates, then there is a greater than 50 percent chance that she's not interested, so you should dump her and move on." Even a friend and advisor of mine frequently advocates this rule. And some even have a "Three Date Sex Rule" that they follow. It's a big guy thing, especially among the American online male population, as no mature adult I know in real life advocates such a thing.

I should note first though, that those who advocate this are NOT suggesting that one should pressure a woman for sex, and if she doesn't "put out" within five dates, to dump her. Rather, the rationale behind this is that if there is some real romantic interest going on, then sex should naturally happen in a mutual manner within five dates. The aim of this rule is to help the guy use his time in the most efficient manner possible, because since the average guy only has a few weeks off from work to go to Russia, he can't afford to waste precious time on someone if it's going nowhere. Therefore, the architects behind this rule intend for it to help weed out the field to find the best single match for the seeker in a time-efficient manner

However, to tell you the truth, this rule is not only inaccurate in its assumptions about human relations and female nature, but potentially harmful as well. Consider these four things.

First of all, what these male advocates don't understand is that the female reproductive instinct is quite different from the male. Genetically, men are programmed (perhaps by evolution) to copulate with the most amount of women the soonest as possible. Evolutionary psychologists who specialize in primal mating have long established this. Now, of course, some men are in control of their natural evolutionary instincts, while others are controlled by their instincts. However, that is not how the female reproductive instinct works. Their instinct is to attract the most admirers possible in order to pick the best one out of them. And as we all know, women also need to feel emotionally and mentally bonded and connected with a man first before having sex. That's why women don't tend to be eager to have sex outside of a relationship. It's part of their fundamental nature. As a result, women are NOT as eager as men are to have sex as soon as possible. It's not in their genetic programming to do so. There are individual differences of course, but that's the fundamental tendency here. But these "5 date sex rule" advocates ignore that, as well as all the other seduction gurus on the internet. Instead, they assume that the female reproductive instinct is the same as the male, and it's obviously not.

Second, no one I know outside of the internet advocates that rule in the slightest. In fact, all my close female friends, upon hearing about this rule, become appalled and exclaim "Winston, where do you get such garbage?!" When I reply that it is circulated on the internet, they shake their heads and feel sorry for anyone who follows such rules which are both immature and shallow, and for the wives/girlfriends of such men who believe in the rule too.

Third, no woman, even the most blunt and truthful, would ever advocate such a rule. In fact, they see it as the most laughable and preposterous thing they've ever heard, and they aren't saying that just to save face either, as some ignorant males will claim in order to rationalize contrary opinions away and protect their rule. Second, such a rule can be potentially harmful, because regardless of what its proponents intended, it can lead many guys to attempt to satisfy this criteria by pressuring their date to have sex within five dates. This can not only jeopardize the

relationship, but even if sex happens within five dates, it says nothing about the long term status of the relationship, since many couples break up or dumped each other soon after sex.

Fourth, it is quite presumptuous to assume that if sex doesn't happen within five dates, that there is a greater than 50 percent chance that she's not interested in you. That is jumping the gun big time. There is simply no basis for that. Time/action rules such as this may help confirm someone's feelings for you, but they don't "rule out" anything. (See Elena's analysis below) And as mentioned above (and below as well), the best indicators of a woman's interest in you is her body language, vibes, and pheromones that she puts out. And like I mentioned in a previous section, most Russian women who are interested in you will take your arm or hand within three dates.

(It should be noted though, that in general older women in their 30's and 40's tend to be willing to have sex much sooner in a relationship than younger women in their teens and 20's, because they are more experienced and more comfortable with their sexuality, whereas younger women with less experience tend to be more cautious and hesitant about sex.)

Elena, author of www.womenrussia.com, put it best in her analysis of this rule in an email to me which she allowed to be posted. As a Russian woman herself and owner of her own introduction agency, she is a credible authority with plenty of experience regarding American men/Russian women relationships. Therefore, she is very qualified to comment on this as well. Her analysis alone demonstrates this. Here is what she said.

"Winston,

I will answer your questions and yes, you can post my answers, with the link to my site.

Winston:

>>The owner of the list and some of the men said that when searching for a wife in Russia and dating a RW, you should follow a rule called "The 5 Date Sex Rule" which says that if you don't have sex within 5 dates, that she probably isn't interested in you, and you should not continue wasting your precious time. They claim the rule works and separates the disinterested from the real potential wives. The theory is that if there is enough real chemistry between you two, then sex should naturally happen within five dates.

However, I have asked some RW about this and most of them said that it was a horrible idea and that they would not have sex with someone even if they were madly in love with him, in only 5 dates.

What is your opinion on this?<<

Sex on a first or second date with a Russian woman will usually only constitute she is stupid or was very drunk, or that the man was very insistent, up to physical pressure. Sex on the first or second date will usually be perceived as inappropriate by the woman, and she will feel very uncomfortable about it, so sex early in relationship may be detrimental for the future of your relationship.

How soon sex will happen when dating a Russian woman, depends mostly on the insistency and experience of the man. If a man is not very experienced and insistent, sex may not happen even after 10 or 20 dates. From the other hand, if the man is insistent, a Russian woman may give in without being really interested in him, and pressurizing a woman about sex can have a negative impact on the relationship, since Russian women are used to Russian men who are only interested in sex without commitment, and may decide you are the same type.

An inexperienced woman will never have sex with a man within 5 dates. "The 5 date sex rule" may eliminate a large pool of really interested decent women but accept disinterested women with vast experience that "do not consider sex as a good enough reason to exchange names" (Russian joke). I have heard from men who were surprised when their yesterday's sexual partners did not want to know them today.

So sex on its own is NOT a definite indication of how attracted the woman is to you.

The real indication is her body language. If she unconsciously reciprocates your body language (moves forward when you move towards her, smiles back when you smile at her, takes you "under the arm" when you walk together (crossing your and her elbows), sits close to you in public places, is relaxed and seems to be at ease even when you make awful mistakes, and always tries to help you - then she is attracted to you. If she, vice versa, moves back when you move forward, crosses her legs and arms when you move closer to her, looks away when you look at her, tries not to sit close to you in public places, is irritated with minor things and seems to be unhappy or indifferent, and does not help you out even when you really need it - then she is not attracted to you.

With those clear body language and personality disposition indications, I do not think one needs "The 5 date sex rule" to detect if a woman is physically attracted to him or not. Again, with Russian women that are used to comply with dominant men, sex may not indicate a strong physical attraction but rather her compliance with an unspoken Russian rule that if a woman agreed on a date with the man, she should pay him back for what he did for her (a dinner, a movie, etc), or she will be considered as a teaser (if she did not like the guy,

she should not go out with him at all). In this case, if a man insists on sex, she may comply only because of this cultural paradigm. A woman with gentle disposition may comply with the man's request for sex only because of that, while she only goes out with this particular man because he is a guest and a guest should be cared for and should not be left to his mercy, even if she is not interested in him at all. So she cannot simply send him to hell and has to go out with him, and once she goes out with him, she feels obliged to comply if he insists on sex.

Since you have limited time for a meeting, and women ARE sexually curious about you (many women suspect there may be something wrong with a man if he has never been married after the age of 30, or if he lived alone for many years without a girlfriend), a woman will usually try to arrange a possibility for a romantic encounter before you leave, but it may happen only 1 or 2 days before your departure.

So I would forfeit this "The 5 date sex rule" and rather learn body language; to advance your knowledge, read any book on the subject, there are dozens available on Amazon.

>>>Also, on a second issue, the owner of the list also claims that if a RW you're dating doesn't introduce you to her family and friends after a few dates, then it is a red flag or bad sign. I don't understand the logic of this, since I feel that women will introduce you to their family or friends when they

feel ready or when they feel that there is something serious. Why should a woman decide whether she is serious about you or not after just a few dates?

What is your opinion on this? <<

This is closer to home. Introducing you to her family does constitute woman's serious intentions, unless it were you who insisted on seeing them. Introducing to friends is an indication, too, but not as strong and explicit, since many women do not disclose their search for a foreign partner to their friends, except the closest ones. The reasons for that are many: from feeling inadequate because she failed to find a partner in "normal" way, to jealousy and possible fear that a friend may "steal" the man. Also I have heard about women who were fired from their jobs or declined promotions on the base that she would anyway leave soon, since she is looking for a partner abroad, so she is not going to work hard for the company. Since it is only about 4-5% of women that seek partners abroad that succeed in their search, it is understandable most women conceal their search for a foreign partner from their friends. Personally, I only told my friends that I was leaving when I had the visa in my passport. Until then, only 2 of my closest friends and my mother were aware of my search.

The faster a woman introduces you to her family, the more serious she is about you. If she does not offer to introduce you to her family that lives in the same city, and you has left the city without being introduced to her family, this is a very strong indication she is not seriously interested in you, or has something to hide (for example, has a stable lover, known to her parents). Unless she is ashamed of her parents (can happen too), this is not a good sign.

Since you have limited time for a meeting, a woman will usually want to introduce you at least to her parents (or to the parent she is closer to, if parents are divorced), before you leave.

Anyway, first of all, look for the body language to detect the woman's interest; this is the most powerful and revealing indication. In a case if a woman tries to "close" herself to you (constantly crosses her arms and legs, when you are together) and is irritated with minor things, this is the sure indication she is NOT genuinely attracted to you, even if you had sex and she introduced you to her family and friends.

Sincerely
Elena Petrova
RUSSIAN BRIDES CYBER GUIDE
<http://www.womenrussia.com>

W: Then in my follow up email, I asked her this:

<<By the way, I understand your points, but the premise of the 5 date sex rule is that IF a woman REALLY likes you as a boyfriend or husband, then she will not mind having sex within 5 dates. What do you think of this premise?>>

Her reply was this:

It again depends on THE woman.
And a man will have to put some pressure on her to have sex, she herself will not jump on him, unless she is very drunk.

This pressure may be not well taken by a less experienced girl.

She seeks a husband, not a sexual endeavor. If you leave the town within 5 days, then 5-day rule will be valid. If you leave in 2 weeks, you cannot hope she will be happy to have sex within 5 days.

Also, depends on how good you already knew each other before you met (you probably already had virtual or phone sex, then the 5-day rule may be valid) and how well you can communicate in each other's language, and how much time you are spending together. If you can freely communicate, and you meet at a Caribbean holiday resort, sex will happen faster than where you can hardly communicate and meet each other once a day for a dinner at her home town.

Again, it is about quality. I believe such “rules” as the quoted 5-dates-sex-rule are dangerous. Men should not feel under pressure to get sex within 5 dates; they can easily spoil everything, and not every man can request sex in an acceptable for women manner. Men are in much better of just being themselves, and allowing things to develop naturally. If a girl shows the right body language, then the man will know when it is the right time for sex, when the situation arises. If there is no right body language, then he should not even bother with sex requests, this will anyway end up in vain.

Sincerely
Elena Petrova
RUSSIAN BRIDES CYBER GUIDE
<http://www.womenrussia.com>

Bringing your Russian woman to your country

Last but not least, if things get serious between you and your Russian woman, and she intends to marry you and go with you to your country, here is what you need to do.

Go to your country's Embassy in Russia, which is probably located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. If you are an American, here are the addresses for the American Embassies there.

US Embassy in St. Petersburg, Russia
Furstadtskaya ul., 15
St. Petersburg 191028
Russia
Tel. 7 (812) 275-1701
website: <http://www.stpetersburg-usconsulate.ru/index.htm>

US Embassy in Moscow, Russia
19/23 Novinskiy Bulvar
Moscow 123242
Russia
consulmo@state.gov
(095) 728-5577
website: <http://www.usembassy.ru/>

Otherwise, you can use the internet to find the address of your country's Embassy in Russia. Just go to www.google.com and type in the search box “(your country) Embassy in Russia”.

At your Embassy, talk to someone in charge of immigration or obtaining visas to your country. He/she will instruct you in the basic steps required in obtaining a fiancée visa for your Russian woman, which if you are an American, consist of the following.

- 1) You have to first return to the states and apply at your state's INS department for your fiancée's visa. There are documents to fill out about you and her. For information about applying for a visa for your fiancée through the INS, check out their website: <http://uscis.gov/graphics/faqs/gen.htm#marriage>
- 2) After filing, there will be a waiting period where your background will be checked, which also doubles as a "cooling off" period to make sure that you made the right decision and if any second thoughts creep up. Your income level will also be evaluated, which must meet at least the federal minimum guidelines of being at least at poverty level. This period can last anywhere between a few months to 8 or 9 months, depending on your state. From what I've heard though, the average waiting period during this time is 6 to 8 months.
- 3) If all this goes through ok, a packet will be sent to your fiancée from the US Embassy in Russia. It will contain documents and instructions for her. She will need to attend an interview at the Embassy, to determine her intentions and suitability for going to the states. During this time, many men prefer to fly over to join their fiancée and attend this interview with her.
- 4) If she passes the interview stage, she will be issued a fiancée visa shortly after, and will be free to come to the states. Once she arrives, you have 3 months to officially get married before the fiancée visa expires, otherwise she has to leave the country. These 3 months are typically used as a trial period to see if she can adjust to life with you there.
- 5) After the marriage, she will have to wait a year or two to get her green card, which allows her to stay in the states.

* Note: The above is what I was told by the American Embassy in Moscow when I was engaged to my ex-fiancée. I was given an information packet about it as well, which I studied thoroughly. If you are dealing with the Embassy of another country though, the rules and conditions may be different.

** Note: Also, there are supposed to be ways, I heard, of shortening this process. For example, some say that getting married in Russia first before applying for the fiancée visa shortens the process. But the US Embassy in Moscow told me that was not the case, at least not anymore. Also, if you live in Russia at least 6 months, there is also a residential status that you can apply for which would create a loophole that would allow you to bring a fiancée to the US in a few weeks. And I have also heard of a way where you both get married outside your countries, such as in Cyprus, it also vastly shortens the INS process for your fiancée as well. And finally, there are lawyers out there, especially ones that are contracted by marriage agencies, that claim to be able to speed up the process for a fee, though you should be very careful dealing with these people. I can't really give you a thumbs up or down on trying these methods, especially since the immigration and visa rules are constantly being revised. But they are worth considering and investigating. I would suggest contacting your country's Embassy in Russia by phone or email to get more details, or your own country's INS department.

Once she gets the green card, the point comes that separates the scammer from the woman who truly loves you, because now she will no longer need you to stay in your country. And if she's a scammer, she'll make her move to leave you. So you better make sure you've picked the right person. Otherwise, here are the consequences.

Understand that if you make a mistake, you can't just pick up and pretend it all never happened, and start over again. It's not that simple. You have more to lose than that. When applying to bring your fiancée to the US, you have to sign documents that obligate you to pay the government back for any welfare or unemployment benefits that your Russian woman collects, EVEN if she isn't married to you any longer! Therefore, even if you two are separated, you still have to support her in a sense. In addition, there is a devious diabolical way she can divorce you before the one or two year period to get the green card is up. If she accuses you of physical abuse, and you're convicted, the court will let her divorce you before the green card waiting period is up, and she can still remain in

the country. Few women have the gall to falsely accuse a man like that, but I've heard of it happening before, so keep that in mind.

There are many guides and books that help you and your Russian woman adjust to living together in America, and deal with the cultural differences between you two, as well as her psychological adjustment. You can find some of them on www.womenrussia.com. The usual phases she goes through are like this.

- a) At first, she goes through a period of wonder, intrigue and excitement at living in a new country.
- b) Then she starts getting homesick and longs for the familiarity of her home country. This can lead to depression and withdrawal symptoms too. It is at this phase that some Russian women decide they can't handle it anymore and wish to return home, which may happen.
- c) Finally, if she gets through that phase, with your help and her inner willpower, then she adjusts to her new life, learns to make the best of it and finds a place for herself.

Other options and loopholes

Besides the fiancée visa, there are other ways that a Russian woman can legally come to the USA. They are through a tourist visa, work visa, or student visa. The tourist visa is impractical as it is extremely difficult for a Russian woman to get. She would have to prove to the US Embassy in her country that she has significant financial assets in Russia that would make it unlikely that she would stay illegally. Most Russian women would not, therefore, be able to pass this qualification. The work visa option is possible, but difficult since she would have to find a company in America willing to sponsor her for that kind of visa. However, I've been told that if you own a business yourself, you can sponsor her with a work visa as long as you pay her a salary. The student visa is the least difficult of these three other options. But she would have to apply through a university or study program and register for courses there, which can be very expensive for her. Then, as long as she's enrolled in courses, she is allowed to stay in the US. However, there may be age restrictions on some of these study programs.

There are also some work abroad programs that Russian girls (some whom I know or have met) often use to come to the USA for a while. One that is frequently used by them is called CC USA (www.ccusa.com). These types of programs have their own selection criteria to qualify, such as being able to speak competent English, and usually cost around a thousand dollars which includes roundtrip airfare, lodging, and meals.

Now, if your Russian girlfriend comes to your country by one of these other methods, and you marry her while she's in the states, then that's a whole other ball game, and you should contact your state INS department for instructions on how to apply for a permanent stay visa for her.

Recently, I've learned of some loopholes you can use in the immigration process. One is by living in Russia for 6 months, and qualifying for residential status which would allow you to bring a fiancée over to your country in a few weeks. Another is to get married in Cyprus and use the immigration laws there to navigate around the conventional immigration process. I do not fully understand the details of these methods yet, but I have received information by email on them, so I will paste them below in case you want to follow up on these routes.

From: "ACS, STPETERSBURG" <acsstpete@state.gov>
To: "'wwu777us@yahoo.com'" <wwu777us@yahoo.com>
Subject: RE: Question about residential status in Russia
Date: Mon, 10 Nov 2003 09:53:42 +0300

Plain Text Attachment [Download File | Save to my Yahoo! Briefcase]

Dear Mr. Winston,

American Citizens who reside in our Consular district (for at least six months) are welcome to file I-130 petition in our office. Please find

attached information on filing.

You are welcome to come over to take the packet of forms: Our walk in hours are 9:30 am -1:30 pm, M-Fr. We'll be closed tomorrow, Nov 11 for a holiday.

You are welcome to contact American Citizen Services Section by telephone at 7-812-331-2600, by fax at 7-812-331-2646 or by e-mail at acsstpete@state.gov

Sincerely,

Svetlana Kotkova
American Citizen Services Assistant
U.S. Consulate General
St. Petersburg, Russia

Attachment:

St. Petersburg, Russia

IMMIGRANT VISA PETITIONS

Please note that only American citizens residing (for at least six months) in St. Petersburg Consular district may file I-130 petitions at our office. Non-residents may file at the Immigration and Naturalization Services in the U.S.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Although the U.S. Consulate General in St. Petersburg does not issue immigrant visas (immigrant visa processing is done at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow), we do accept immigrant visa petitions (Petition for Alien Relative, or I-130). This petition is filed by you (the "petitioner") on behalf of your alien relative (the "beneficiary"), and is the very beginning of the process.

Please read the instructions carefully and then complete the I-130 and the two Biographic Information sheets (G-325A - white forms). You may contact the Consulate General for information about obtaining these forms. Once you have completed the forms and collected the appropriate documents (see list below) you may submit them to the American Citizen Services office in the Consular Section between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

You will need to submit the I-130 and the following original documents with a photocopy. Include translations for any of the following documents that are not in English:

- Biographic Information Forms (G-325A), one for U.S. citizen, one for each beneficiary
- Two photographs each for U.S. citizen and beneficiaries. Earrings may not be worn in photographs (See separate Instructions)
- U.S. citizen's passport with photocopy of data page
- Divorce decrees or other documents stating that previous marriages were legally terminated (if applicable) with photocopy
- International and domestic passport of beneficiary with photocopy of data page
- Birth certificate of beneficiary with photocopy
- Marriage certificate (if applicable) with photocopy
- \$130 fee

If you are filing a petition for your spouse's dependent children please request additional forms. Petitions will not be accepted without photocopies of the above documents. Do not notarize the photocopies.

After approval of your petition (normally the same day), the consular officer will return to you the originals of the above documents; you and the beneficiary will be given a set of instructions and applications known as "Packet Three and Packet Four" (a packet of forms about the medical exam, police certificate and affidavit of support). Our office will mail the petition to the Immigrant Visa Section at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. In approximately 4 weeks you and/or the beneficiary will need to contact the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to schedule a date for the visa interview at the Embassy. An immigrant visa is valid for six months after the date of issue.

Note: If you have further questions about the immigrant visa process or need to schedule an interview, please contact the Immigrant Visa Section of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow via e-mail at consulmo@state.gov or by telephone at (095) 258-2525. The address of the Embassy is: 121099 Moscow, 19/23 Novinskiy Bulvar, Immigrant Visa Section. Website: <http://www.usembassy.ru>

On the Cyprus method for getting a fiancée visa:

To all,

My Russian wife and I got a K-3 visa very quickly last summer by Direct Consular Filing (DCF) in Cyprus (the island just south of Turkey). We had waited a long time for a K-1 visa and finally could wait no longer. While you can DCF in other countries, including Romania, Austria, Belgium, etc., there are several advantages for doing it in Cyprus in particular if your wife or fiancée is Russian: there is virtually no waiting period to get married, the airfare from Moscow to Cyprus as well as the living costs while in Cyprus are inexpensive, and the process of getting a visa is relatively without complications in that country. Many people from the Middle east get married in Cyprus due to the lack of residency requirements - it is like the Las Vegas of that part of the world.

Here is general is how it works: You establish communications with the US Embassy in Nicosia , Cyprus by phone or e-mail (e-mail is by far the best way). You inform them of your plans and describe your schedule to them. You then fax or e-mail to the Embassy certain documents that allow them to begin the process. The Embassy personnel will then submit a request to the USA for a security clearance for your fiancée - this may only take about 2-3 weeks (it took 2 weeks for us). After they have your documents and the clearance has been approved, you may fly to Cyprus (actually I was with my fiancée in Moscow while waiting for her clearance to be approved). As soon as you get there, register in one of the town halls for a marriage license. You will pay more (about \$250) if you want to get married within 3 days. Actually we were told that we could get married the same day that we registered if we so desired. After you have been married you can go to the Cyprus Embassy. You will need to take many documents with you, including an affidavit or support, proof of the relationship, income tax records for 3 years, etc. and the marriage certificate, obviously. Obviously you will want to be sure that you have all of the required documents with you.

On the day that you go to the US Cyprus Embassy here is what will happen, if everything has been correctly scheduled and you have all of the required

papers. You will wait in line outside of the Embassy for a while. A man will eventually ask you if you have a scheduled appointment, and you will say yes. After being admitted to the Embassy you will wait your turn to present your documents. One of the clerks will review your file in your presence. If everything is OK you will be interviewed the same day. If the interview goes in your favor your wife will be given a I-130/K-3 visa the same day or the next day. You can then return to the USA immediately if that is your plan.

Here are a few web sites and contact information that will help:

1. INS site: www.uscis.gov: contains general information and immigration forms.
2. General information about K-3 visa: www.travel.state.gov/kvfaqs.html.
3. US Embassy in Cyprus (this is the most important site): www.americanembassy.org.cy. Study this site carefully. For specific information about getting married in Cyprus click on "American Citizen Services" and then on "Marriage in Cyprus".
4. For Cyprus national requirements for marriage go to www.cypruswed.com/rules_regulations.htm.
5. The most important contact for you will be a US Cyprus Embassy case officer by the name of Anna at the Embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus. She will lead you through the process. Get in touch with her from the USA as soon as you have a good idea when you would like to get married. She will tell you all of the documents that you need to send to her to start the process in motion. Her e-mail address is MyrianthopoulouAx@state.gov.

This concludes my summary of the process. I know what you all are going through and I know that it is not easy. However, I and my wife Anna found the personnel at the Cyprus embassy to be very helpful, friendly, and professional, unlike the INS employees I encountered in the USA. The interview will be a bit nerve-wracking, but they are just trying to see if you have a real relationship with your intended. Just keep your cool and reply honestly to all questions. If you are not sure of the answer, just say that you do not know. They are looking for over-all indications of your sincerity.

Anna and I stayed in the town of Larnaca in Cyprus which is right on the ocean and about 35 minutes by car south of Nicosia which is where the US Embassy is located. Nicosia is up in the mountains. I rented an inexpensive car at the Larnaca airport, which can be reached by a direct flight from Moscow. Many Russians go to Larnaca on vacation so Anna felt right at home. If you stay in Larnaca, be sure to walk along the beachfront drive - it is interesting and there are many restaurants. If I and Anna had to do it again, we would go to the same place.

Good luck to you all in the future. Please check everything carefully since some things may have changed since last summer. If you have any specific questions feel free to e-mail me again and I will try to help. I remember very well how I felt at this time last year.

Regards,

Wilcan2

Meeting and approaching women in Russia

First, let me say this. In general, meeting people in Russia is a whole different dimension than it is in the USA. In America, strangers are strangers and people don't like to meet you unless it's through an organization like work, school, clubs, common friends, church, etc. and even then, it's not always easy to get to know them or become a part of their social circle. In countries like Russia on the other hand, people have the attitude that they like to meet new people, especially foreigners, and are very direct about it. Differences arouse curiosity there. Almost no one is a stranger. You never feel like you don't exist. That's the attitude they have. You can meet people anywhere, on the street, standing in line, at a bus stop, etc. And this applies even if you're a shy person too, because the fact that people are open and welcoming to strangers, GIVES shy people a confidence they wouldn't normally have. The process is very mutual. You don't really have to "make" it happen. In the US though, people are defensive to strangers approaching them and so it's much harder since it feels inappropriate to try to meet people. Words can't really describe the kind of social vibe I'm talking about in Russia. You'd have to be melded in that kind of environment and stay for a while to know what I am talking about. Eventually, you feel like a different person yourself than the person you were back home. In fact, when I arrived in a new city in Russia, it would usually only take a few hours to already know some people, get some contact information, and have plans that night. Just doing the normal things will usually create natural opportunities that get you acquainted with people. When you see how easy it is, you will soon become less shy and more direct yourself. People in Russia are totally UN-cliqueish, which is so refreshing when you're new.

This applies to meeting beautiful women too. Western men who arrive in Russia are often amazed at how open Russian women are to meeting strangers. In North America, women tend to be very defensive and stuck up toward strangers. As a result, trying to meet them feels awkward, unnatural, and inappropriate. But not so in Russia. Russian women are more naturally curious, intellectual, and uninhibited than their western counterparts. There, meeting women comes easily and naturally, which is a delightful surprise to Western men who are accustomed to the opposite. It almost seems too good to be true, but it is, so many men think to themselves "My gosh. Where have I been?!"

In fact, here is the main difference between meeting women in Russia vs. America. In most parts of America, when you see attractive girls that you want to meet in a public place, it is a form of silent torture because you can't really do anything about it. If you go up and try to meet them, most of the time they will see that as inappropriate and see you as some kind of creep, resulting in a defensive posture and vibe. This of course, make guys become more shy and erodes their confidence toward attractive women. In Russia, on the other hand, it's not like that at all. More often than not, the attractive girls you see in public that you try to meet will often want to meet you too, even if they look like models. And when they give you their number or agree to get together later, they usually follow through (rather than giving you their number and then screening out your calls like many American girls do). And even if they aren't interested in meeting you, at least they don't make you feel like you are doing anything inappropriate, so you don't feel like you've lost anything or violated anything. And besides, there are enough girls there that want to meet you anyway, to keep you motivated and confident enough to keep trying all the time. Therefore, in Russia you don't feel the torture of seeing an attractive woman and not being able to do anything about it because you CAN do something about it which isn't inappropriate or unnatural! Now guys, which attitude would you prefer from attractive women?

The bottom line here is that women in Russia are almost always APPROACHABLE! And this applies whether they are interested in you or not, are single or not, etc. Either way, they are always approachable at least. It is not like the US where you feel like you're doing something wrong if you try to meet a girl you like but don't know.

Furthermore, holding a conversation with them is much easier and natural, because they are curious, easily amused, and can talk about almost anything. This is so refreshingly nice, because in America, typical young girls are VERY difficult to hold a conversation with because they are interested in few topics if any, have no curiosity, have short attention spans, and do not like to think much. The ease of meeting women in Russia gives even shy guys the confidence to approach them, which does not even feel inappropriate at all like it would in the states. Therefore, if you tend to be too shy to meet or approach women, don't worry because you won't feel that way in Russia, I can assure you. When you're there, it will seem so natural and easy to meet new women, that it's "part of the flow" of things. It may be hard for you to sit there and imagine yourself not being shy, but when you're actually there and melded into the dynamics of a different world and attitude, you will adapt and change to it.

Therefore, if you find yourself in a situation where things didn't work out with the woman you came to see or were introduced to, and you have some time on your hands, you may use this as an opportunity to try to meet new women. The beauty of Russia is that you can meet them ANYWHERE! You don't even have to be actively trying to meet them either. It happens when you're going somewhere or doing something on your own too. Therefore, you don't have to stick with bars and clubs to meet them (and we all know in bars and clubs most people you meet aren't quality people and don't even put forth their real self, which applies even to Russia too) or join social organizations or clubs. In fact, I would hesitate to use the word "club" in Russia because groups by nature are very inclusive, and not exclusive like in the states.

But if you're the clubbing or bar type and prefer to try to find some loose women there, remember that very few nice women hang out there. A lot of the women you'll meet there are prostitutes, gold diggers, and game players who say things they don't really mean. And of course, to shine at those places you have to dance well. Some guys have great experiences with the women in clubs and bars there, but I'm not one of them, so I can't personally vouch for it. It's best to ask the opinions of the Russian traveling men who are more the clubbing type. I did notice that in many Moscow clubs, a high proportion of the girls are "working girls". They will seem super friendly at first, but then they start talking cash for sex. If you're not interested, they will quickly lose interest. Typically, the working girls in Moscow try to get at least 100 dollars from you (contrary to what they ask outside of Moscow, which is 15-20 dollars), but I have heard that you can negotiate it down.

If you want to take the initiative and approach Russian women in public, here's all you have to do. First, try to find women who are not with other men who could be their boyfriends or husbands. There's no need to risk such awkwardness, and there are always plenty of women alone or with other girls. It is also better to meet them if they are sitting like in a park, bench, café, on a train or subway, etc. rather than if they are walking on their way somewhere because they may be in a rush (though that works too sometimes, and it doesn't hurt to try). Often, right when you walk toward them, they may notice you and give you a look of intrigue. If that happens, it is a welcome sign of social interaction. All you have to do is say hello, and their attention will be focused on you. If they don't notice you, then just try to sit next to them, say "Excuse me" or ask them a question about something. It doesn't matter what you say, because all you need to do is get the ball rolling and establish a social interaction. From there, just go with the flow of things. It's easier than you think. If you know any Russian conversational phrases, now is the time to use some of them. If not, then just say some simple words in English. If they understand English, then great. If not, just the attempt will be amusing to them, and they will start trying to speak English with you too if they can. It takes little conversation skill to keep this interaction going.

One of the first questions they will ask you is "Where are you from?" or "Akoodahteh?" (in Russian) After you answer, the next question usually is "What are you doing in Russia?" and if they ask that in Russian and you don't understand, you can just assume that's what they are asking you because they ALWAYS ask this question to foreigners next after asking where you're from! The answers they expect to hear are that you're here as a tourist, student, or on business. If you're here to look for a wife or meet a woman you've been corresponding with, it's best not to reveal that. It risks making you look desperate, or that you are unavailable and belong to the woman you came to see. Instead, just say you're a tourist, which is not lying because hey, it's at least partly true! You don't need to give them too much detail about yourself though. Just be a little playful, flirty, and mysterious. You will have to judge how much though, according to the flow of things. It is very easy to make Russian girls laugh and they tend to even laugh at corny jokes. You'll be surprised at how easy it is. And if you are talking to two or more girls, they will tend to look at each other when they laugh at things you say.

Sometimes, you may find that your novelty to them has dried down or that the interaction is getting stale. If that happens, just try to think of things to comment on, or ask them questions about themselves, etc. You can also ask them to go on a walk with you to see something interesting nearby or get a drink somewhere. As you do, you can comment on new things you see such as buildings, churches, rivers, market bazaars, stores, museums, etc. That helps keep the ball rolling. If they reciprocate, then keep it up. If not, then you can say a polite goodbye to them, but as you do, if you are at least slightly interested in her, ask for her phone number before parting. When the time comes where they have to get going, or you do, ask for their number if you are still interested in them. Even if you meet a Russian woman who is busy on her way somewhere and can only talk for a few minutes, they will still often give you their number if you ask, so you can arrange a meeting later.

To ask for their number, just say “Moznah pozvoni?” (May I call you?) if they can’t understand English. If you forget how to say that, just say “Telephone?” (it’s the same word in Russian). If they nod or show agreement, take out a pen/pencil and paper/address book and hand it to them. If you have a cell phone number, you can offer that to them too. If they have email, it’s best to get that too (the Russian word for email is the same). Some Russian women don’t have a phone number (or they don’t want you to have it). If that’s the case, try to at least get their email. If they have neither, and you “really” like them enough to go through the hassle of it, then you can ask for their mailing address so you can send them a postal letter. In most cases, they will give you their contact information. Russian women are very uninhibited about giving out their contact information (even their home address believe it or not). In Moscow and St. Petersburg though, it may be a bit more difficult, but outside those cities, it is super easy, believe me.

Most Russian women who give you their number, if you follow up on it, will be willing to meet you again. It is rare to get fake numbers there. It is best to call them at their home number, if they gave you one, so that the call is free to them. If they only have a mobile number, or if that’s the only way to reach them, remember that the minutes they pay for mobile service is very expensive to them, so try to keep the conversation short (they usually do anyway). If you have a mobile phone, it is best to use it to call their mobile phone because then the call will be free to them, and they won’t have the pressure of conserving their minutes (that’s the rate/coverage policy in Russia).

Now, occasionally, these women may lose interest in you after a while or you may find that their curiosity toward you was just a fleeting whim. If that happens, it’s ok, because you will meet so many women here that statistically, there will ALWAYS be some who maintain a genuine interest in you. So look at it with the attitude that you have nothing to lose, and lots of backups, which is true in fact. Getting rejection there isn’t as damaging to your ego, because there are always plenty of other beautiful friendly women you know there who will replace those that you lose. Therefore, such losses are quickly forgotten. And that’s the beauty of Russia.

As I mentioned above earlier, you don’t have to only meet women when they are sitting down somewhere. In fact, you often meet them even when you’re not even trying to meet them, like when you’re on your way somewhere or doing something on your own. Often, just standing in line, asking for directions, waiting at a bus stop, sitting in an internet café, etc. leads to meeting women. You don’t even have to try to make it happen. It just happens naturally as part of the flow of things. It’s that easy. Seriously. Sometimes, they will even come up to you to introduce themselves or practice their English. Russian girls can be aggressive about that and not shy at all. When these meetings happen (and they happen more often than you think) you can just follow the guidelines above or go with the flow of things. If you’re brave, you can even try experimenting with different techniques to see what happens (as long as you don’t get yourself in trouble). If you are a shy person who isn’t used to doing these kinds of things, you may find it a bit awkward at first, but it will soon become second nature as you see how easy and natural it is.

If you have a hard time believing how easy it all is, you can go to the link in the next section and look through my two online photo albums containing over 800 photos and video stills that show you how easy and natural it is to meet women in Russia, demonstrating my claims.

After meeting so many women, eventually you will start having regular relations with some of them. Some may only be interested in friendship with you, others may be open for more. If you start a dating relationship, keep in mind the guidelines mentioned in this article. You may think that with meeting many women so easily, that getting

more introductions from a marriage agency will be unnecessary. However, you might find that the women you meet in public may not be as serious about you because to tell you the truth, most of them are not willing to leave their country (contrary to what Americans think) and have never even considered having a foreign boyfriend before. So it is always logical to utilize getting introductions from a local marriage agency too. During your relations with Russian women, you will find that they are not so hung up about holding hands or taking your arm. In fact, as I mentioned above, with your fear of rejection subdued, you may even find yourself more at ease than usual in initiating physical affections or moving in for a kiss!

But remember to be careful though, for there are occasionally some who will try to use you or ask you to buy things for them. Don't waste your time with that kind, for there are many other women around that you can focus on who won't do those kinds of things.

Simple effective pick up lines and phrases in Russian

Note: The following Russian phrases are NOT grammatically correct. This is not intended to be a course in proper Russian grammar, but a crash course simple pickup lines and phrases that I used during my trips that can be learned with the most minimal effort. We are not aiming for correctness, only to be understood. So I share them with those interested. The reader is urged to use whichever combination of them that fits their personality and style. Common responses from Russian women are also included.

The basic pickup line I use when approaching Russian women I'm attracted to:

"Devushka, Privet. Ti ochen kraseevaya. Moznah vstretimsya?" - translated as "Miss, Hi. I think you're very beautiful. Can we meet?"

You'd be surprised at how well this works, often enough to keep using it. Though in the US, such a line would be deemed that of a low life creep, it is actually normal and to the point in Russia, which fits the communication style there. In fact, many Russian women are flattered and amused by such an opening; sometimes it might just make some sweet young Russian damsel's day :)

Another variation of it is by substituting "kraseevaya"(beautiful) with "sympatichnaya"(cute) which is similar in meaning but sounds better to some. Still other substitutions are:

"milaya" - sweet, endearing, cute

"privlikatynaya" - attractive

"prekrasniya" - wonderful

"horoshinkiy" - pretty

Other lines you can add later, if you wish, are:

"Ya Americaniz" - "I am American"

"Ya iz Amerika" - "I'm from America"

"Kak dila?" - "How are you?"

"Dobre utra" - "Good morning"

"Dobre den" - "Good afternoon"

"Dobre viechir" - "Good evening"

"Shto dalish" - "What are you doing?"

The most usual responses Russian women will give to the basic pickup line above (all which I've heard so many times) are:

"Moznah" - "We can (meet)", usually said with a nod

"Harasho" - "Ok" or "yes"

"Da" - "Yes"

"Da vai" - "Let's do it"

"Niet" - "No"

"Ni-eh Ni-eh Ni-eh Ni-eh", pronounced like "knee-eh knee-eh knee-eh knee-eh" - a cute way that some girls like to say "no".

"Minya yest maladochalavek" - "I have a boyfriend"

"Minya yest moosh" - "I have a husband"

"Ya zamuscham" - "I'm married"

"Ya zanitum" - "I'm busy"

"Za chem?" - "What for?"

"Da vai telephone" - "Let's exchange phone numbers" (probably cause she's too busy to chat now)

To ask for or arrange a date, you can say these phrases:

"Moznah svidanya?" - "Let's make a date/appointment?"

"Kagdah svidanya?" - "When will we have a date/appointment?"

"Kagdah vstretumsen?" - "When shall we meet?"

"Katori chas?" - "What time?". You can add "svidanya" or "vstretumsen" with it.

"Zafra, ti shto dalish?" - "What are you doing tomorrow?"

"Gdeh vstretumsen?" - "Where shall we meet?" (Note: It's best to meet at an easy to find landmark, metro station, shop, or at the place you first met at)

To close a conversation, it's common to say "Da vai. Poka." - "Let's do it. See you later."

During a date or meeting, here is how you can suggest some activities:

"Da vai gulaya?" - Let's go for a walk?

"Da vai ____?" or "Payidiom ____?" - Let's go to a ____?

Put in the blanks:

"kafe" - cafe

"restauran" - restaurant

"park" - park

"muzium" - museum

"teatre" - theatre

"kino" - movie theater

"concert" - concert

"metro" - subway

"vokzahl" - station (train or bus)

"poist vokzahl" - train station

"aftobus vokzahl" - bus station

"da moi" - home

"moi dome" - my home

In the beginning, some questions they usually ask you are:

Where are you from? - Atk'oodah ty?

What are you doing in this country? - Shto ty 'delayesh v 'etoy stra'ne?

Why are you here? - Pache'mu ty zdes?

What do you do for work? - Kem ty ra'botaesh?

Are you a tourist, or are you here for work? - Ty turist 'ili zdes ra'botaesh?

Who do you work with? - S kem ty ra'botaesh?

Photos and Videos of me dating Russian women (for your inspiration)

For your inspiration, here are photos and videos below of how “free-flowing” my dating life was in Russia.

<http://www.happierabroad.com/ebook/Collage.htm>

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Photojournals.htm>

You can read rave responses to it from other viewers on this page www.happierabroad.com/ebook/Page86.htm. It'll inspire you to view them I'm sure ☺

I also have a video series you can watch of me interacting with Russian people and meeting girls so you can get an idea of what they are like and see how approachable, friendly and open they are. Here is the series embedded on this page:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/film.php>

And I have a dating abroad slideshow of girls in Russia I met and dated as well:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/slideshows>

You can see my other videos here:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Videos.htm>

If you like the videos, you can purchase a DVD copy of all 38 hours of footage I shot in Russia. Here is the price list and ordering info: http://www.happierabroad.com/Video_List.htm.

Calling Russia from abroad

If you are corresponding with Russian women or already involved with one, chances are you make regular phone calls to Russia or Ukraine. If so, here is one of the cheapest way to do it. You can use Skype or buy prepaid internet calling cards online that give you much lower rates than your long distance phone provider. There are many of them online, but the cheapest ones I've found so far are from Masterbell for only a few cents per minute.

I happen to have an affiliate account with them, so I will provide you the link to it of course.

<http://happierabroad.pushline.com>

At the page above, everything is self-explanatory. Select the countries you're calling to and from to get the list of rates and calling cards available. There are also great rates to Europe and Asia, as well as domestic US rates of one cent per minute nationwide. Anyone should be able to use the site with no problem, but if you do, feel free to email me with any questions at WWu777us@yahoo.com.

Also, if you're calling someone in Russia or another country, and aren't sure of the current time there, you can go to this site here which will have current up-to-date time zones for the major cities of the world.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>

Most of Western Russia is under the Moscow Time Zone. From there, you can calculate the difference between your time zone and theirs. Or you can check this chart to see if your city is listed.

http://www.gotorussia.com/travelers_essentials_time_zones.htm

The pros and cons of Russian women

In my view, here are the pros and cons of Russian women based the strong patterns I've experienced and observed. Not all of them have both of the pros and cons below of course. Some have more of the pros and others have more of the cons, to varying degrees. But the more you know and get involved with Russian women, the more these patterns below become prevalent and repeat consistently.

Pros:

- They are among the most beautiful women in the world. They look very feminine, skinny, have top-notch taste in clothes, and know how to look good. Unlike American women, they know how to maximize their looks with skirts and high heels. Modern American women, on the other hand, tend to dislike wearing skirts nowadays, unless they are city girls.
- Not only are they beautiful, but very approachable, sociable, communicative, and inclusive to strangers as well. They are very comfortable with talking to strangers, and they really enjoy meeting new people, especially foreigners. It is so easy to get dates in Russia and make friends, that one can never really be lonely. Russians in general are very inclusive of strangers, and very likely to invite them somewhere or spend time with them. In fact, it is hard to find time to be alone in Russia, as privacy is not as respected as in the West.
- They have a modest sweet disposition that makes you more comfortable around them, and makes them more approachable. It's a pleasant, refreshing difference from the self-righteous "I don't need you" attitude of modern Western women.
- Russian women tend to be very curious by nature, so curious in fact that they will even go out with guys they aren't really interested in, just out of curiosity (though not usually more than once or twice, especially if the guy they aren't interested in starts trying to get intimate).
- They are very intelligent and educated, have a good knowledge of history (more so than Western women for sure), and usually speak more than one language. Usually German is their second language, which many speak even better than English for some reason. (No one really knows why though, and it's strange that German, a country that killed millions of Russians, would be so popular in Russia.)
- They enjoy compliments, are easy to flatter, and are impressed when a guy is persistent in his love for them.

Cons:

- They tend to be more greedy than women of the rest of the world, in several ways:
 - a) They are not ashamed to ask a man for presents or money. (Not all Russian women do this, but more Russian women have asked me for things, than ever in my whole life anywhere else. Guaranteed. There is no arguing or rationalizing it away.)
 - b) Unlike American or Asian women, they will gladly take presents (even if they are expensive) from a man they aren't interested in and don't really like. Though American women are not as approachable to strangers and are more paranoid of them, they won't usually accept gifts from a man they aren't interested in, even if they want the gift. That's because Russian women LOVE to take, and have no shame in it, but in fact are proud of it.
 - c) They don't see a balance between taking and giving. And they strongly prefer taking over giving. Comparatively speaking, American women try to keep a 50/50 balance between taking and giving, with their partner, and Asian women prefer to give more than take. But Russian women are the opposite, for they strongly prefer taking more than giving. I have hundreds of examples to prove this, even from simple everyday events in Russia, and people I know who have lived in Moscow for 9 years or more agree with this too.
 - d) They have a clear hypocrisy and double standard in this area as well. Russian women are very economical and frugal with THEIR own money, but if you are a foreign man, you are NOT allowed to be economical or frugal with YOUR money around them. If you are, they will call you "greedy" and look at you with this hypnotic gaze that

tries to induce guilt and shame in you. It's kind of creepy, but I've had that hypnotic shame-inducing gaze directed at me many times, and it is powerful indeed. But afterwards, I am repulsed by it for it is very manipulating in nature.

In short, they don't like to spend their own money, but they LOVE spending other people's money. This is very sad but true. I wish it wasn't true though.

But nevertheless, it is a CLEAR double standard. If you confront them about this, though will not try to logically defend it, but instead become angry and defensive, claiming that as women, they have a "right" to be economical, ungenerous and expect men to be generous to them. They see it within their right to have a "taker mentality" which they see no shame in.

In fact, they are infamous for constantly putting you in situations that require you to spend money. And sadly, many Russian women judge a man by how freely he spends and how generous he is, rather than by his personality or character.

In Russia, a man can be economical, (and they have to, as not everyone is super rich) as long as he doesn't APPEAR to be economical. Deep down, they don't wish to spend all their money either, but they can't let the women see that. Russian men have tactful ways of getting around this. They may hide their money and show an empty wallet, or look for excuses not to go to places where they will have to spend a lot of money.

- They have an unusual morbid desire to receive presents. It's kind of shallow I know, but somehow they get off on it like an acid trip or drug. In fact, when I'm at a store or mall with a Russian girl, I can sense that her thoughts are "Why doesn't he offer to buy me a present? When will he do so? Why doesn't he? He should!" which makes me feel awkward and uncomfortable.

The problem though, even if you're a nice man, is that buying a Russian woman a present isn't going to satisfy her desire for them. Instead, it will only fuel her desire for them more, as she will ask and expect more and more without end. That's how desire works in human nature. Getting your desire doesn't end them, but in fact makes them grow even more. (e.g. if you won a million dollars right now, you'd be happy for a while, but it wouldn't be long before you thought "wouldn't it be nice to have ten million dollars, I could do so much more with ten million!") Therefore, nothing good comes out of it, unless you like being an eternal sugar daddy.

- Though they are feminine, they are not romantic and don't believe in the concept or romance, deeming it to be of a child's fantasy, and unrealistic. They don't even like romantic or tender men, but instead prefer big strong men with money, strength, and power. Rather than do something romantic on a date, they prefer to do something that involves spending money (not theirs of course, but the man's). Deep down, they are cold, hard, strong willed, untrusting, cynical and pessimistic (though they are playful and fun-loving as well). And not to cross the line, but during sex they have a reputation for being robotic and unfeeling (as depicted in the movie "The Birthday Girl" with Nicole Kidman).

- They are so stubborn and strong willed, that they will never admit that they are wrong or apologize for their mistakes. Even if you show them every reason and fact that they were wrong, they will not admit it. That cold, resilient willpower of theirs (the same one that defeated Hitler and Napoleon) will never succumb. They'd rather argue for hours or even destroy the relationship, than admit that they were wrong.

- And sadly, they are very changeable and don't stick through thick and thin. In fact, the divorce rate in Russia is very high, arguably the highest in the world, somewhere around 60 to 70 percent depending on the study you read. Some studies show that divorce in Russia is even higher than in America (though other sources dispute it). But regardless, they may get with you fast, but they can leave you fast too, and often coldheartedly. In fact, this study found Russians to be the quickest to marry and quickest to divorce: www.divorcereform.org/nonus.html It seems as though Russians don't tend to honor fidelity and commitment. Often, such virtues are merely lip service. Therefore, I wouldn't exactly bank my hopes on finding a long term mate there of good marriage material. It's possible of course, just difficult.

Conclusion:

Based on the pros and cons of Russian women that I listed above, I conclude the following. Russian women and I do have a great natural chemistry in our communication styles and personalities. They like my personality (though some of them tell me that I am cute, I don't really buy it) and my communication style jives well with theirs. Russian women and I have a lot in common - we love to laugh at silly corny things, we are easily amused, we are very curious by nature, we love meeting new people, we are comfortable talking to strangers, we are pessimists who know how to have fun, we love travel and foreign cultures, we love history and literature, we love trying new things, we love to flirt, etc. They love my silly sense of humor, laugh easily, and are easily amused. And they enjoy my flirting, flattery, and the way I charm them, which works well with them.

However, when it comes to conflict in personal values, it starts to create a rift between us. I am economical and frugal, and I don't believe in being judged by how "freely" I spend or how "generous" I am. (and I can't just be generous once, I have to be generous constantly without end or limit for them) I also am big on fairness, and don't agree with the double standard that they can be stingy with me, but I cannot be frugal around them. That's a pet peeve with me. I don't believe in the relationship of me being a total giver while them being a total taker. I also despise that they are so ungenerous toward me, and won't do much to help me or try to make me happy. Like them though, I am also very strong willed and stubborn, and hence I don't easily compromise on my values either.

Now don't get me wrong. I am giving and generous, especially to those I like or love, but what Russian women want is too one-sided for me. In my home society, people don't take something without trying to offer something in return (e.g. money, gifts, services, favors, affection, etc). But in Russian female mentality, they strongly want to take without the balance of at least trying to offer something in return.

Around them, when they want me to spend money or pay for something I don't want to, I am caught between a rock and a hard place - on one hand if I refuse to spend a lot or buy what they want, then they will call me "greedy" and look at me with angry shame-inducing gazes. But on the other hand, I can't just do whatever they want and give them everything they want either. There has to be a line. I can't just surrender all my resources to their will, or else my vacation will end shortly and I will have to fly back home (and no, usually they won't even be a good friend and let me stay over their place if I can't pay for a hotel). Plus, even if I did, I'd feel like I'm sacrificing my self-dignity, which would be a shame to myself. So either way, I lose. I hate such situations.

They are also not as romantic as I want women to be, nor as gentle either. And, I don't know if it's my looks or race, but they aren't as passionate toward me as I am toward them when it comes to sex. So I often feel unfulfilled and unsatisfied with them. But they seem very open and uninhibited with regard to touching, rubbing, and kissing more so than Western women are to me. I do notice though that they don't tend to like Asian men that much, even though they may deny it and say race doesn't matter. Perhaps in Eastern Russia, which is more Asianized, it's different, but my experience has to do with Western Russia.

And of course, with such an unusually high divorce rate, about the same rate as in America, and some might argue even higher, it's unwise for me to invest my heart and emotions on finding a good life partner there. It's possible of course, but very difficult and against the odds.

Therefore, in conclusion I'd have to say that my chemistry with Russian women is mostly a surface chemistry and behavior, rather than a soulful chemistry, bond, or connection. So I'd have to conclude that in short, Russian women are good for short term fun, but not for long term relationships. There are exceptions of course, but those are the odds.

Helpful Links, Reputable Agencies and Dating Sites

Here are some links to articles and websites I recommend about Russian women. And also links to marriage or introduction agencies that I know of which are honest and reputable.

Reputable introduction agencies

A Foreign Affair

<http://www.loveme.com/go/51213>

The largest and most reputable international introduction agency. Runs Romance Tours to Russia, Asia and Latin America.

Happier Abroad Introductions and Romance Tours

<http://women.happierabroad.com>

My co-branded A Foreign Affair affiliate site.

Happier Abroad Personals

<http://personals.happierabroad.com>

My co-branded dating site from Dating and Matchmaking Inc. with many stunning profiles from Russia, Ukraine and the FSU

Elena's Models

<http://www.elenamodels.com/?goto=happierabroad>

Created by a Russian woman, Elena, with a plethora of articles about Russian women and also functions as a dating agency. Elena has a very fine and solid reputation in this field. In addition, she has a degree in philosophy and is very smart.

Cupid Media Network

[Russian Euro](#)

[Ukraine Date](#)

Get Russian Wife

Russian American matchmaker offers unique personalized matchmaking service designed to weed out scammers and gold diggers by introducing you to Russian women NOT affiliated with marriage agencies.

GetRussianWife.com

Virginia in Yoshkar-Ola

Honest and reputable agency and staff in Yoshkar-Ola with nice quality women who are well-intentioned.

<http://www.yoshkar-ola.com/e>

Some agencies in Volgograd recommended by others to be honest and reputable

<http://www.anastasya.com>

<http://www.karmen-agency.com>

Large database of Russian women profiles.

<http://www.russianwomen.net>

Jim's Agency Scams

If you are in doubt about a particular introduction agency and wish to check its reputation, check Jim's anti-scam site at the link below to see if it is blacklisted, graylisted or whitelisted. If you can't find it, contact Jim directly through his site.

<http://www.agencyscams.com>

Free sites to meet Russian women

* Warning: The free sites tend to have many scammers (since it's free for them and anyone can join their database without any screening process) but they also have sincere good women as well. You'll just have to weed out the scammers using the methods described in the "How to recognize and guard against email scammers" section of this guide.

A free site where you can write Russian women for free, and also post a free profile to have Russian women write you directly from their personal email address (and you get a lot of replies, believe me).

<http://www.1st-attractive.com>

Another totally free site with lots of Russian women where you can post your own free profile:

<http://www.match-seeker.com>

A site with a long-standing good reputation and a large database of Russian women. There is also a section that provides free addresses (some with email) of many attractive women.

<http://www.bride.ru>

Another free site with lots of gorgeous Russian women.

<http://www.foreignbrides.ru>

An incredible free site with thousands of Russian women in their database. I would say that about 40 percent of them are gorgeous too. The site is easy to navigate, and lets you post your own profile for free. Also includes a message board forum as well.

<http://freepersonals.ru>

A sister free site of the above. Some of the ladies' profiles are cross-linked.

<http://www.datingfree.info/free-dating>

A large free site where you can write to many gorgeous sexy women from many countries, including the USA, for free. It lets you put many photos of yourself in your profile. And like HotorNot.com, lets you rate photos too.

<http://www.plentyoffish.com>

A pen pal site where the girls aren't generally looking for love, but have honest intentions for friendship and cultural exchange. You are unlikely to find scammers there.

<http://www.sv-agency.udm.ru/sv/penpal.php>

(make sure to click the search button to pull up all the results)

Escort Sites

I hate to get into this topic, but there must be some reading this who would be interested, so here are links to some sites to find Russian escorts and short term flings. They require paid membership to contact the escorts and models on these sites. But since I have never used them or been a member, I can't vouch as to whether the girls are real or not, so use at your own risk. If anyone contacts or meets any women from these sites, I'd love to hear how it went. But in any case, to find an escort or call girl in Russia is easy. Just ask the door security man at your hotel, or go to any bar or disco at night and they will be lurking around. Or ask someone in town to tell you which streets they are waiting on.

www.privaterussia.com

www.badrussiangirls.com

<http://1000russianwomenescorts.com/>

Applying for Fiancee Visa

The US government INS website to find information or instructions on bringing your Russian woman to America.

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/faqsgen.htm#marriage>

Online forums for discussions and seeking advice

Happier Abroad Forum

<http://www.happierabroad.com/forum/index.php>

Happy Bachelors Forum

<http://www.happybachelors.com/>

A Russian women forum

http://www.rwguide.com/Russian_Woman_Message_Forum.html

A similar forum but smaller and less active, part of the freepersonals.ru site.

<http://datingtalk.info>

Other foreign options for seeking love

If you ever decide that Russian women aren't for you, or just want to consider backup options, here are other good choices that I've heard about. Besides Russia, other countries where I hear that women will treat you right, are friendly, open, and approachable as well are: Ukraine, Philippines (Cebu island in particular), Thailand, South America, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, and parts of China. From my experiences and the experiences of many travelers I know, the country with the worst dating scene and least approachable women seems to be the US, unfortunately.

As a matter of fact, it is reasonable to conclude that out of the approximately 120 countries in the world, the US ranks at the very bottom in availability of single, approachable, open, non-stuck up women who are easy to connect with and hook up with. As for Europe in general, although women there are not as easily datable as in Russia/Ukraine, they are still definitely more so than the US in comparison. I find them to be easy to strike up a conversation with, communicative, and easy to meet, but not so easy to date or have romantic relations with. Therefore, European women in general tend to be somewhere in between the US and Russia in terms of dateability. The big difference between young people and young women in Europe and the US is that although both live in wealthy conditions by global standards, the European young people are much more cultured, and therefore more communicative and sociable with strangers (especially if those strangers are cultured themselves).

If you'd like to read an inspiring story similar to mine, but in regards to the Philippines and also much shorter as well, you can do so at this link below. Asia and the Philippines are another great option for those disgruntled with dating in America to consider.

www.happierabroad.com/Love_Adventure_Philippines.htm

In addition, if you are interested in pursuing women in Asia in general, there is a great comparison analysis of the pros and cons of each country in Asia, written by an experienced traveler, at the link above.

Best of luck,
Winston Wu

Note: Questions or comments can be emailed to me at WWu777us@yahoo.com.

Feel free to share your comments and feedback in the [Guestbook](#) or [Forum](#).

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