

SAINT

Church Spilled Blood

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PETERSBURG

Glamour and Glory of the Tsar Era

By Rosemarie Elsner

Visitors in St. Petersburg for the first time will certainly have in mind attractions, such as the art treasures of the Hermitage, the famous Amber Room in the Catherine Palace, and of course, the typical Russian souvenirs like caviar, vodka, or the Russian puppets, called “matryoshkas”. What else is there in this metropolis of five million inhabitants located in the delta of the River Neva and the Gulf of Finland? German journalist Rosemarie Elsner found out for the readers of Bahrain Traveler.



Winter Palace

No one would think of ancient bridges and canals. Fact is that St. Petersburg, second largest city in Russia after Moscow and UNESCO World Heritage Site, has more bridges than Stockholm and Venice together. That's why it is often called the "Venice of the North". Few people would think of luxury shops, jewellery, fashion or night clubs in connection with former Leningrad (the town was renamed St. Petersburg in 1991). What a mistake! Today's St. Petersburg, a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis, offers all that.

Along the Number One boulevard, the Nevsky Prospekt (means nothing more than a long, straight avenue), visitors find numerous designer boutiques, grand hotels, jeweller's shops, posh restaurants and cosy coffee shops.

Renowned designers like Gucci, Armani or Prada have established branches here. In between are magnificent palaces and buildings that provide visitors an impression of the pompous era under Tsar Peter The Great or Tsarina Catherine. In the immediate vicinity of Nevsky Prospekt are also the various museums, galleries, the luxurious shopping centres and the gorgeous markets with a great variety of souvenirs like "matryoshkas" and Fabergé eggs.

Modern St. Petersburg can compete in nearly every respect with other European metropolises. Who ever has spent an evening in the Seven Sky Bar at the seventh floor of the luxury shopping centre Grand Palace knows that night life in St. Petersburg is just as exciting, fancy and stylish as it is in a night club in Paris,

Rome or London. The same is true for all the young attractive and fashionable Russian ladies, who never go out without wearing their shoes with high heels that would require in other countries a license for weapons.

Tourists come to St. Petersburg mainly because of the rich culture and the legacies of the Tsarist era. A visit to the world-famous Hermitage in the Winter Palace – the former residence of the tsars – is a must-see for every visitor. Catherine II, tsarina since 1762, had the rooms of the so-called Little Hermitage decorated with paintings. In the 18th and the middle of the 19th century, the gallery was extended by the Old and the New Hermitage. But it was not until 1922 that the collection of paintings was opened for the public. It would take months to



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Peter and Paul Fortress

admire all of the approximately three million exhibits (among them many paintings by Paul Cezanne, Henry Matisse and Pablo Picasso), which the largest of Russia's museums shows today. Visitors who tour this monumental gallery for the first time should do so with a guide in order to have the best overview of all that is to be seen.

Amber room – the world's most famous puzzle

Catherine's Palace and its beautiful park 25 kilometres south of St. Petersburg, in Zarskoje Selo (tsar village) or Pushkin, as the place was called until 1992, makes for a delightful visit. The main attraction here is, of course, the famous Amber Room, whose walls and panels consist of more than 500,000 minute pieces of amber. The so-called Eighth Wonder of the World, a gift from the German king Friedrich Wilhelm I to Tsar Peter in 1716 (and originally installed in the Winter Palace), could be admired for 200 years until it was brought to Königsberg, the former capital of East Prussia (today Kaliningrad) by German forces during World War II. There, the treasure disappeared without a trace. Since then, numerous treasure hunters have tried to find the lost jewel without any success. The whereabouts of the Amber Room will be a mystery forever. Meanwhile the legend becomes reality again, thanks to Essener Ruhrgas

AG, a company which is highly involved in business with Russia. The company invested about 3.5 billion US dollars into the restoration of the Amber Room. Since May 2003 – the 300th anniversary of the town – it is reopened and attracts countless visitors.

Ideal environment

While St. Petersburg has been a popular travel destination for tourists from around the world for years, the town now makes an effort to also become a global player in the world of international business: as a location for economic summits, banquets, congresses, conferences, expositions, incentive trips or sales meetings. The city offers 17 grand hotels, all centrally located and well-equipped with conference rooms, state-of-the-art technology, and of course, rooms and suites suited for such events. It's not easy to make a decision when looking for a hotel room. Heavy is the head that wears the crown! Exclusive addresses like the five star hotels Angleterre, Astoria, Nevsky Palace or Grand Hotel Europe have all the advantages that guests expect when coming to St. Petersburg: historical flair, a fantastic panoramic view over the picturesque city centre, luxuriously equipped rooms and perfect service. To choose St. Petersburg as a meeting place is a good decision, because here conditions are also ideal for social programs. Culture in abundance,



Park Catherine Castle



Monument to Catherine the Great

splendid Russian Orthodox churches – a particular treasure is the Church of Spilled Blood with its colourful cupolas – but also shopping and first class restaurants with excellent Russian cuisine or international meals, offering much more than cabbage, caviar and vodka. A visit to the Mariinsky Theatre with its excellent aristocratic ballet performances promises an unforgettable evening. You may be lucky and get a reservation for the tsar's box. Nightlife with its various bars, clubs and discos will not disappoint an ambitious audience.



MAKING IT HAPPEN

St. Petersburg, Russia

Getting There

Daily flights are available in various Gulf countries flying to St. Petersburg, Russia. Arrange a transfer through your hotel, Travel Company or an agent in advance.

When to Go

There are many reasons to visit St. Petersburg, a city filled with cultural, historical, and architectural treasures, and the people are hospitable and generous, doing their utmost to make visitors feel welcome.

Anytime is good indeed, though it's recommended to go either in Summer (June - September) or Early May to late July for the "White Nights". This is a truly magical time to visit St. Petersburg as the city is embraced by White Nights, when the sun disappears below the horizon for only a brief respite and the skies never completely darken. During this restless time of midnight sun romantics flock to the river embankments to witness the rising bridges in twilight hues, and the city's architectural jewels take on new life in the strange luminescence.

If you're looking to maximise your leisure time or ho to parties, you need to go either in May/June, September or December. This is the best time, lots of parties, exhibitions, events happen.

Where to Stay

Corinthia Nevskij Palace Hotel
Nevski Prospekt 57, St. Petersburg
Phone (7) 812 3 80-20 01
www.corinthiahotels.com

Web Resources

www.russia-travel.com or
www.russia-tourism.ru

Magical "White Nights"

The most beautiful time to visit St. Petersburg is the period between early May and late July, during the so-called "White Nights" (all hotels offer special "White Night" packages). During this period, nobody sleeps in the world's most northern metropolis. These nights with their magic light, when it never gets dark, are made for ballet, theatre, music and film performances. Then the whole city is on its feet. These midsummer

nights are a wonder of nature and mean light for at least 20 hours per day. It is the time when the citizens of St. Petersburg are celebrating, dancing, having parties and strolling along the splendid boulevards. These wonderful months of summer make up for the long, cold and wet winters in St. Petersburg.

Experience the glamour and glory of a bygone era - you will not be disappointed!

