Russia 2015 Crime and Safety Report: St. Petersburg

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Nationalist; Religious Terrorism; Right-wing; Surveillance; Stolen items; Insurgencies; Riots/Civil Unrest; Separatist violence; Floods; Hotels; Financial Security; Faith-based Organization; Economic Espionage; Cyber; Anti-American sentiment; Aviation; Theft; Fraud; Murder; Burglary; Extortion; Hate Crimes; Employee Health Safety; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Drug Trafficking; Bribery

Europe > Russia; Europe > Russia > St. Petersburg

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Following the staging of the Winter Olympics in Sochi in February 2014, Russia’s political, economic, and social climate changed markedly as a result of the country’s illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, ongoing support for military separatists in eastern Ukraine, U.S./Western economic sanctions, and a dramatic drop in the price of oil that significantly weakened the value of the Russian ruble. These aggregate events have greatly strained the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship.

Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats
St. Petersburg experiences crime levels commensurate with other urban centers in Russia, Europe, and the U.S. The police are able to deter and respond to many serious crimes, but petty crimes occur regularly. In January 2015, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) for the NW Federal District, of which St. Petersburg is the administrative capital and which includes the entirety of the consular district for U.S. Consulate St. Petersburg, released its official crime statistics for 2014. According to the MVD figures, reported crimes in the NW Federal District increased 1.5 percent in 2014 to 203,681 crimes compared to 200,632 reported crimes in 2013. According to the MVD, there were 56,463 crimes reported in St. Petersburg during 2014, an increase of approximately 2.5 percent over 2013 numbers.

While the majority of violent crimes are reported to occur outside the center city, a significant number of crimes take place in the vicinity of major hotels and affluent neighborhoods. Reported crime rates for 2014, reflected 45 percent of crimes in St. Petersburg occurring in public areas. For 2014, MVD officials reported that the number of cases in St. Petersburg in which victims suffered ‘grievous bodily harm’ increased 20.2 percent, the third highest rate increase in Russia. The downtown area where most foreign expatriates and diplomats work and live does not have clearly defined lines between “good” and “bad” neighborhoods, and higher-income apartments can be found on the same block as communal and lower-income units. St. Petersburg also does not have clearly delineated zoning between commercial and residential areas. While the overall number of crimes within certain districts may not be very high, the crimes may be more violent. For example, in the Kalininskiy, Moscovskiy, and Frunzenkiy districts, more than 50 percent of reported crimes involve serious felonies (robbery, homicide, attempted homicide, serious assaults). While in the Central District of St. Petersburg, where many shopping, tourist, business and consular offices operate, only about 35 percent of crimes reported are serious or violent felonies.

The most prevalent crime reported to the RSO in St. Petersburg continues to be theft; primarily petty street crimes (pickpocketing). Most of the reported incidents occur in high pedestrian traffic areas (train stations, public transportation terminals, markets, underground crosswalks, shopping malls, crowded restaurants, popular tourist areas). Typically, a thief will
remove a wallet or purse from a distracted victim. Thieves also routinely target cell phones, digital tablets, smart phones, cameras, and laptop computers. Large numbers of tourists and visitors to St. Petersburg, particularly in summer months, provide a target-rich environment for criminals.

Male business travelers are disproportionately victims of drink drugging incidents at nightclubs, ‘gentlemen’s clubs,’ and hotel bars. In 2014, RSO received several reports of U.S. citizens and other foreign visitors being drugged or incapacitated after excessive alcohol consumption and then robbed by women whom they had met in nightclubs. These women target their victims in establishments frequented by foreigners, including hotels. Typically, one or two women approach the potential victim and feign romantic interest. The victim is invited to another, unfamiliar nightclub. Once the victim is incapacitated from excessive drinking or intentional drugging, his cash is stolen, and he often finds excessive charges on his credit/debit cards. Physical/sexual assault may also occur. Thieves may also target an inebriated or incapacitated victim, and scams preying on the overindulgence of alcohol are fairly common.

Debit/credit card ‘skimming’ is a frequent occurrence in the city. Anywhere a credit or debit card is used, including online, can be associated with fraudulent charges. The Consulate receives regular reports of fraudulent charges appearing on the credit/debit accounts of visitors and of members of the diplomatic and expatriate community residing in St. Petersburg. Fraudulent charges are generally in the range of $1,000 to $1,500, although the Consulate has received reports of fraudulent charges totaling as much as $50,000. If using credit/debit cards, monitor the accounts frequently and properly dispose of receipts and other documents containing account numbers.

The number of ‘serious and very serious’ crimes (including felonies and crimes involving weapons/violence, including homicides and attempted homicides) reported in 2014
represented slightly more than a quarter of the total number of crimes reported within the NW Federal District (51,874 instances for 2014) and represented a 5.6 percent reduction over 2013 crime numbers. The number of ‘serious and very serious’ crimes also decreased during 2014 in St. Petersburg (13,677; down 6.9 percent from 2013) and the surrounding Leningrad Oblast (19,681; down 8.5 percent from 2013). The amount of ‘serious’ and ‘very serious’ violent crime varied within the administrative districts of St. Petersburg, often influenced by the district’s economic prosperity and population density.

According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Russian Federation reported 14,574 ‘intentional homicides’ in 2012, giving the country a rate of 10.2 homicides per 100,000 persons. The number of homicides per year ranks Russia 10th in number of homicides globally. Russian law enforcement, judicial, and social agencies have made significant progress in reducing homicide and violent crime rates. Police in St. Petersburg believe that alcohol plays a significant role in both homicides and violent crimes, with as many as two-thirds of suspects intoxicated at the time of arrest.

MVD officials reported 257 homicides in St. Petersburg for 2014; a six percent increase over 2013 numbers (241 homicides in 2013). The total number of homicides ranked St. Petersburg alongside Los Angeles (255 homicides in 2013), Philadelphia (246 homicides in 2013), and Baltimore (234 homicides in 2013). However, as the population of St. Petersburg is estimated at approximately 5 million persons, compared to Los Angeles (3.8 million), Philadelphia (1.5 million), and Baltimore (620,000), the homicide and crime rates per 100,000 citizens would be statistically lower in St. Petersburg.

While legal private handgun ownership is limited and well regulated by police, there are unlicensed firearms in circulation, particularly within criminal groups. While police also regulate pneumatic, non-lethal “traumatic” weapons, these weapons often look identical to traditional handguns and have increasingly been used in violent crimes in St. Petersburg.
Though officially declared “non-lethal,” individuals have died from injuries from pneumatic/traumatic weapons. Though infrequent in the city center, robberies are conducted using the threat of assault or use of weapons, including knives or pistols.

Law enforcement officials noted that the presence of a tenant in a residence is not usually a sufficient deterrent for most residential thieves. A surprising number of burglaries involve thieves utilizing the owner’s keys, normally from an earlier theft of a bag or pickpocketing, allowing the burglar access to both the victim’s keys and information of the victim’s address (15 percent of burglaries).

St. Petersburg continues to experience a regular number of armed robberies and burglaries, primarily targeting small businesses (jewelry stores, cash exchanges). These smaller businesses often lack effective security measures and may be located in more isolated parts of the city. Armed robberies are more infrequent in the city center but do occur. It is not uncommon for criminals to use firearms or traumatic pistols in the commission of commercial robberies.

The MVD, traffic police (GIBDD), and St. Petersburg prosecutor’s office all reported an increase in vehicle thefts in St. Petersburg during 2013 and 2014. Despite increased law enforcement operations targeting auto theft rings, the total number of vehicle-related crimes in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region increased 2.2 percent in 2013, up to 6,878 reported cases. The majority of cases were recorded in St. Petersburg (5,633), with only 1,245 recorded in the areas of Leningrad region outside the city. In 2014, authorities reported another increase over 2013 levels, with 6,255 cars stolen in St. Petersburg. The greatest number of thefts recorded in 2014 occurred in the Vyborg (853), Kalinin (819), Nevsky (798), and Primorskiy (747) districts of St. Petersburg. Traffic police identified the following vehicle models as most frequently stolen in St. Petersburg: common VAZ models, Ford Focus (approximately 50 stolen per month), Chevrolet Lacetti, Land Rover and Infinity SUV.
(approximately 30 stolen per month), Renault Logan, Toyota Land Cruisers, Nissan Patrol, and inexpensive Mazda and Mitsubishi models. According to the same police data, vehicles are most frequently stolen in the evening and late night, with more than 70 percent of the thefts occurring from 6 pm to 6 am. The lack of sufficient, safe parking facilitates auto theft, as many vehicle owners may make poor parking choices (dark, isolated, unmonitored areas). The St. Petersburg prosecutor's office detailed three general places where the majority of auto thefts occur: 25 percent at shopping centers; 22 percent in unprotected/unmonitored parking areas; and 51 percent in front of residences.

The profile of auto theft victims also changed in 2013 and 2014, as owners of inexpensive vehicles represented an increasing percentage of victims. While expensive vehicles are still stolen, they are moved to outlying areas. The St. Petersburg Prosecutor's office confirmed that domestically produced cars, and foreign cars costing less than 600,000 rubles, are increasingly stolen for spare parts. Once stolen, these vehicles are brought to 'chop shops' where they are disassembled for component parts. These second-hand parts are much harder for police to trace, and parts can be disseminated to parts supply and auto repair shops with little risk of discovery.

Foreign companies may encounter organized crime (extortion, corruption) in the local business environment. Organized criminal groups target businesses in urban areas by demanding protection money under threat of violence. A significant number of Russian businesses are forced to pay a percentage of their revenue to a "krysha" or "roof." This payment is intended to ensure that the person soliciting the money will not harm the proprietor or business, and in return the protector is supposed to defend the business against other extortion attempts or threats. Organized crime groups are not as active in St. Petersburg street-level crime as they were in the 1990s, but violent acts do occasionally occur. These organized criminal groups have evolved to financial crimes (credit card fraud, cyber crime, prostitution, drug trafficking, money laundering schemes).
Russia continues to struggle with high levels of corruption despite high-level anti-corruption campaigns and efforts to improve the business environment. Business leaders routinely cite corruption and lack of judicial independence and consistency as factors hampering foreign business investment in Russia. According to the most recent World Bank and IFC’s Enterprise Survey for Russia, more than 20 percent of companies reported making unofficial payments in order to ‘get things done.’ In its 2014 ratings, Transparency International ranked Russia 136th out of 183 countries in the perception of public sector corruption. The government has taken positive steps against corruption, implementing mandatory anti-corruption training for public officials, increasing civil servant salaries, and amending the Russian Federal Anti-Corruption Law in January 2013. Under the amendment, all companies are required to establish anti-bribery compliance programs and develop internal anti-corruption policies. Inconsistent and often non-transparent application of laws and regulations limit the country’s anti-corruption efforts. The use of anti-corruption laws to target political rivals also degrades Russia’s judicial system and the public’s confidence in the country’s adherence to the rule of law.

Cyber

The cyber crime threat in Russia is acute. Groups in Russia and China are believed to be the source of the majority of the world’s cyber attacks, malicious code, and hacking tools. The risk of infection, compromise, and theft via malware, spam e-mail, sophisticated spear phishing, and social engineering attacks is significant. U.S. businesses and private citizens should exercise all due caution and adhere to all cyber security best practices.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) has import notification and regulation requirements that may apply to commonly used security equipment (radios, mobile communication equipment,
The importation and use of GPS and other radio electronic devices are sometimes subject to special rules and regulations. The Russian Customs Service recently announced that terminal GPS devices could be imported by declaration on arrival. A special customs permit should be obtained for any GPS to be used as a peripheral device, intended to support and/or boost computer capacity.

Visitors may bring cellular telephones to Russia without restriction, but satellite telephones require advance approval from the authorities. The Russian agency overseeing telecommunications issues and which approves satellite phone importation is Rosnadzor (http://rkn.gov.ru/).

There are no restrictions on bringing laptop computers into the country for personal use. The software, however, may be inspected upon departure. Additionally, hardware and software found to contain sensitive or encrypted data might be subject to confiscation.

Areas of Concern

Ukraine

From July 22 to December 31, 2014, the Department of State issued a Travel Alert to U.S. citizens regarding the Russian border region with Ukraine, specifically the districts of Bryansk, Kursk, Belgorod, Voronezh, and Rostov Oblasts and Krasnodar Krai. A state of emergency, declared by the Russian government, was in effect in the Rostov Oblast. Although the alert has expired, the situation along the border is unpredictable and could change quickly. Armed, pro-Russian groups are reportedly traveling illegally into Ukraine and could increase the
potential for clashes in Russia near the border, and pose a heightened risk for kidnapping and hostage taking.

The Department of State maintains an active Travel Warning alerting U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to eastern Ukraine. Despite the signing of a ceasefire agreement, violent clashes between Russia-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces continue in parts of the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, resulting in thousands of injuries and deaths. Russian military forces continue to occupy the Crimean Peninsula and are present on the eastern border of Ukraine. Individuals, including U.S. citizens, have been threatened, detained, or kidnapped for hours or days at separatist checkpoints. The government of Ukraine has stated that foreigners, including U.S. citizens, who enter Ukraine through separatist-controlled checkpoints will not be allowed to pass through government checkpoints. The current status of Crimea prevents official Americans from traveling to that area. As a result, the U.S. government’s ability to assist American citizens who travel or reside in Crimea is extremely limited. More information about travel to the Ukrainian Border Region and Crimea can be found at
http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/ukraine-travel-warning.html

North Caucasus

Due to the possibility of civil and political unrest throughout much of the North Caucasus, the Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens against travel to the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Stavropol, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, and Kabardino-Balkariya. Violence has become less predictable and more random, creating a widespread climate of fear. Additionally, the line between a criminal and terrorist act is difficult to distinguish. Political, economic, and criminal motives overlap to create a violent and chaotic environment, with attacks and suicide bombings a regular occurrence in Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Attacks had been directed almost exclusively against law enforcement, military, and government officials; however, civilians can be targeted or caught in the crossfire. It can also be difficult to
distinguish civilian casualties of indigenous terrorism from those of criminal acts. Throughout the region, local criminal gangs have kidnapped foreigners, including U.S. citizens, for ransom. U.S. citizens have disappeared in Chechnya and remain missing. Having close contacts within the local community does not guarantee safety. There have been several kidnappings of foreigners and Russian citizens working for media and non-governmental organizations in the region. The U.S. government’s ability to assist U.S. citizens in the North Caucasus is extremely limited.

Closed Cities/Regions

There are several closed cities and regions in Russia. If you attempt to enter these areas without prior authorization, you may be subject to arrest, fines, and/or deportation. You must list on the visa application all areas to be visited and register with authorities upon arrival at each destination. There is no centralized list or database of the restricted areas, so travelers should check with their sponsor, hotel, or the nearest office of the Russian Federal Migration Service before traveling to unfamiliar cities and towns.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Very heavy congestion makes driving in St. Petersburg challenging. Over the last several years, the number of personal vehicles on the road has skyrocketed, placing a significant burden on the city’s road and parking infrastructure. While St. Petersburg has passed several new ordinances to create some level of parking enforcement within the center city area, it has provided little overall impact on improving the parking or traffic situations. Traffic cameras
have been deployed within the city, but tend to be targeted at the city’s ring road traffic. Drivers frequently ignore local traffic laws, and accidents are a regular occurrence. Yielding to oncoming traffic or pedestrians is inconsistent and subjective, as is the use of turn signals. Mini-buses (or “Marshrutkas”) and unofficial taxis (“gypsy” cabs) can be dangerous because of the speed at which they travel and the lack of safety measures in the vehicles.

The large volume of traffic and extreme winter weather conditions have led to continuous road repair work in a city with an aging infrastructure, narrow streets, and numerous and changing one-way routes. In order to avoid even small potholes, drivers commonly make violent and unexpected lane changes without signaling or checking other lanes. Collisions as a result of this behavior are common.

There is zero tolerance for operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol. Police conduct random traffic stops and will insist that drivers submit to a medical evaluation (Breathalyzer). It is possible to be arrested for driving while intoxicated after a single drink. Refusal to submit to the evaluation is generally treated as an admission to having consumed alcohol. The maximum punishment is a two-year suspension of a driver’s license. An intoxicated driver may also be detained until s/he is sober.

When involved in a traffic accident, travelers should immediately report it to the State Inspectorate for Traffic Security (GIBDD). The GIBDD response to traffic accidents can be slow, but the law requires that the vehicles involved in an accident not be moved (even to the side of the road) until police arrive. Moving one’s vehicle will result in that driver assuming full responsibility for damages. Turn off the vehicle, call police, and wait for them to conduct their investigation.
Public Transportation Conditions

Most major cities have an established public transportation system that may consist of subway (Metro), bus, trolley, and/or streetcars. Travelers are urged to remain vigilant and exercise good judgment and discretion when using any form of public transportation. Pickpockets work buses and trams regularly and are adept at slicing through purses, backpacks, and clothing.

Taxis also operate in larger cities. Licensed taxi companies generally provide reliable, safe, and economical services. However, visitors should be alert to the potential for substantial overcharging, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. Always negotiate the charge with the driver before departing. Sharing a taxi ride and splitting the fare with strangers already in the taxi is strongly discouraged. Higher charges can be expected when a cab is stopped in the street or is idling at a taxi stand. The cheapest, safest option remains arranging a car from a legitimate radio or electronic dispatch taxi service.

Foreigners taking unmarked taxis have been victims of nearly everything from price gouging practices to assaults and robberies. Criminals using taxis to rob passengers often wait outside bars or restaurants to find passengers who have been drinking and are more susceptible to robbery. Robberies may also occur in taxis shared with strangers. You should always use authorized services when arriving at a major airport. The Embassy generally advises visitors to avoid Marshrutkas and gypsy cabs, especially if visitors do not have a strong grasp of local customs and the Russian language.
Aviation/Airport Conditions

The safety of air transportation throughout Russia has been a concern although the government has taken steps to replace aging aircraft, increase civil aviation oversight, and strengthen regulatory regimes. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the government’s Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of air carrier operations. Several carriers have participated in the International Air Transport Association’s (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) program, an industry-sponsored safety audit program. According to Russia’s Interstate Aviation Committee (K), which investigates air accidents in Russia and the other Commonwealth of Independent States, there were 41 aviation accidents reported in 2014 in Russia. Further information may be found in the MAK’s annual flight safety analysis reports issued by the Air Accident Investigation Commission. According to IATA statistical data, the region consisting of the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States has an aviation accident rate of 3.63 per million flights, or one every 275,000 flights, the second-worst rate of any IATA region.

Other Travel Conditions

In 2014, the Embassy and Consulates received reports of U.S. citizens being detained by the Federal Migration Service for entering the Russian Federation on the wrong type of visa or failing to register properly. The people who were detained faced legal repercussions based on liberal interpretation of immigration laws. In some instances, it was not clear which type of visa was appropriate for certain activities.
Data collection, including mapping natural resources to support commercial or scientific interests, can result in seizure of equipment and/or arrest if authorities decide that national security is compromised. Similarly, scholars conducting research, particularly at government archives, have been ordered deported if found to be conducting research while on a tourist visa or researching politically sensitive topics.

**Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Political Violence Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The transnational terrorist threat is commensurate with that of many Western European nations; however, indigenous and regional terrorism is a significant concern. The most prominent regional terrorist organization continues to be the Caucasus Emirate (CE). While neither CE nor any other known groups have specifically targeted U.S. interests in Russia, this does not negate the possibility of attacks. In any terrorist attack, even if not directed at U.S. businesses or persons, there is a general risk of U.S. citizens becoming victims. U.S. citizens should be aware of their personal surroundings and follow good security practices.

Terrorist activities continued to be prevalent in 2014, including attacks on police checkpoints in Grozny, Chechnya. In October, a suicide bomber detonated himself at a checkpoint, causing the deaths of five policemen. Additionally, in December, a group of militants...
conducted a multi-level attack on a checkpoint and two buildings in Grozny, resulting in the deaths of 14 policemen, 11 militants, and one civilian, along with numerous injuries.

Within the last decade, Moscow and St. Petersburg have been the targets of terrorist attacks. Bombings have occurred at government buildings, airports, hotels, tourist sites, markets, entertainment venues, schools, and residential complexes, and on public transportation including subways, buses, trains, and commercial flights. The CE has been responsible for numerous acts of terrorism in Russia including suicide bombings against rail and bus transportation in Volgograd in late 2013, a 2011 suicide bombing at Domodedovo Airport in Moscow, the 2010 bombings in the Moscow Metro, the 2009 bombing of a train traveling between Moscow and St. Petersburg, the 2004 bombing of two commercial airliners, the 2004 Beslan school takeover, and the 2002 Moscow theater attack. Extremist groups occasionally threaten to set off bombs in market areas that are operated largely by migrant workers in major cities. From mid-2013 through early-2014, government security forces stepped up their counterinsurgency campaign in the Caucasus in preparation for the Sochi Winter Olympics.

Throughout 2013 and 2014, police and immigration officials, including in St. Petersburg, conducted a number of operations targeting potential illegal immigrants, particularly focusing on ethnic minorities from Central Asia and the Caucasus region. According to local news reports, several detainees remained in custody due to alleged ties to religious extremism. Several others were jailed or deported for direct ties to terrorist organizations.

For 2014, federal MVD officials recorded 1,127 terrorist offenses (an increase of 70.5 percent) and 1,024 extremist crimes (an increase of 14.3 percent) throughout Russia.
Terrorism Rating: High

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

While anti-American and anti-Western sentiment increased in the latter half of 2014 (most notably in certain Russian media outlets), there were no incidents of wide-scale violence specifically targeting American citizens.

Violence against foreigners does occur in St. Petersburg, given its large migrant and expatriate communities. As political tensions between the United States and Russia increase as a result of disputes over a number of issues, including Syria, Ukraine, human rights, and trade issues, visitors should be aware that speaking English or wearing clothing or items that clearly identify them as U.S. citizens may subject them to additional attention from local residents. RSO St. Petersburg has noted an increase of violent rhetoric targeting the U.S. and EU on social media websites and in the media generally since March 2014. While authorities maintain tight control over protests and the government continues to provide reasonable levels of security for U.S. facilities in St. Petersburg, the government’s continued anti-U.S. and anti-EU rhetoric might be interpreted by some elements of society as tacit approval of more violent acts directed at the Consulate or U.S. citizens.

Immediately following the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia by the U.S. and Europe in response to Russian actions in Ukraine, some American “iconic brand” companies were heavily scrutinized by the authorities, and in some cases, closed, if only temporarily.
Civil Unrest

Street demonstrations about social matters, to include single person pickets, were prevalent in 2014. There are various political groups that hold regular rallies/demonstrations, the majority are peaceful and legal, although strictly limited and monitored by the authorities. As standard practice, the government expends considerable resources to control protests, through the deployment of barricades and police officers. Allegations of election fraud in the presidential elections resulted in a record number of protests in 2011 and 2012, some of which resulted in violence. Similar protests in St. Petersburg tended to attract far fewer demonstrators and remained mostly peaceful compared to some of the initial confrontations between police and protestors in Moscow.

In St. Petersburg, protests most frequently occur in the area of “Gostiny Dvor” metro station or at the Field of Mars, both in downtown St. Petersburg. Legal protests require approval from the authorities in advance, and authorities generally deal with unsanctioned protests harshly. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg monitor protests for their potential impact on the official and U.S. business community.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

St. Petersburg police report high levels of violence between various migrant groups. Street “brawls” between competing ethnically-based criminal gangs, involving as many as 40 people, have resulted in severe injuries and even some deaths. In 2013, Federal Migration Officials estimated that approximately 20 percent of the city’s crime statistics could be attributed to ‘migrant workers.’ In April 2014, the head of the MVD for St. Petersburg and the Leningrad
region estimated that migrants and foreign nationals committed approximately nine percent of St. Petersburg’s reported crimes. As a result, the city established a special department to combat crime among migrants, particularly those from the North Caucasus.

Negative sentiment toward religious missionaries and proselytizing has occurred throughout Russia, particularly if religious workers are present on non-religious worker visas. The Moscow based SOVA Center NGO, which tracks racist, xenophobic, and ethnically-motivated violence, recorded 53 acts of ideologically-motivated vandalism in 35 regions of Russia in 2014. The main targets were religious objects (17), Orthodox churches (10), Jehovah’s Witnesses buildings (8), mosques and Muslim graves (7), Jewish objects (5), and government agency buildings (5).

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

During the spring thaw, flooding is possible in many parts, to include northwest Russia. As St. Petersburg is located on the Neva River, flooding was a problem, but the city and regional government have a number of mitigation measures in place.

The Ministry of Emergency Situations (EMERCOM or Rus: ) posts regular updates on environmental hazards, including weather-related emergencies, on its webpage. Daily weather forecasts, information on natural disasters, and updates for transportation
Emergencies are routinely posted on the main site and on sites for the regions.


Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Russia has experienced a number of industrial accidents resulting from inadequate enforcement of safety and health standards in the work place. Aging infrastructure and endemic corruption in regulatory bodies has contributed to several well-publicized disasters. Fines and facility closures are normally enforced only after an accident has occurred.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

American businesses are susceptible to industrial espionage. When utilizing local services for banking, security, and medical treatment, it is important to ensure that they are reputable organizations. Even then, police investigations have found that employees have passed sensitive personal, medical, or financial information to criminals or intelligence agencies. Personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary business information can be sold or used to threaten and extort businesses and their employees.
Companies can increase their chances of defending against industrial espionage with strong employee vetting programs, verifying the background and qualifications of potential partners, establishing information technology security and recovery plans, and utilizing computer network protection infrastructure. U.S. businesses should always conduct detailed pre-employment screening and background checks prior to hiring any overseas staff, to include Russian partners and employees. Businesses can be held liable for illegal or malicious actions on the part of their employees.

Privacy Concerns

Security and law enforcement agencies have wide investigative powers to prevent and investigate criminal activity and to collect information on events or actions that pose a threat to the military, economic, or ecological security of the Russian Federation. In practice, these are broad powers that enable authorities to monitor and seize any forms of electronic communication. As a result, travelers should assume communications are monitored and should have no expectation of privacy.

The System for Operational-Investigative Activities (SORM) enables authorities to lawfully monitor and record all data that traverses Russia’s networks. Through SORM, authorities have access to any information transmitted via telephone and Internet networks. All emails, phone calls, and faxes are subject to collection by authorities, and the information may be analyzed and stored for up to three years.

Foreign visitors may experience other types of surveillance. Hotel rooms (including meeting rooms), offices, cars, and taxis may be monitored onsite or remotely. Personal possessions in hotel rooms, including computers, may be searched without consent/knowledge of the owner.
Foreign visitors may also witness or encounter individuals associated with the security or intelligence services entering their residences or hotel rooms. While not criminally motivated, such entry attempts may be difficult to discern from a criminal burglary. Those perpetrating clandestine entries are sophisticated and skilled at surreptitious entry. In general, visitors should be aware that they have no privacy in public or private. Visitors should assume that host government personnel could monitor their movements and conversations. Discretion should be exercised at all times and in all places.

Personnel Background Concerns

U.S. Embassy and Consulates continues to be concerned by the steady number of racially-motivated incidents and violence against ethnic minorities. Racially-motivated attacks and hate crimes continue to occur in the city, with several high-profile incidents occurring in St. Petersburg in 2013 and 2014. These incidents involved assaults and violence that primarily targeted victims described as ‘non-Slavic’ or ‘Asian’ in their ethnicity. In spite of frequent arrests, membership in local right-wing, nationalist, or racist groups continues. Young ultra-nationalists, who profess the sentiment “Russia for Russians,” continue to carry out attacks on ethnic minorities.

From the summer of 2013 and into 2014, migrants were targeted in St. Petersburg during ‘anti-migrant’ raids (‘Russian Sweeps’). Immigration and police officials, often accompanied by nationalist “volunteer” groups that would detain individuals without legal authority, conducted these “sweeps.” Members of the nationalist ‘volunteer’ groups would detain individuals or demand migrants produce identification under the threat of violence until law enforcement or immigration officials arrived. The raids targeted shops, cafes, and neighborhoods where individuals of “non-Slavic appearance” resided or worked. In October 2013, St. Petersburg nationalists marched from Marsovo Pole (Field of Mars) to Gostiny Dvor mall and Apraksin Dvor market, where they shouted racist slogans, threw stones and smoke bombs into stores,
and assaulted workers. Workers responded with bats, clubs, and pipes, resulting in a number of arrests and injuries. The SOVA Center NGO, which tracks xenophobic and racist violence, recorded a dozen incidents of violence in St. Petersburg in 2014 that resulted in two deaths and 29 injured.

During 2014, nationalist groups in St. Petersburg also targeted “rubber apartments” where they believed illegal migrants were living. After locating a suspected “rubber apartment,” nationalists placed a sticker on the apartment door that read, “Warning! Rubber apartment! More than 100 people registered,” and then posted a photograph of the door on the Internet along with the address. Nationalists also conducted anti-smoking and alcohol campaigns in St. Petersburg, including a “Sober Courtyard” initiative, in 2014. Nationalist groups would patrol streets and courtyards looking for individuals drinking outside and targeting shops and restaurants by sending underage activists inside to purchase alcohol or cigarettes. The neighborhoods and businesses targeted were frequently associated with “non-Slavs.” These nationalist groups frequently operated without legal authority/training and often exercised excessive forms of violence.

Racism among soccer fans continued to be an issue in Russia. Soccer fans at matches in St. Petersburg and other urban areas, regularly display swastikas, Viking runes, and other symbols associated with neo-Nazi groups. Prior to soccer matches with teams or players from the Caucasus, fans have drawn anti-Caucasian pictures or committed attacks, accompanied by xenophobic slogans and insults.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread, as harassment, threats, and acts of violence have targeted LGBT individuals. Small demonstrations in support of LGBT rights have regularly been dispersed, sometimes violently, by nationalists claiming to be defending traditional Russian values.
Drug-related Crimes

Drug-related crimes are on the increase in St. Petersburg, and according to official MVD statistics, St. Petersburg had the second highest percentage of narcotics crimes as an overall percentage of reported crimes – 25.1 percent -- in 2014. According to 2013 figures, MVD and Federal Narcotics Control Service (FSKN) officials reported a seven percent increase in drug crimes (16,662 for 2013) in St. Petersburg and the NW Federal District. The majority of these crimes were felony offenses (‘grave and especially grave’) and covered all types of illicit trafficking and production of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, cannabis, hashish, cocaine, methamphetamines, and other controlled substances. For 2014, FSKN and MVD officials for St. Petersburg and Leningrad region reported seizing more than 1,600 kilograms of illicit substances, including precursor chemicals, in 2,279 drug related crimes. FSKN also reported conducting raids on 13 drug labs in the city.

Russia is a transit and a consumer country for Afghan opiates. The opiates are transported through Central Asia to Russia. In February 2014, the FSKN estimated the Russian Federation had approximately eight million drug addicts, of which 1.5 million were heroin users. FSKN officials added that approximately 70,000 deaths occur annually due to drugs among the 15-34 age bracket. FSKN and MVD officials concluded that people addicted to heroin generally require two daily doses, valued at up to $100 daily, which fuels crime rates. FSKN officials reported seizures of 107 kg of heroin in the St. Petersburg area in 2014.

Russia has also witnessed an increase in the amount of cocaine being imported and seized in recent years. Cocaine shipments come, often via seaports, from South America. These shipments are delivered to organized crime and drug trafficking groups throughout Russia.
According to FSKN statistics, seizures in St. Petersburg and Leningrad region totaled 17 kg in 2014, representing approximately one-tenth the amount seized in 2013.

Synthetic drugs (methamphetamines, ‘krokodil/crocodile’) are a growing problem. FSKN officials continue to reported significant seizures of synthetic drugs and psychotropic substances (935 kg in 2014) in the St. Petersburg area.

FSKN officials reported seizures of 390 kilograms of cannabis-based drugs in the St. Petersburg area, primarily hashish (360 kg) and marijuana (30kg), down from 740.5 kg in 2013.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings frequently occur in the North Caucasus, primarily to extract ransom payments, although some have been political. These kidnappings occasionally resulted in the execution of the victim. Outside of the Caucasus region, kidnappings occur with much less frequency. However, kidnappings of affluent Russians do occur, including in St. Petersburg, although they tend to involve persons with organized crime connections.

Police Response
Although the government has embarked on a police reform effort, a transformation into a police force comparable to that of Western European or U.S. standards is still developing. Low salaries combined with high cost of living contribute to widespread police corruption. Professionalism and responsiveness of local law enforcement in St. Petersburg is in general satisfactory. However, individual assessments can differ depending on the particular unit or jurisdictions involved.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In recent years, the U.S. Consulate has received decreasing numbers of reports from U.S. citizens of harassment or unprofessional behavior by police. However, visitors should be aware that the practice of racial/ethnic profiling is common. Police often target ethnic minorities from Central Asia and the Caucasus or those perceived to be ethnic minorities from those regions. Police often attribute profiling by pointing to the large number of illegal or undocumented ethnic minorities from Central Asia. It is also common to see profiling after terrorist incidents or the threat of a terrorist attack. American citizens should report problems with the police to the American Citizen Services Unit at the Consulate.

Police do not need to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain individuals. Persons stopped by police for routine identification checks should remain courteous in dealing with officers and be respectful. In the event a police officer does behave in an unprofessional or harassing manner, travelers should obtain the officer’s name, badge number, and patrol car number, and note where the stop happened; this information will assist officials in the event that victimization occurs. If detained by the police, U.S. citizens should contact the American Citizen Services at the Embassy or nearest Consulate.
The U.S. Consulate does not recommend the payment of bribes in any circumstance.

Crime Victim Assistance

The quality of assistance to foreign citizens varies. U.S. citizens should report all crimes immediately to the police and to the American Citizen Services Unit of the U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg.

Due to the limited number of English-speaking police officers, travelers lacking strong Russian skills may have a frustrating interaction with police. Police try to provide English-speakers when possible, but travelers should not assume that one will be available to assist. Travelers are encouraged to locate a friend or colleague who can assist with translating. Experiences of a foreign victims in St. Petersburg can vary, depending on the nature of the crime being reported and other factors including one’s ability to communicate in Russian with law enforcement.

In the event police assistance is required in St. Petersburg, individuals should call the following numbers within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). (For numbers specific to Moscow or the rest of the country refer to the Moscow CSR.)

Fire Department/Emergency Management: 112 / +7 (812) 299-99-99

General police emergency number: 102 / +7 (812) 573-21-81
Traffic accidents: 102

City Police (“GuMVD”): +7 (812) 573-26-76

Task force for crimes against foreigners: +7 (812) 764-97-87

Criminal Investigative Division: +7 (812) 573-21-77

MVD Economic Crimes /Anti-Corruption Division: +7 (812) 573-31-76

Lost and Found (with police - Zakhar’evskaya 19): +7 (812) 578-36-90

City Tourism Information Office (Sadovaya 14): +7 (812) 310-28-22

City Tourist Helpline: +7 (812) 300-33-33 / 0333

Police/Security Agencies

Police and security services are organized on a federal level in Russia. Almost all federal agencies have some representative office in St. Petersburg or the Northwest Federal District. For a detailed description of various police and security agencies within Russia and their general purpose, please refer to the Moscow CSR (https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17069).

A 1992 Russian federal law (‘On private detective and security activity,’ dated March 11, 1992, No. 2487-1) regulates private detective and private security agency activities. An amendment to the law came into effect on January 1, 2010. According to the law and its amendment, no security company can be owned by a non-Russian entity, including a Russian
subsidiary owned by a foreign entity, and the law includes restrictions on the use of foreign capital in the operation of such firms. Russia agreed during WTO negotiations, however, to remove restrictions on foreign participation in this sector upon its accession. Many items commonly used in the private security sector are also closely regulated by the Russian Federation.

**Medical Emergencies**

Medical care in St. Petersburg can be expensive, difficult to obtain, and may not be comprehensive. Some facilities offer quality services, but many restrict services to normal business hours and/or to members or persons willing to pay for services in advance. Russian doctors often demand pre-payment for medications, x-rays, and supplies such as disposable needles. Acceptance of insurance in lieu of pre-payment is rare. Most patients pay in cash and apply for reimbursement from their insurance companies upon their return to the U.S.

The Russian national medical system provides emergency care that, while officially free of charge, often ranges from poor to mediocre. Nursing care is not to levels most U.S. citizens are accustomed to, and patients may need to make their own arrangements for food, clean sheets, and clothing.

Pharmacies (Rus: А) are common and frequently offer 24-hour service, although the English language ability of pharmacy staff may be limited.
Ambulance (city government service): 03 (Russian language only)

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The medical clinics listed here are routinely utilized by the expatriate community in St. Petersburg. These clinics have English-speaking staff, maintain staff qualified to provide specialized medical and dental care, and can assist with medical evacuation from St. Petersburg.

American Medical Clinic
Tel.: 740-2090 (24 hours)
Fax: 310-4664
Moika emb. 78
www.amclinic.ru

Euromed Clinic
Suvorovskiy Pr. 60
Tel.: 327-0301 (24 hours)
Fax: 327-0301

www.euromed.ru

The International Clinic Medem
Marata St. 6 (metro Mayakovskaya)
Tel.: 336-3333 (24 hours)
Fax: 336-3334
http://www.medem.ru

International Medical Center “SOGAZ”
Malaya Konyushennaya St. 8
Tel.: 406-8888 (24 hours)
Fax: 406- 8887
www.sogaz-clinic.ru

Skandinavia Clinic (AVA-PETER)
Liteyny Pr. 55-a,
Recommended Insurance Posture

Medical evacuation to another country is an expensive option and may cost between $4,000 and $30,000; the Consulate strongly urges travelers to Russia to purchase overseas medical insurance that includes coverage for hospitalization and medical evacuation. The U.S. Social Security Medicare Program does not provide coverage for hospital or medical costs in Russia.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC recommends all travelers have current routine vaccinations and Hepatitis A. Additionally, the CDC recommends some travelers be inoculated against Hepatitis B, Japanese Encephalitis, and/or rabies. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/russia?s_cid=nceid-dgmq-travel-singl e-001.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Scams

The “turkey drop” is a popular street scam usually perpetrated by two or more individuals. The perpetrators lure an unsuspecting pedestrian into a confrontation after distracting the victim by dropping a conspicuous roll of currency or a wallet. Typically, one party “accidentally” drops the money in front of the victim, while the second perpetrator either waits for the victim to pick up the money or picks it up himself and offers to split it with the victim. Once the targeted pedestrian has engaged the other perpetrator in conversation about the wallet or money, the perpetrator who dropped it returns and accuses both his accomplice and the target of stealing his money. The goal is for the target to display his/her wallet/purse in an effort to prove innocence, at which time the scammers steal the target’s money. A variation of this scam involves a third individual who passes himself off as a security or police official (often with a quick flash of a badge). This “police officer” is part of the scam whose goal is to coerce the victim into displaying his/her wallet/passport. These scam artists are adept at surreptitiously taking large bank notes from a person’s wallet even if the wallet is out of a person’s hands for only a brief moment. Foreigners are frequent targets of this scam, particularly near major hotels and tourist areas. If the turkey drop scam materializes, individuals should depart the area quickly, leave the money/wallet on the ground, and avoid engaging the individual at all. A clear and audible “nyet (no)” shows the would-be perpetrators that you know what is going on. If a plain-clothed individual attempts to stop you as part of this scam and if you are unable to move away, demand to see their official identification clearly. Under no circumstances should one remove or hand over one’s wallet.

The U.S. Embassy and U.S. Consulates receive regular reports of fraud committed against U.S. citizens by Internet correspondents professing love and romantic interest. Typically, the Russian correspondent asks the U.S. citizen to send money or credit card information for living expenses, travel expenses, or “visa costs.” The anonymity of the Internet means that the U.S. citizen cannot be sure of the real name, age, marital status, nationality, or gender of the
correspondent. The U.S. Embassy and U.S. Consulates have received many reports of citizens losing thousands of dollars through such scams. Never send money to anyone you have not met in person. These Internet dating scams include some common themes:

• Misrepresentation about the costs and requirements of a U.S. visa,
• Claims that airline tickets must be purchased only in Russia,
• Use of professional models’ photos taken from Internet web sites,
• Sudden financial hurdles encountered when trying to leave Russia,
• Requests to send money only through a specific company,
• A scan of a (usually fraudulent) U.S. visa to prove intent to travel.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers must remain aware of their surroundings in Russia. Constant vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. U.S. citizens may wish to provide a friend, family member, or coworker a copy of the trip itinerary.

Men should place their wallets in front pockets, while women should drape the shoulder straps of purses across their body, keeping them visible and under positive control. If you use a backpack, avoid carrying high-value items inside or in easily accessible external pockets.
Travelers should make copies of their passport photo page, visa, and credit card numbers (to include telephone contact information on the back of the credit card in the event the card is stolen). Copies should be stored in a safe location in the event that the original items are stolen. Using the safe in a hotel room is encouraged to protect against theft but is not a guarantee to safeguard your possessions. Travelers should not flash large amounts of money, jewelry, or electronics. Travelers should be cautious when using ATMs; look for evidence of device tampering, illegal card readers, low-profile video cameras, and for individuals loitering in the immediate area.

Individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs, and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight. Individuals should exercise caution and common sense when visiting nightclubs and other late-night establishments. Drinks should never be left unattended, especially when sitting with strangers. Do not accept a beverage in an open or re-sealable container from a stranger or recent acquaintance. It is best not to engage in a “shot-drinking contest.” While normally a result of the intentional introduction of a substance into an unattended drink by a criminal, drugging can also be caused from consumption of unregulated alcoholic beverages.

When entering a residence or hotel, travelers should be aware of individuals loitering near the entrance, lobby, stairwell, and elevator. It is equally important to confirm the identity of persons seeking access to one’s home or hotel room. Criminals have posed as police officers, health officials, and delivery persons in order to gain entry to homes. Individuals should be prepared to call the police to verify the identification of persons claiming to be officials.

The St. Petersburg Prosecutors Office identified several recurring vulnerabilities common in most reported residential burglaries and thefts. Among the most common factors in burglaries are thieves disabling poor quality door locks (70 percent of the incidents) or gaining entry through unsecured windows or balcony doors on the first or second floors of homes or
apartment buildings, particularly at night (15 percent of burglaries). The Prosecutors Office noted that the lowest numbers of burglaries target residences that utilize an alarm (one percent) or buildings with a concierge or similar access control method such as videophones (less than one percent).

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

15 Furshtatskaya Street
St. Petersburg Russia

Business hours: Monday-Friday, 0900 to 1730.

Consulate Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +7-812-331-2600 during hours of operation
Regional Security Office: X 2666
STEP travel registration website, please email CAIbrs@state.gov.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Regional Security Office in the U.S. Embassy Moscow established a Country Council for Russia in 2012. While the Country Council is based in Moscow, the RSO in St. Petersburg is available to meet with OSAC constituents about security concerns/questions by appointment. To reach OSAC’s Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

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