

## F.A.Q of COSAK 2007

### **PRACTICE**

#### ***What are the needed forms to fill?***

Obligatory passport and visa. no vaccine is requested to enter the country. Examination HIV for long stays.

#### ***What is the time difference?***

2 h prior all year for Moscow and St. Petersburg/ France, and 3 hours/England

#### ***What is the best period to go there?***

From May till September, but brusque changes of temperature may occur in spring, especially in St. Petersburg. July and August are superb. May and September is rather soft and less tourist. In February there is most snow.

#### ***Is the life expensive?***

Yes. The hotels of the two big cities are expensive and often not tremendous. The meals are at very moderate prices. Transport and drinks are cheap. Museums remain under priced for the foreigners (half-price for the students).

#### ***Can we travel with the children?***

No problem of security. But Moscow and St. Petersburg are huge cities, the first one is very polluted.

#### ***What is the best way to go there?***

In Traction Avant Citroën.

#### ***Do they find some caviar easily?***

Bad and untasty is very easy to find. If you search quality, go to the good shopping arcades or the fine groceries. Avoid étals to tourists. In Russia as everywhere, the quality is expensive, but it remains 3 - 5 times cheaper than in France! However, know that the importation of black caviar beluga is forbidden.

#### ***Energy***

The orifices of plugs are smaller than ours. It is better to take a small adapter to buy in a supermarket before departure (or in a newsstand in Moscow).

### **TELEPHONE**

#### ***Portable communications hyper expensive***

Park in your portables! They will not steal them from you more than elsewhere, but you will see to what extent people phone, even in the subway everywhere... However, it is very expensive. Your communications to England, France, Belgium or Switzerland will be invoiced to you 5 - 8 € / mn, according to the Russian operator partner of yours. And you pay so very a lot communications which arrive at you: in the order of 2 - 3 € / mn. Communications inside Moscow or of St. Petersburg (you make the number directly without passing by the international) are affordable.

#### ***Ask for prices the hotel***

To call the foreign countries, it is most often bluntly very expensive. According to hotels ...

Resolutions exist: buy cards in the specialized newsstands or the boutiques of telephony (it is better, for advice, to have somebody speaking English or French). They allow you to phone cheaper by composing a code. Offer is numerous and the rather fluctuating market. In general, the sellers will orientate you. Price ranges are wide and will allow you to find what you need. There are also Internet cards for connections in the same conditions.

### **PHOTOGRAPH**

Some advice of common sense:

- do not take photographs of militiamen or soldiers, except around Kremlin
- It is even more disadvised to make pictures nearby vehicles of the Militia as well as trucks of the army and buildings used by the "guarantors" of public order. Small tolerance for the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (interesting architecture), *Kremlin* (in impossible obviousness to forbid) and to a certain extent *Loubianka*, which thrills curiosity of course. Know that what counts, it is not your perception of things, but that of the militiaman! It's difficult to change old habits.
- Also, do not take photographs in the markets where they sell pirating. Particularly touchy sellers and *akrana* guards risks taking over your camera, grabbing the film and keep it. In case you would have a throwaway apparatus, these guards without any official accreditation can even confiscate it also.
- Try to be as discreet as possible by taking photographs of activities or of suspicious figures.
- It worths to process the films in Moscow; 3 € the film of 36 poses, correct quality; you will make your doubles and your enlargement back in France.
- In case you would not have camera or lost yours, it is possible to find of good old Zenith in the chips of Ismailovo in bargain prices (they can have of it good as 400-500 R - that is 12 - 15 € - by haggling). Finally, the collectors will not miss to purchase of a nice Leica (made in RDA) very gilded, with leather scabbard for about fifty euro (and sometimes working).

### **Silver{Money, Exchange rate?**

#### **With what currency can they pay?**

In roubles, of course! In spite of the nearness of Europe, the dollar remains the second currency for cash settlements. No problem to change pounds in banks and foreign exchange offices.

Today, the money changers are very obviously everywhere displayed. The exchange rates of the euro, Poound and the dollar are roughly diplayed: price of purchase and sale. Of course, avoid changing in airports and especially in hotels. Big game consists in comparing rates. Then, be careful with commissions. In Moscow, they become rare; in St. Petersburg, they are systematic. Attention, in St. Petersburg, change for the foreigners is not the same that for the Russians. Therefore, if you are with Russians, ask them to undertake the foreign exchange transaction. There can be a difference from 3 to 6 R by pound in favour of the inhabitants. You can get some money in Bankomat (distributors), which become more and more frequent and sure. But attention, commissions are rather well brought up (but really lower than for *traveller' s checks*).

#### **Direct debit cards**

*Card, MasterCard and Visa* allow its possessor and its family (if it repatriation goes with it) to benefit from the medical care.

**Tip** It is good to know that the transitional period of the the country still subjects the Russians, in numerous aspects of their common life, to the necessity to have to pay bribes. Happily, the tourist are not concerned. The tip is a respectable tradition: 5 - 10 % in restaurants, some dollars « in hotels », "up to you" in any situation where you will be served well.

### **POLICE and PUBLIC ORDER**

After the terrorist acts victim in Moscow, police checks increased everywhere. At city entries, in the subway, near railway stations, on streets. This control is made without complexes nor protests, of whoever it is. If you are proved in the subway, show your passport, remain calm and firm, but are not especially aggressive.

In case you would be stopped further to an offence of the highway code or simply because the « city sergeant » needs of « beans for the children » (as they say in Africa), there are some chances that, in front of your ignorance of Russian, he lets you go off. As a rule, it is better to remain sat in the steering wheel and to show its documents, of which an obligatory "Lending authorization» for any lent vehicle. If offence is real, "Militsioner" has all chances to want to gain advantage from it...

**Are there problems of security linked to the mafia?** At the risk of crumpling you, the mafioso have many other goals that the poor small tourists! They have their business to be managed and will not absolutely care about you. Unless you go in Russia to make the mafia's deal of the century, you interest nobody.

### **Is not it dangerous to travel in western Russia?**

Moscow and St. Petersburg do not present more risks than the big European capitals. Just remain vigilant in the tourist places. It is the petty crime which is especially to fear (and its link with prostitution).

As everywhere, social inequality equal delinquency, and she concerns everybody, Russians or tourists. That your alertness is suited to the circumstances! No ostentation in wealth, avoid attracting possible candidates for a quick and easy benefit. Less they will see your values and precious objects, better you will go on. In the hotel, they have to be in the safe. Generally, if you are approached while you asked for nothing, trust your common sense not to meet in embarrassing or unpleasant situations.

In the chapter formalities, be sure that your visa is recorded by the organization or the person who invited you. It must be made in the three days according to your arrival. If you did not make it, you risk troubles with the police at the borders in your departure (it is the former inheritance of the dispositions which applied to the tourists who visited Soviet Union, but they sometimes remember it).

## **LANGUAGE**

### **What language to use?**

To understand Russian a bit is very advisable. To learn to decipher the cyrillic is almost necessary (see glossary). English is (a bit) used in tourist facilities and begins being learnt by the young generations.

## HEALTH

Do not forget that a travel insurance of a company recognized by the Russian consulate is necessary to acquire a visa. The health situation in Russia answers *roughly* the same norms as in Western Europe: the vaccination of the population was one of the big programs of the social policy of postwar period. Some small advice is nevertheless obvious:

- *Tap water* is not potable in Russia.
- Prefer making your purchases of fresh food on the *markets* of centers-cities rather than on those of periphery: controls are there more severe. To wash fruits, vegetables, meats, it is common sense.
- Use condoms in case: it is necessary. Authorities took a census of about 200 000 persons affected by the virus of the *AIDS*; but according to their own evaluations, reality would be rather around a million persons (young women for about a quarter).

## POLITENESS

Least that they can say is that the human reports of the street are not imprinted of "fusses". Slavonic soul, made to bloom in sometimes severe living conditions on a lot of plans, does not burden itself with it. "Good morning ", "*please* " and others "thank you " will however be received with gratitude by those to whom you will address them. You will note however that in their everyday contact, the Russians are *more "instantaneous"*.

## SEX

Attention, it will not be said that Russia is a country of destination for sexual tourism. That fabled beauty of the women is a reality. But in sex, discouraging experiments might occur (not a rule, very much happily!),

- Risk n ° 1: expectations on both sides can not correspond, certain places can look like places of dredge, but they are only waiting for the friqué barge there (example *Night Flight* in Moscow).
- Risk n ° 2: theft. A price dealt. But adventure turns in another way.
- Risk 3: the AIDS.. Essential extreme caution.

Conclusion: it is better to stay in the romantic of seduction; take your balalaika and, go to sing your love song under the balcony of the princess. Who knows?