



Russia 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Moscow

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Terrorism; Surveillance; Stolen items; Religious Violence; Political Violence; Threats; Crime; Cyber; Anti-American sentiment; Faith-based Organization; Elections; Other Government Agencies

Europe > Russia; Europe > Russia > Moscow

2/12/2018

According to the current U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory at the date of this report's publication, Russia has been assessed as Level 3. Reconsider travel due to terrorism and harassment. Do not travel to the north Caucasus, including Chechnya and Mount Elbrus, due to civil unrest and terrorism, and Crimea due to foreign occupation and abuses by occupying authorities.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Embassy Moscow does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizens' Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or location, and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Moscow as being a **HIGH**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Please review OSAC's Russia-specific page for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Crime Threats

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The overall level of reported criminal activity in Moscow remained relatively stable over 2017. Moscow civil authorities track reported criminal activity statistics closely, but the results do rely upon crimes being reported. There is a margin of error involved in statistical reporting. Although not pervasive, crimes against tourists do occur at popular tourist sites and on public transportation.

More than half of reported criminal activity (52.4%) involved theft/larceny, with offenses ranging from pickpocketing to burglary. Street-level thefts and robberies are a somewhat frequent event on the Moscow metro and in large crowds. The most vulnerable areas for street crime include underground walkways (*perekhods*), the metro, overnight trains, train stations, airports, markets, tourist attractions, and restaurants. Smash-and-grab burglaries from parked cars are common, where anything of value left in plain sight is taken but the car itself is not specifically targeted.

According to police statistics, approximately 20,000 foreign citizens were victims of crime in Russia in 2017. Intoxicated foreigners are especially vulnerable to assault and robbery in/around nightclubs and bars. Alcohol was a significant factor in most of the criminal activity reported by foreign visitors. For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad."

In Moscow, violent crime is not as common as in years past, but crimes involving firearms are not unheard of. The majority of street-level violence involves bladed weapons and targets people carrying conspicuously valuable property or large amounts of cash.

In 2017, the frequency of telephonic bomb threats against public venues increased significantly. If you are at a location that receives a bomb threat, follow all instructions from the local police and security services. These hoax threats typically target government buildings, airports, hotels, tourist sites, markets, entertainment venues, schools, residential complexes, and public transportation.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cybercrime is a significant problem across Russia. Russian hackers and traditional organized crime structures continue to work together, raising threats to the financial sector. The risk of infection, compromise, and theft via malware, spam e-mail, sophisticated spear phishing, and social engineering attacks is significant. U.S. citizens and companies should remain vigilant against cyber threats and actively use cyber security measures to mitigate risks.

Other Areas of Concern

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The Department of State maintains an active Travel Advisory (Jan 10, 2018) alerting U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to Crimea and the north Caucasus region due to civil unrest and terrorism.

Crimea

The Russian Federation maintains an extensive military presence in Crimea. The Russian Federation is likely to take further military actions in Crimea as part of its occupation of this part of Ukraine. The international community, including the U.S. and Ukraine, does not recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. There are continuing abuses against foreigners and the local population by the occupation authorities in Crimea, particularly against those who are seen as challenging their authority on the peninsula.

The U.S. government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens traveling in Crimea as U.S. government employees are prohibited from traveling to Crimea.

North Caucasus (including Chechnya and Mount Elbrus)

Civil unrest and terrorist attacks continue throughout the North Caucasus region including in Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Stavropol, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, and Kabardino-Balkariya. Local gangs have kidnapped U.S. citizens and other foreigners for ransom. There are credible reports of arrest, torture, and extrajudicial killing of gay men in Chechnya allegedly conducted by Chechen regional authorities.

Do not attempt to climb Mount Elbrus, as travelers must pass close to volatile and insecure areas of the North Caucasus region.

The U.S. government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens traveling in the North Caucasus region, including Mount Elbrus, as U.S. government employees are prohibited from traveling to the region.

Visit our Consular Affairs website for additional information on Travel to High-Risk Areas.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights."

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions and driver safety norms differ significantly from those in the U.S., especially outside of major metropolitan areas. Even thoroughfares marked as major routes on maps can be two-lane roadways, and some routes have heavy truck and bus traffic, while others have poor or nonexistent shoulders. Asphalt quality varies widely, and roads outside of cities are often poorly illuminated.

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Local driving regulations are strictly enforced, and violators are subject to severe legal penalties. Avoid excessive speed and, when possible, do not drive at night outside of major cities. Roadside checkpoints are commonplace.

Russia practices a zero-tolerance policy with regard to operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol, and there are strict penalties for violations that exceed the allowable blood-alcohol content (BAC) of 0.03. Police conduct random traffic stops and can compel drivers to submit to a sobriety test. A driver's refusal to submit to the test is treated as an admission of having consumed alcohol. The maximum punishment for drinking and driving is a two-year suspension of the violator's a driver's license. An intoxicated driver may also be detained until he or she is sober.

Russian law requires that vehicles involved in an accident not be moved until police arrive. Moving one's vehicle will result in that driver assuming full responsibility for damages. The only exception is a situation in which vehicles block traffic; in this case, the parties involved are required to take photographs from different angles and move the vehicles to a near-by location that does not block traffic.

Winter weather, which tends to last for six months or longer every year, can escalate rapidly and cause extremely dangerous travel conditions. Proper vehicle maintenance and winter driving skills are essential. Have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you travel.

For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report "Driving Overseas: Best Practices."

Public Transportation Conditions

Moscow has an extensive and efficient public transportation system.

Legitimate taxi companies generally provide reliable, safe, and economical services. When hailing a taxi curbside, visitors should be alert to the potential for substantial overcharging, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. Mobile app ride-sharing services (Uber, Yandex, and Gett) are widely used in Moscow and deemed to be as safe as using these services elsewhere in the world. For more information on ride-sharing, please review OSAC's Annual Briefing Report "Safety and Security in the Share Economy." The U.S. Embassy discourages the use of unmarked, unregulated taxis (sometimes called gypsy cabs), as passengers have been victims of robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and theft. Criminals using these taxis to rob passengers often wait outside bars or restaurants to find passengers who have been drinking and are, therefore, more susceptible to robbery. Robberies may also occur in taxis shared

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with strangers. You should always use authorized services when arriving at a major airport.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed that the Government of Russia's Civil Aviation Authority is in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Russia's air carrier operations.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Moscow as being a **HIGH**-threat location for terrorist activity directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Visitors to Moscow remain vulnerable to attacks by terrorist organizations. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities. Although the Russian Federation continued to prioritize counterterrorism efforts in 2017, Russia remained a target of international terrorist groups, particularly ISIS. The majority of domestic counterterrorism activities in 2017 targeted armed groups in the North Caucasus, but Russia encountered increased ISIS-related activity in law enforcement activities throughout the country. In 2017, the Russian military intervention in Syria factored heavily in public messaging on counterterrorism. The Russian government regularly cited the threat posed by terrorists to help justify its military operations in Syria. As of October 2017, the Russian government estimated that over 3,400 Russian citizens had fought with ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Russia also continued to pursue counterterrorism cooperation with foreign partners and expressed a desire to work with the U.S. to address terrorist threats, particularly via military cooperation in Syria. Although the Russian government increased its engagement with U.S. counterparts, U.S./Russian cooperation remains limited. On December 6, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia's counterterrorism operation in Syria had come to an end "with a complete victory and defeat of the terrorists." Moscow has expressed concern about the ISIS-Khorasan threat in northern Afghanistan, calling it one of the most significant threats to the Russian homeland.

2017 Terrorist Incidents:

On December 27, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated inside a locker at a supermarket in St. Petersburg. The device injured more than a dozen people. Although ISIS

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claimed responsibility, it appears that the suspect is likely mentally disturbed and does not have connections to terrorist groups.

On November 5, two attackers shot and killed one police officer and injured two others in the Nazran district of Russia's North Caucasus. Firearms, ammunition, and a homemade explosive device were found at the scene after the operation.

On August 19, a 19-year old resident of Surgut, Siberia, attacked and injured seven people with a knife before he was shot and killed by police. ISIS claimed responsibility.

On April 4, two Russian police officers were killed in a shooting in Astrakhan; ISIS claimed responsibility. Two days later, Russian National Guard troops killed four men suspected of involvement in the attack.

The most high profile terrorist attack in Russia in 2017 occurred on April 3 in St. Petersburg, where a bomb detonated by an alleged suicide bomber on the city's metro system causing 60 casualties, including 15 deaths. Katiba Al Imam Shamil, an al-Qa'ida affiliate primarily active in the North Caucasus, claimed responsibility.

On March 24, 8 alleged ISIS-affiliated militants attacked a Russian National Guard outpost near Grozny, Chechnya, resulting in the deaths of six soldiers and six attackers.

Terrorism-related law-enforcement activities continued apace in 2017. Significant events include:

On December 15, the FSB detained seven alleged members of ISIS in St. Petersburg who were allegedly plotting imminent attacks on busy sites throughout the city, including the Kazan

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Cathedral. Russian media reports identified a bomb maker with an ethnic Russian name and other participants from mostly Russia's North Caucasus. One report identified one suspect as a native of Tajikistan.

On September 26, Russia's Interior Ministry, the Federal Security Service (FSB), and the National Guard arrested a member of ISIS on Interpol's wanted list in Irkutsk, East Siberia. The suspected terrorist was a 30-year old native of a former Soviet republic.

On August 31, the FSB detained two Central Asian-born men in the Moscow region for plotting terrorist attacks for September 1. According to the FSB, one suspect pledged allegiance to ISIS, while the other claimed to be carrying out ISIS instructions. The FSB seized a powerful makeshift explosive device and bomb-making components intended to carry out a suicide bomb attack.

On August 14 outside Moscow, the FSB) arrested one Russian national and three citizens of Central Asian nations on suspicion of plotting attacks on public transportation and shopping centers in Moscow using suicide bombers and explosives. According to the FSB, those arrested included two would-be suicide bombers, an expert in explosives, and an ISIS "emissary."

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

In response to Russia's violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and other acts, the U.S. suspended most bilateral engagement with the Russian government on economic issues. The U.S. continues to investigate allegations of mistreatment or discrimination against U.S. investors in Russia, and urges Russia to improve its investment climate, adhere to the rule of law, and foster transparency. In response, Russia further diminished the ability of U.S. institutions to engage in Russia. Anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric is widespread in both official media sources and on social media. Despite the rhetoric, no major incidents of violence targeting U.S. citizens took place in 2017. Learn more on the U.S. Commercial

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Service in Russia website.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Moscow as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Presidential elections are scheduled to take place in March 2018. Although mass demonstrations/civil unrest are not expected, the best practice is to avoid attending demonstrations of any nature. Russian law does not require police to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain individuals.

Civil Unrest

Russian law provides for freedom of assembly, but local authorities are placing increased restrictions on this right. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or marches by more than one person to formally notify the government of their intent to assemble. Failure to obtain official permission to hold a protest frequently results in the demonstration being deemed unlawful by law enforcement officials, who routinely disperse such protests. While numerous public demonstrations do take place, local officials selectively deny permission to assemble or offer alternate venues that are inconveniently or remotely located. U.S. citizens should avoid public demonstrations and avoid any large crowds and public gatherings that lack enhanced security measures.

Please review the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 for additional information on this issue.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Russian authorities have detained, fined, and in some cases deported travelers for engaging in religious activities. Russian officials have stated that Russia recognizes four "historic" religions: Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. The Russian government places restrictions on so-called "missionary activity" and defines it broadly – travelers engaging in certain types of religious work may risk harassment, detention, fines, or deportation for administrative violations if they do not have proper authorization from a registered religious group. The Russian government has detained U.S. citizens for religious activities that they contend are not permitted under a tourist visa. Even speaking at a religious service, traditional or non-traditional, has resulted in immigration violations.

In 2017, the media and NGOs reported the killing of a deputy imam and a number of physical assaults based on religious identity. Physical assaults on Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Muslims, and Jews, as well as other attacks on individuals, which may have been based on

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both their ethnicity and religion, took place in 2017. NGOs reported that in 2017 fewer instances of violence based on religious identity took place when compared to the last several years. A number of events, including television programs and social media postings, aroused societal criticism because of their portrayal of the Holocaust. Acts of vandalism motivated by religious hatred continue to occur, with actions targeting Jewish, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Islamic religious sites.

For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Putting Your Faith in Travel: Security Implications."

Please review the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 for additional information on this issue.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Russia suffers from extensive land and groundwater pollution due to the lax environmental protections during the Soviet era. A recent study indicated that Moscow's air quality is similar to that of comparable large, industrial cities; however there have been episodes of spikes in foul-smelling emissions (particularly hydrogen sulfide) likely as a result of refurbishing work at Moscow-area refineries. There have been no reports of long-term illnesses from these releases.

Critical Infrastructure

Russia continues to experience industrial accidents directly associated with inadequate enforcement of safety and health standards in the workplace. Aging infrastructure and rampant corruption in regulatory bodies have contributed to several well-publicized disasters. Fines and facility closures are normally enforced only after an accident has occurred.

Economic Concerns

While the Russian Federation made substantial advances in 2017 to decrease the regulatory burden on businesses at the regional level, fundamental structural problems in governance of the economy continue to stifle foreign direct investment throughout the country. In particular, Russia's judicial system remains heavily biased in favor of the state, which often leaves investors with little recourse in the event of a legal dispute with the government. High levels of corruption among government officials compound this risk. The Russian government frequently adopts rules with little or no transparency and without incorporating public comments, creating significant business uncertainty. Russia's import substitution program often gives local producers a significant advantage over foreign competitors that do not meet

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Russia's localization requirements. Further complicating matters, Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea have led to the imposition of sanctions on targeted Russian entities by the U.S. and EU – increasing the cost of legal compliance for Western companies and placing restrictions on the types of business activities legally permissible for Western companies in Russia.

U.S. investors in Russia must ensure they are in full compliance with sanctions stemming from Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and Russia's military involvement in eastern Ukraine. These measures include: a prohibition on the refinancing of debt beyond 30 days for sanctioned entities; restrictions on the export to Russia of certain kinds of equipment for the energy sector; and a complete ban on dealings with those entities or individuals identified by the U.S. Treasury Department as "specially designated nationals." Further information on the U.S. sanctions program is available at the U.S. Treasury's website. Please review the State Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs Investment Climate Statements for 2017 for additional information on this issue.

Privacy Concerns

OSAC constituents have no reasonable expectation of privacy in Russia. Telephone and electronic communications are subject to surveillance at any time and without advisory, which can compromise sensitive information. The Russian System for Operational-Investigative Activities (SORM) legally permits authorities to monitor and record all data that traverses Russia's networks. A SORM Factsheet is available. Travelers should assume all communications are monitored.

Personal Identity Concerns

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is widespread in Russia and acts of violence and harassment targeting LGBTI individuals occur frequently. Government officials have made derogatory comments about LGBTI persons, and Russian law bans providing "the propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" to minors. The law is vague as to what Russia considers propaganda, but foreign citizens can face fines, up to 15 days in jail, and deportation if their actions are found to be violating Russian law. Violence against the LGBTI community has increased sharply since the law banning propaganda was passed, including entrapment and torture of young gay men by neo-Nazi gangs and the murder of multiple individuals due to their sexual orientation.

Drug-related Crimes

Russia is both a transit and destination country for international narcotics traffickers. Criminal elements use Russia's financial system and foreign legal entities to launder money associated

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with criminal activities. Criminals invest (in the process laundering) currency through securities instruments, e-currencies, precious metals, domestic and foreign real estate, and luxury consumer goods.

Russia remains a major destination for Afghan opiates, which enter the country via Central Asian states, and consumes approximately 70-75 metric tons (MT) of heroin annually according to a UN estimate from 2011. Other illegal narcotics, such as cocaine, are typically smuggled in via St. Petersburg and Black Sea ports by drug couriers originating in the Caribbean and South America. In the first half of 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available), Russian law enforcement seized approximately 14 MT of illegal drugs, with 1.34 MT being opiates. Three federal agencies conduct drug-related investigations in Russia: Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD); Federal Security Service (FSB); and Federal Customs Service (FTS).

In April 2016, the government disbanded the Federal Narcotics Control Service (FSKN) and assigned its functions to other agencies. The MVD fulfills most of the former FSKN responsibilities and absorbed approximately 70% of its workforce. It is expected that the Ministries of Health and Labor will assume responsibility for drug user rehabilitation. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Russia are severe. Convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings occur infrequently. The motives for the kidnappings range from strictly for-profit to political. There is no information to suggest U.S. citizens are being specifically targeted as kidnap victims.

Police Response

Police presence in Moscow is deliberately escalated during key holidays and at major events such as the World Cup. Russia enforces special restrictions on dual U.S.-Russian nationals. Due to the Russian government-imposed reduction on U.S. diplomatic personnel in Russia, the U.S. government's capacity to provide services to U.S. citizens has been reduced compared to circumstances prior to September 2017.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Although it is not a systemic problem, incidents of U.S. citizens as victims of harassment, mistreatment, and extortion by law enforcement and other officials do occur. U.S. consular assistance to detained individuals is often unreasonably delayed by Russian officials. Russian law does not require police to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain

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individuals. Random document checks and other official actions provide opportunities for “on-the-spot” fines. If stopped, the best practice for non-Russians is to obtain the officer’s name, badge number, and patrol car number, and note where the stop happened. This information assists local officials in responding to the harassment.

If detained by the police, American citizens can contact American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. U.S. citizens with an emergency during regular office hours can call (7) (495) 728-5577. U.S. citizens with an after-hours emergency can call (7) (495) 728-5000.

Crime Victim Assistance

Report crimes to the local police at 102 (landline), 020 or 112 (mobile phone). American citizens should report all crimes immediately to the police and to the American Citizen Services section of the Embassy or Consulate.

For local first responders, please refer to the Embassy’s Emergency Assistance page.

Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) is the agency primarily responsible for ensuring public order and conducting routine criminal investigations. The uniform worn by the police is dark blue with the word (police) across the back and a police patch on the shoulder.

State Inspection for Traffic Security (GIBDD) is the MVD entity responsible for the regulation of traffic and investigating traffic accidents. Their uniforms are black with red trim.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) is Russia’s main domestic security agency. The FSB combines functions and powers similar to those exercised by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Medical Emergencies

To summon an ambulance (*Skoraya Pomosh*), dial 103 (landline), 030 or 112 (mobile phone). Medical care can be expensive and may not be comprehensive. Some private facilities offer high quality services, but many restrict services to normal business hours. The Russian national medical system provides emergency care that ranges in quality from poor to mediocre by Western standards. Pharmacies are widespread and frequently offer 24-hour service, although the English language ability of the staff may be limited.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy’s Medical Assistance page.

Available Air Ambulance Services

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The U.S. Embassy maintains a list of medevac services in Russia. In the event of an emergency, they will work with nearby providers to facilitate a medical evacuation.

Insurance Guidance

Travelers should purchase medical insurance that covers medical evacuation via air ambulance and that will reimburse for medical treatment provided in Russia. The U.S. Social Security Medicare Program does not provide coverage for hospital or medical costs in Russia.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers should consult EPA and CDC guidance for information on coping with air pollution. The CDC recommends all travelers have current routine vaccinations as well as hepatitis A, and some travelers should be inoculated against hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, and/or rabies. The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Russia.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Moscow is active, meeting quarterly. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's Europe Team with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Bolshoy Deviatinskiy Pereulok No. 8

Moscow 121099

Russian Federation

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri 0830-1630, excluding Russian and U.S. Holidays

Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Switchboard – +7-495-728-5000

Website: <https://ru.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

U.S. Consulate General St. Petersburg:

<https://ru.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/st-petersburg/>

U.S. Consulate General Vladivostok:

<https://ru.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/vladivostok/>

U.S. Consulate General Yekaterinburg:

<https://ru.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/yekaterinburg/>

Embassy Guidance

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U.S. citizens traveling to Russia should register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices. The data that is entered is secured behind Department of State firewalls, accessed only by cleared personnel in Embassies, Consulates, and the Department of State, and releasable only under the provisions of the Privacy Act.

Additional Resources

Russia Country Information Sheet

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