

Arriving in Russia

Airports in Russia

On the last leg of your journey, you will fill out a customs form on the plane. You will need this handy along with your passport, visa, and luggage tags attached to your airline ticket. The plane may roll up to the gate or stay on the ramp and roll a set of stairways to your aircraft. **Do not take any pictures!** Make sure you have all of your carry-on items and make your way where airport security directs you toward the inside of the building. Once there you will stand in line for passport control.

Passport Control

Make sure you get in the line for Foreigners. Others may be talking, but it is best to stay quiet and subdued especially in the airport. There will be a red line on the floor in front of the booth. Do not cross the line until the person ahead of you in line has finished and has passed through. When it is your turn, simply hand your passport and visa (which is pasted inside) to the passport control officer. There is no need to say anything and you will likely not be asked any questions. They will look at your documents and stamp certain sections. When they are done they will pass your documents back to you. Inside your passport will be a **“Migration Card”**. **Don’t lose it as you need that small paper to exit the country!** Pass through the small gate and proceed to Luggage claim.

Getting your Luggage

It will take a little while for the luggage to come. Stand near the luggage carousel and wait for your luggage to arrive. Again, it is tempting to talk to the others in your group around you, but it is best to remain subdued. You may have individuals who are luggage handlers who will help you with your luggage. Politely refuse them by saying no thank you. If you need help you can rent a luggage cart for \$1-2. If your luggage has wheels, you shouldn’t have to rent a cart. Remember, if you have checked a piece of luggage that is the ministry suitcase; be sure to pick that up as well. Once you have your luggage, proceed to the Customs and ensure they stamp your Customs form.

Missing Luggage

If your luggage does not arrive, inform the Mission Trip Director. You will have to go to a room to document a claim just like in the USA, but it takes a little longer. You will need to have customs stamp your Customs form, then go to document your claim, then go through customs again. The process keeps changing so be prepared to “flex” as this is all worked out. Remember that if the ministry suitcase is missing, you will need to know the description of that piece and your own as well. Once you have made your claim for your missing luggage, proceed to Customs and ensure they stamp your Customs form if you have something to declare.

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Customs

You may simply be directed to pass through the “Green Line” and have nothing to declare. If so, proceed to the airport lobby and await the rest of the team. If the customs agent asks to look at your bags, simply comply with their request.

The customs agent will usually speak some broken English and ask you to place your bags one at a time on the x-ray machine. They will ask for your passport, visa, and your customs form. They may ask you a question and may hand inspect your luggage. This is normal. Answer their questions simply and directly. Do not become “chatty” and give more information than they are asking. If they ask you about the contents of your suitcases, you should say,

”These are my personal belongings and *gifts* for friends”.

Do not say or use the term “humanitarian aid”. This will cause delays and more scrutiny since “humanitarian aid” falls within a different taxation and regulation category. Once they are done, make sure that they have stamped your documents and you are not leaving anything behind. Once you have cleared customs, proceed to the airport lobby and wait there for the rest of the group to arrive. Keep this stamped copy with your passport as you will need this when exiting the country.

Transportation to the Hotel

Once everyone has cleared Customs, we will make our way to the parking lot to load our belongings on the bus or van depending on the size of the group arriving. It will take less than one hour to arrive at our hotel. On the bus you can take pictures as we travel through the city on our way to the hotel.

Exchanging Money

On our way to the hotel we will stop at a bank and exchange money. You will need your passport to exchange money. Decide how much you want to exchange. We will have other opportunities later, but it will take more time and may not be convenient. The bank will give you a better exchange rate than the hotel. Remember to be careful with your money, passport and that migration card! The translator will be there at the window to help us through the process. Once everyone has exchanged money, we will continue our trip to the hotel.

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Checking into the Hotel

The Mission Trip Director will pass out room numbers once the group is checked in.

Once we arrive the Mission Trip Director will need to collect all the passports and migration cards to check into the hotel. The hotel will keep the passports so they can register you in the country. You should get your passport and migration card back later that evening or the next morning. Make sure that the migration card has a date stamp on it that shows your date of departure from Russia.

Hotel Rooms

Once you have arrived at your room unpack and get settled in. Also become familiar with the hotel.

1. Know how to exit the hotel using the stairs in case of an emergency just as you would if you were in the USA.
2. Check to see if your phone is working. Be aware that some hotels charge for local calls. Check with the Mission Trip Director about the hotel policy.
3. Know the room numbers of the others in your group and become aware of how to dial between rooms.
4. Do not keep your door open for others to look in. Keep the door closed and locked even if you are down the hall.
5. Do not drink the tap water or brush your teeth in it. Bottled water will be available from the Mission Trip Director or the one he assigns to help with that.

Use this time to rest, but not go to sleep. As a group we will have dinner in a nearby Russian café or the hotel restaurant that evening and then return early so everyone can rest from the long trip. See the section on “Hotel Accommodations” for more information on hotel rooms.

Sunday Church Services

On Sunday our mission group will attend a local church. Services may start in the morning or begin at noon. Check with the Mission Trip Director for the time. Services can last from 1.5 to 3 hours depending on the church. We will attend the Transformation Church which is a Baptist Church led by Pastor Maxim Baranov. Services start at noon and go 1.5 hours. Tea is often served after the service for fellowship. Wear your SAC nametag so everyone will know who you are! The service will typically be in Russian with wonderful Russian Christian Music. Many of the songs will be familiar tunes sung in their language. This will be an awesome experience to worship together with our Russian brothers and sisters in Christ!

Nametags

All of you will have nametags that you will wear at the ministry sites. Please wear these and don't forget! It's a great way to build a relationship if people know your name.

Wear these inside the buildings at the ministry sites, church, other times where you want to build relationships. Do not wear them in restaurants, on the street, in the metro, or to breakfast in the morning at the hotel.

When you give nametags to the kids in your group at your ministry site, you may want to reward them with a piece of candy if they remember to wear *their* nametag!