

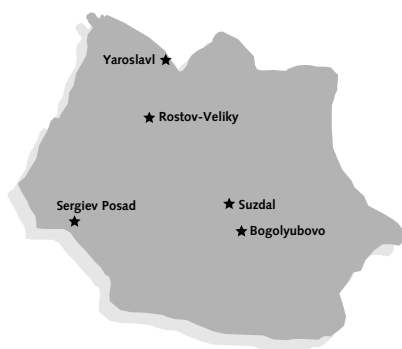
# Golden Ring Золотое Кольцо

Ancient Rus grew up in the clutch of towns northeast of Moscow that is now known as the Golden Ring. The whitewashed walls of these once-fortified cities still stand, in many cases. The golden spires and onion domes of their monasteries still mark the horizon, evoking medieval Rus. Bells ring out from towering belfries; robed holy men scurry through church doors; historic tales recall mysterious, magical times.

The Golden Ring – so called for its wealth of architectural and artistic riches – is among Russia’s most enchanting destinations. Some of these spots are accessible from Moscow by day trip. But if you have a few days to spare, it is worth leaving behind the big-city bustle to immerse yourself in the age-old allure of the Golden Ring.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Sampling the varieties of *medovukha* (honey ale) at Suzdal’s **Mead-Tasting Hall** (p210)
- Seeing the domes and spires of Rostov-Veliky’s many monasteries from **Lake Nero** (p219)
- Lighting a candle to St Sergius in the **Trinity Cathedral** (p222), Sergiev Posad
- Strolling from church to church along the Yaroslavl **river embankments** (p214)
- Admiring the simple perfection of the **Church of Intercession on the Nerl** (p206), Bogolyubovo



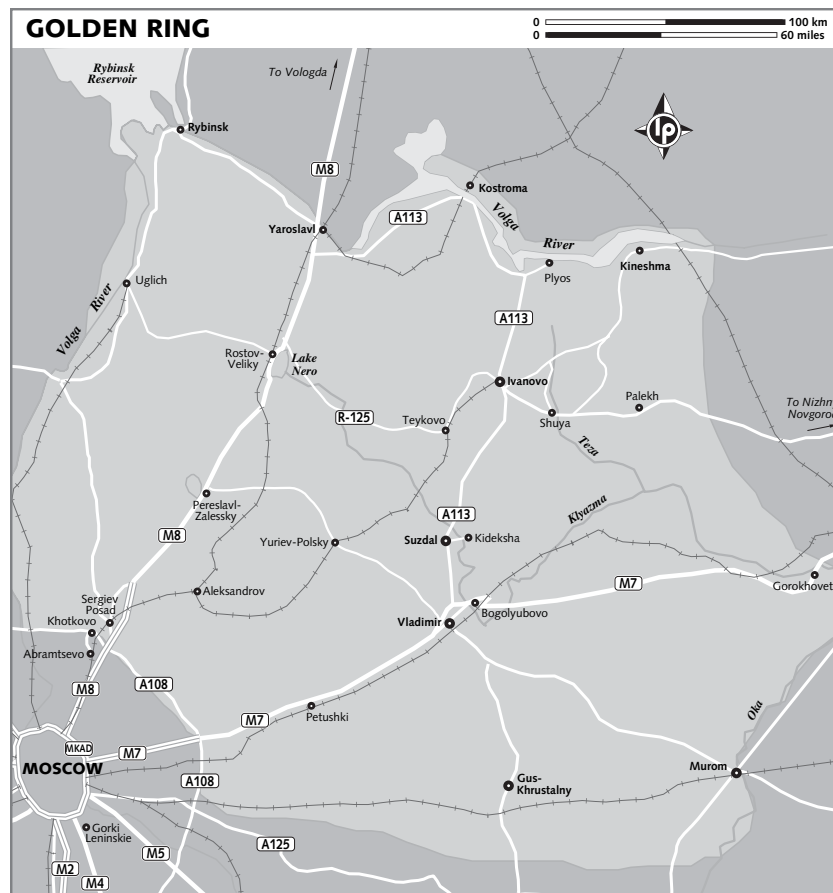
## History

The ‘Golden Ring’ is a recently coined term that evokes a heroic distant past. Located northeast of Moscow, the Golden Ring is composed of some of Russia’s oldest cities, wherein occurred the events that shaped early Russian history.

Towards the end of the 9th century, Slav tribes began to migrate into the hilly forest land of the Volga headwaters. They established small farming communities, eventually absorbing the Finno-Ugric tribes that already occupied the region. These Slav settlements made up the easternmost reaches of the Kyivan Rus principality and bordered the formidable Turkic Bulgar state of the Middle Volga.

Wary of his eastern rival, the Kyivan Grand Prince, Vladimir I, defeated the Bulgars in combat and secured his claim of sovereignty over these Slav tribes. Vladimir then made his son, Yaroslav, the regional potentate, responsible for collecting tribute and converting pagans among the locals. Upon his death, in 1015, Vladimir’s realm was divided among his sons, ushering a prolonged period of violent sibling rivalry and fragmented power.

The victors who eventually emerged from this fratricidal competition were the descendants of Yaroslav’s son Vsevolod, who had inherited the Rostov-Suzdal principality. As a result, the locus of power in medieval Russia gradually shifted eastward.



GOLDEN RING

GOLDEN RING

In this period, the Golden Ring towns prospered and expanded under a string of shrewd and able princes.

In the early 12th century, Suzdal's Vladimir Monomakh founded the fortress city of Vladimir, high above the Klyazma River. He entrusted the eastern lands to his young son, Yuri Dolgoruky. In 1125, Yuri took the title of Grand Prince and

declared Suzdal as the northern capital of Rus. In 1157, Yuri's son, Andrei Bogolyubsky, moved the Grand Prince's throne to Vladimir, which grew into the dominant city-state in the region. Andrei and his brother Vsevolod III (r 1176–1212) brought builders and artists from as far away as Western Europe to give Vladimir a Kyiv-like splendour. When the Mongols paid a

### HIDDEN TREASURES

One of the charms of the Golden Ring is the proliferation of tiny villages – each populated with a handful of simple wooden houses, but always dominated by a jaw-dropping, majestic church. Recent history has not been kind to many of these idyllic spots, and the churches are in various states of disrepair. But they stand as witness to the strength of spirit, the persistence of beauty and – perhaps – the wisdom of history.

If you have your own transport, it is worth making a detour to discover some of these lesser-explored gems of the Golden Ring.

#### Aleksandrov

First documented in 1328, this village 120km north of Moscow (60km northeast of Sergiev Posad) gained prominence when Grand Prince Vasily III chose it as the site for his splendid royal palace. Under Ivan the Terrible, this 'Russian Versailles' served as the capital of Russia. The palace site now houses the Assumption Monastery, but little remains from the original structure. Only the 1513 Trinity Cathedral harks back to the village's glorious history: its gates were looted from Novgorod and Tver when Ivan sacked those cities in 1570.

#### Khotkovo

This village between Abramtsevo and Sergiev Posad is the home of the Convent of the Intercession, founded in 1308 (though the present buildings are from the 18th century or later). The parents of Sergius of Radonezh (the patron saint of Russia) are buried in the convent's recently restored Intercession Cathedral.

#### Murom

Locals boast that Murom, 137km southeast of Vladimir, is among the prettiest towns in Russia. Indeed, writer Maxim Gorky apparently agreed when he wrote 'Whoever has not seen Murom from the Oka River, has not seen Russian beauty.' The town is littered with 16th- to 18th-century churches and monasteries, including the elegant 1552 Saviour-Transfiguration Cathedral.

#### Palekh

The small village 65km east of Ivanovo on the Nizhny Novgorod road is famous for its artistry. Its namesake lacquer boxes are on display in the local museum. The Raising of the Cross Church also shows off the local craft, with a fine display of restored icons from the 14th to 19th centuries.

#### Yuriev-Polsky

Founded by Yuri Dolgoruky in 1152, his namesake village sits on the Kaluksha River about halfway between Vladimir and Pereslavl-Zalessky. It is still surrounded by 12th-century ramparts, which provide excellent views of villagers' painted wooden houses and overflowing gardens. Within the ramparts, St George's Church – built in 1230 by Yuri Dolgoruky's grandson Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich (who is also buried here) – has a façade completely covered in elaborate stone carvings.

### TELEPHONE CODE CHANGES

In late 2005, the Russian Communications Ministry announced plans to change the area codes for 19 regions across Russia, including many towns in the Golden Ring. All codes that used to start with '0' should now start with a '4' instead, although be aware that there may be teething problems with this change. The new numbers are reflected here.

visit in the 13th century, Alexander Nevsky, Russia's first war hero, rebuilt Vladimir and restored the city's political status.

The heirs of Vladimir Monomakh sought to create a realm that rivalled Kyiv, the cradle of eastern Slavic civilisation. Under the reign of Andrei Bogolyubsky, in particular, the region experienced a building frenzy. Imposing towers, golden gates, fortified monasteries and elegant churches were constructed to match the cultural ambitions of its political rulers. Rostov-Veliky, Suzdal, Vladimir and Sergiev Posad each played an important part in making the Golden Ring the spiritual centre of Russian Orthodoxy.

The heyday of the Golden Ring towns was short-lived. Marauding Mongol invaders overran the towns' realm and forced their princes to pay them homage. With this change in regional politics, the erstwhile lesser principality of Muscovy rose in prominence through its role as the Golden Horde's chosen tribute collector. Gradually, the once proud principalities of the Golden Ring were absorbed into the expanding Muscovite state and reduced in status to another set of provincial capital towns.

### Getting There & Around

The larger towns in the Golden Ring are accessible by train from Moscow, but it is necessary to travel by bus to visit some of the region's highlights.

The most efficient (albeit expensive) way to visit the Golden Ring is by car. Renting a car in Moscow will allow you to take a tour around the Golden Ring in a few days, stopping in some small, off-the-beaten-track destinations (see the boxed text, opposite). Alternatively, you can often hire cars with drivers at the local bus stations. Rates are about R10 per kilometre from Moscow,

but less around the smaller towns, which may be cost-effective if you're travelling in a group or are on a tight schedule.

Local Moscow-based tour agencies such as Dom Patriarshy Tours (p171) also organise excursions to most of these destinations.

### VLADIMIR ВЛАДИМИР

☎ 4922 / ☎ 360,000 / 📍 Moscow

High up on Vladimir's slope above the Klyazma River sits the solemnly majestic Assumption Cathedral, built to announce Vladimir's claim as capital of Rus. These days, Vladimir – 178km east of Moscow – feels more like a modern, provincial town than an ancient capital. Nonetheless, the grandeur of medieval Vladimir shines through the commotion of this busy, industrial town. Exquisite examples of Russia's most formative architecture, along with some entertaining museums, make Vladimir one of the jewels in the Golden Ring.

### History

After being founded by Prince Vladimir Monomakh in the early 12th century, the city grew to become a splendid political, cultural and religious centre. See opposite for details of Vladimir's early history.

The city recovered from devastating attacks by nomadic Mongol raiders in 1238 and 1293. But its realm disintegrated into smaller principalities, with Moscow increasingly dominant. The head of the Russian Church resided here from 1300 to 1326, but then moved to Moscow. Worldly power finally shifted to Moscow around this time, too. Even so, the rulers remained nominally Grand Princes of Vladimir until the 15th century.

In the 20th century, Vladimir prospered anew on the back of textile, mechanical engineering and chemical industries.

### Orientation

Vladimir's main street is Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul, although it sometimes goes by its former name, ul III Internatsionala. To make matters more confusing, other segments of the street go by different names, including simply ul Moskovskaya, which is just west of the Golden Gate. Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul is where you'll find the main attractions such as the Golden Gate and the Cathedrals of the Assumption and St Dmitry. The train and

bus stations are 500m east on Vokzalnaya ul at the bottom of the slope.

## Information

**Internet@Salon** (cnr uls Gagarina & Bolshaya Moskovskaya; per hr R30; ☎ 9am-9pm)

**Post & telephone office** (ul Podbelskogo; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri)

**Sberbank** (Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 27; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Exchange facilities and ATM.

## Sights

### ASSUMPTION CATHEDRAL

A white-stone version of Kyiv's brick Byzantine churches, the **Assumption Cathedral** (☎ 325 201; admission R100; ☎ 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun) was begun in 1158 – its simple but majestic form adorned with fine carving, innovative for the time. The cathedral was extended on all sides after a fire in the 1180s, when it gained the four outer domes.

The cathedral used to house the *Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God*, brought from Kyiv by Andrei Bogolyubsky. A national protector bestowing supreme status to its city of residence, the icon was moved to Moscow in 1390 and is now kept in the Tretyakov Gallery.

Inside the working church, a few restored 12th-century murals of peacocks and prophets can be deciphered about halfway up the inner wall of the outer north aisle; this was originally an outside wall. The real treasures are the Last Judgment frescoes by Andrei Rublyov and Daniil Chyorny, painted in 1408 in the central nave and inner south aisle, under the choir gallery towards the west end.

The church also contains the original coffin of Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod, the 13th-century military leader who was also Prince of Vladimir. He was buried in the former **Nativity Monastery** east of here, but his remains were moved to St Petersburg in 1724 when Peter the Great allotted him Russian hero status.

Adjoining the cathedral on the northern side are an 1810 **bell tower** and the 1862 **St George's Chapel**.

### CATHEDRAL OF ST DMITRY

A quick stroll to the east of the Assumption Cathedral is the smaller **Cathedral of St Dmitry** (1193-97), where the art of Vladimir-Suzdal stone carving reached its pinnacle.

The church is permanently closed, but the attraction here is its exterior walls, covered in an amazing profusion of images.

The top centre of the north, south and west walls all show King David bewitching the birds and beasts with music. The Kyivan prince Vsevolod III, who had this church built as part of his palace, appears at the top left of the north wall, with a baby son on his knee and other sons kneeling on each side. Above the right-hand window of the south wall, Alexander the Great ascends into heaven, a symbol of princely might; on the west wall appear the labours of Hercules.

### CHAMBERS

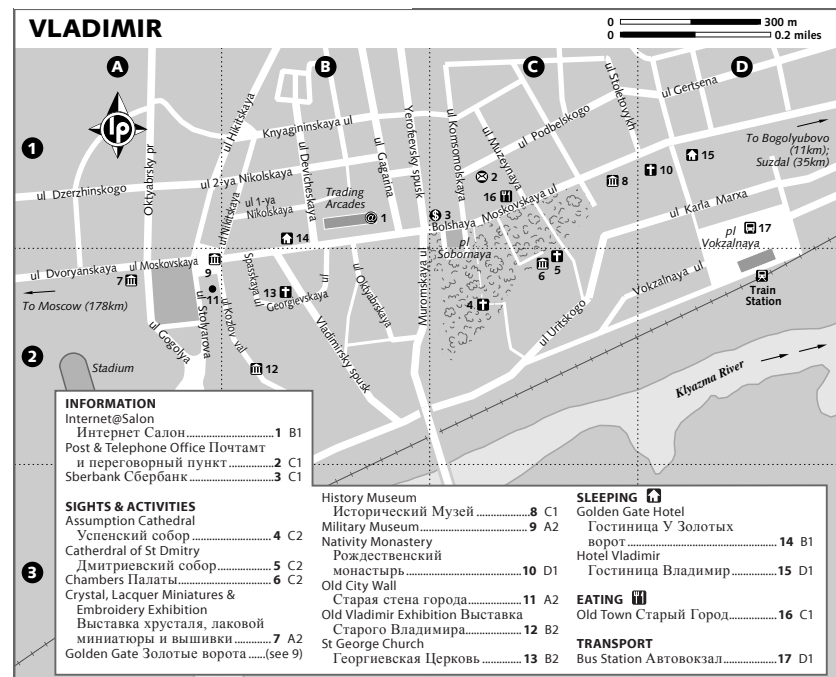
The grand building between the cathedrals is known as the **Chambers** (☎ 323 320; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 58; admission R150; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) and contains a children's museum, art gallery and historical exhibit. The former is a welcome diversion for little ones, who may well be suffering from old-church syndrome on this trip. The art gallery features art since the 18th century, with wonderful depictions of the Golden Ring towns.

Across the small street, the **History Museum** (☎ 322 284; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 64; admission R50; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) displays many remains and reproductions of the ornamentation from the Cathedrals of the Assumption and St Dmitry.

### GOLDEN GATE

Vladimir's Golden Gate – part defensive tower, part triumphal arch – was modelled on the very similar structure in Kyiv. Originally built by Andrei Bogolyubsky to guard the main, western entrance to his city, it was later restored under Catherine the Great. Now you can climb the narrow stone staircase to check out the **Military Museum** (☎ 322 559; admission R50; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Wed) inside. It is a small exhibit, the centrepiece of which is a diorama of old Vladimir being ravaged by nomadic raiders. Across the street to the south you can see a remnant of the old wall that protected the city.

The red-brick building opposite was built in 1913 to house the Old Believers' Trinity Church. Now it is a **Crystal, Lacquer Miniatures & Embroidery Exhibition** (☎ 324 872; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 2; admission R50; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Mon), which features the crafts of Gus-Khrustalny and other nearby towns.



### OLD VLADIMIR EXHIBIT

The red-brick water tower atop the old ramparts houses the **Old Vladimir Exhibition** (☎ 325 451; ul Kozlov val; admission R40; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), a nostalgic collection of old photos, advertisements and maps, including a photo of a very distinguished couple taking a ride in Vladimir's first automobile in 1896. The highlight is the view from the top.

The nearby **St George Church** (Georgievskaya ul 2a) houses the Vladimir Theatre of Choral Music, where performances are often held on summer weekends.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Golden Gate Hotel** (☎ 323 116; www.golden-gate.ru in Russian; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 17; s/d incl breakfast R1800/2300) The 14 rooms at this shiny new hotel are spacious and comfortable, with large windows overlooking the activity on the main street – or a central courtyard if you prefer. The attached restaurant is among the town's best, and is popular with tour groups.

**Hotel Vladimir** (☎ 323 042; tour@gtk.elcom.ru; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 74; s/d with bathroom incl breakfast

from R950/1300; P) This conveniently located option has acceptable rooms for all price ranges, including upgraded singles/doubles for R1150/1600. Rooms with shared bathroom are also available for R350 to R500 per person. It is a friendly place with lots of services, including a restaurant and bar.

**Old Town** (☎ 325 101; Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul 41; meals R300-400; ☎ 11am-2am) One of two side-by-side restaurants on the main drag. Choose from the cosy bar, the elegant dining room or – if the weather is fine – the lovely terrace with views of the Cathedral of St Dmitry.

### Getting There & Away

The daily express train between Moscow's Kursky vokzal (Kursk train station; R208, 2½ hours) and Nizhny Novgorod (R290, 2½ hours) stops in Vladimir, as do many slower trains. Privately run buses (R100, three hours) also leave regularly from Kursky and Kazansky vokzals to Vladimir. They do not run on a timetable, but leave as they fill up.

There are also scheduled buses to/from Moscow's Shcholkovskiy bus station, as well as Kostroma (R150, five hours, three daily),

Yaroslavl (R160, 5½ hours, twice daily) and Suzdal (R20, one hour, half-hourly). There are also six buses a day to Nizhny Novgorod (R180, 4½ hours, four daily).

### Getting Around

Trolleybus 5 from the train and bus stations runs up and along Bolshaya Moskovskaya ul, passing the main sights and hotels.

### BOGOLYUBOVO БОГОЛЮБОВО

☎ 4922 / pop 3900 / 📍 Moscow

According to legend, when Andrei Bogolyubsky was returning north from Kyiv in the late 1150s, his horses stopped where Bogolyubovo now stands, 11km east of Vladimir. Apparently they wouldn't go another step, so Andrei was forced to establish his capital in Vladimir, and not his father's old base of Suzdal.

Whatever the reasoning, between 1158 and 1165, Andrei built a stone-fortified palace at this strategic spot near the meeting of the Nerl and Klyazma Rivers. Nearby, he built the most perfect of all old Russian buildings, the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl.

### Sights

#### PALACE & MONASTERY

A tower and arch from Andrei Bogolyubsky's palace survive amid a dilapidated but reopened 18th-century monastery (they are by the Vladimir-Nizhny Novgorod road in the middle of Bogolyubovo).

The dominant buildings today are the monastery's 1841 **bell tower** beside the road, and its 1866 **Assumption Cathedral**. Just east of the cathedral there is an arch and tower, on whose stairs – according to a chronicle – Andrei was assassinated by hostile boyars (nobles). The arch abuts the 18th-century **Church of the Virgin's Nativity**.

#### CHURCH OF THE INTERCESSION ON THE NERL ЦЕРКОВЬ ПОКРОВА НА НЕРЛИ

To reach this famous little church, go 200m towards Vladimir from the monastery-palace complex and turn onto ul Frunze, which winds downhill and under a railway bridge. Take the path to the left that runs along the side of a small wood. The church appears across the meadows, about 1.25km from the bridge. This walk can be precarious in spring, when the area is often flooded by the rising river.

The church's beauty lies in its simple but perfect proportions, a brilliantly chosen waterside site (floods aside) and sparing use of delicate carving. If it looks a mite top-heavy, it's because the original helmet dome was replaced by a cushion dome in 1803.

Legend has it that Andrei had the church built in memory of his favourite son, Iz-yaslav, who was killed in battle against the Bulgars. As with the Cathedral of St Dmitry in Vladimir, King David sits at the top of three façades, the birds and beasts entranced by his music. The interior has more carving, including 20 pairs of lions. If the church is closed, try asking at the house behind.

### Getting There & Away

To get to Bogolyubovo, take trolleybus 1 east from Vladimir and get off at Khimzavod. Walk along the main road for 100m to the bus stop, where you can catch a *marshrutka* (fixed-route minibus) to Bogolyubovo (second stop).

Drivers from central Vladimir should head straight out east along the main road. From Suzdal, turn left when you hit Vladimir's northern bypass and go 5km.

### SUZDAL СУЗДАЛЬ

☎ 49231 / pop 12,000 / 📍 Moscow

The gently winding Kamenka River, flower-drenched meadows and dome-spotted skyline make this medieval capital the perfect fairytale setting. Suzdal, 35km north of Vladimir, has earned a federally protected status, which has limited development in the area. As a result, its main features are its abundance of ancient architectural gems and its decidedly rural atmosphere. Judging by the spires and cupolas, Suzdal may have as many churches as people.

### History

Although the town's history dates back to 1024, Yuri Dolgoruky made Suzdal the capital of the Rostov-Suzdal principality in the first half of the 12th century. Andrei Bogolyubsky moved the capital to Vladimir in 1157, from which time the principality was known as Vladimir-Suzdal. Set in a fertile wheat-growing area, Suzdal remained a trade centre even after Mongol-led invasions. Eventually, it united with Nizhny Novgorod until both were annexed by Moscow in 1392.

Under Muscovite rule, Suzdal became a wealthy monastic centre, with incredible development projects funded by Vasily III and Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, wealthy merchants paid for 30 charming churches, which still adorn the town.

### Orientation

The main street, ul Lenina, runs from north to south through Suzdal. The bus station is 2km east along Vasilyevskaya ul.

### Information

**Post & telephone office** (Krasnaya pl; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Open 24 hours for phone calls.

**Sberbank** (ul Lenina; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Exchange office.

**Vneshtorgbank** (Kremlyovskaya ul; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) Centrally located bank with ATM.

### Sights

#### KREMLIN

The 1.4km-long earth rampart of Suzdal's kremlin, founded in the 11th century, today encloses a few streets of houses and a handful of churches, as well as the main cathedral group on Kremlyovskaya ul.

The **Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral**, its blue domes spangled with gold, was founded in the 1220s, but only its richly carved lower section is original white stone, the rest being 16th-century brick. The inside is sumptuous with 13th- and 17th-century frescoes and 13th-century damascene (gold on copper) west and south doors. Unfortunately, the cathedral was under restoration and closed indefinitely at the time of research.

The **Archbishop's Chambers** houses the **Suzdal History Exhibition** (☎ 21624; admission R30; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon). The exhibition includes the original 13th-century door from the cathedral, photos of its interior and a visit to the 18th-century **Cross Hall** (Krestovaya palata), which was used for receptions. The tent-roofed 1635 **kremlin bell tower** on the east side of the yard contains additional exhibits.

Just west of this group stands the 1766 wooden **St Nicholas Church**, brought from Glatovo village near Yuriyev-Polsky. There's another **St Nicholas** (ul Lebedeva), one of Suzdal's own fine small 18th-century churches, just east of the cathedral group.

### TORGOVAYA PLOSHCHAD

Suzdal's Torgovaya pl (Trade Sq) is dominated by the pillared **Trading Arcades** (1806–11) along its western side. Although the four churches in the immediate vicinity are closed, the five-domed 1707 **Emperor Constantine Church** in the square's northeastern corner is a working church with an ornate interior. Next to it is the smaller 1787 **Virgin of All Sorrows Church**.

### SAVIOUR MONASTERY OF ST EUTHYMIUS

Founded in the 14th century to protect the town's northern entrance, Suzdal's biggest **monastery** (☎ 20746; admission to exhibits R40-50 each or all-inclusive R280; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) grew mighty in the 16th and 17th centuries after Vasily III, Ivan the Terrible and the noble Pozharsky family funded impressive new stone buildings and big land and property acquisitions. It was girded with its great brick walls and towers in the 17th century.

Inside, the **Annunciation Gate-Church** houses an interesting exhibit on Dmitry Pozharsky (1578–1642), leader of the Russian army that drove the Polish invaders from Moscow in 1612.

A tall 16th- to 17th-century **cathedral bell tower** stands before the seven-domed **Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour**. Every 90 minutes from 10.30am to 4.30pm, a short concert of chimes is given on the bell tower's bells. The cathedral was built in the 1590s in 12th- to 13th-century Vladimir-Suzdal style. Inside, restoration has uncovered some bright 1689 frescoes by the school of Gury Nikitin from Kostroma. On summer weekends, a short but heavenly a cappella concert takes place once an hour. The **tomb** of Prince Dmitry Pozharsky is by the cathedral's east wall.

The 1525 **Assumption Church** facing the bell tower adjoins the old **Father Superior's chambers**, which houses a display of Russian icons. The **monks' quarters** across the compound contain a museum of artistic history.

At the north end of the complex is the old monastery **prison**, set up in 1764 for religious dissidents. It now houses a fascinating exhibit on the monastery's military history and prison life, including displays of some of the better-known prisoners who stayed here. The combined **hospital** and **St Nicholas' Church** (1669) features a rich museum



of 12th- to 20th-century Russian applied art, much of it from Suzdal itself.

Across ul Lenina from the southeastern corner of the monastery is **Our Lady of Smolensk Church** (Smolenskaya tserkov; 1696–1707), along with Suzdal's only surviving early-18th-century **town house**.

### INTERCESSION CONVENT

This **convent** (☎ 20889; ul Pokrovka; admission free; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm Thu–Mon) is once again home to a small community of nuns, after being closed during the Soviet period. The **Intercession Cathedral** (1510–18), with its three domes, holds regular services in the centre.

Founded in 1364, the convent was originally a place of exile for the unwanted wives

of tsars. Among them was Solomonia Saburova, first wife of Vasily III, who was sent here in the 1520s because of her supposed infertility. The story goes that she finally became pregnant too late to avoid being divorced. A baby boy was born in Suzdal. Fearing he would be seen as a dangerous rival to any sons produced by Vasily's new wife, Solomonia secretly had him adopted, pretended he had died and staged a mock burial. This was probably just as well for the boy since Vasily's second wife did indeed produce a son – Ivan the Terrible.

The legend received dramatic corroboration in 1934 when researchers opened a small 16th-century tomb beside Solomonia's, in the crypt underneath the Interces-

sion Cathedral. They found a silk-and-pearl shirt stuffed with rags – and no bones. The crypt is closed to visitors.

### MONASTERY OF THE DEPOSITION

The Monastery of the Deposition of the Holy Robe was founded in 1207 but the existing buildings date from the 16th to 19th centuries. The monastery is now pretty dilapidated. Still, its two pyramidal entrance turrets (1688) on the south gate are exquisite. Suzdal's tallest structure, a 72m **monastery bell tower** (1813–19), rises from the east wall. The central 16th-century **Deposition Cathedral** (Rizopolozhensky sobor) is reminiscent of the Moscow Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral with its three helmet domes.

### ALEXANDROVSKY CONVENT

This little white convent at the top of the river embankment stands out for its simple, quiet beauty. Reputedly founded in 1240 by Alexander Nevsky for noble women whose menfolk had been killed by nomadic raiders, its present **Ascension Church** (Voznesenskaya tserkov) and bell tower date from 1695.

### MUSEUM OF WOODEN ARCHITECTURE & PEASANT LIFE

This **open-air museum** (ul Pushkarskaya; admission R50; ☎ 9.30am–3.30pm Wed–Mon May–Oct), illustrating old peasant life in this region of Russia, is a short walk across the river south of the Kremlin. Besides log houses, windmills, a barn and lots of tools and handicrafts, its highlights are the 1756 **Transfiguration Church** (Preobrazhenskaya tserkov) and the simpler 1776 **Resurrection Church** (Voskresenskaya tserkov).

### OTHER SUZDAL BUILDINGS

Almost every corner in Suzdal has its own little church with its own charm. Some

other gems include the simple **Resurrection Church** (Torgovaya pl), dating from 1719; the shabby but graceful **Predtechenskaya Church** (ul Lenina), built in 1720, and the slender, multicoloured tower of **St Lazarus' Church** (Staraya ul), from 1667. The **SS Kosma & Damian Church** (1725) is picturesquely placed on a bend in the river east of ul Lenina. Suzdal's fifth monastery is the 17th-century **St Basil's** (Vasilevsky monastyr) on the Kideksha road. No doubt you'll find your own favourite.

### KIDEKSHA

The 1152 **Church of SS Boris & Gleb** (Borisoglebskaya tserkov), on the Nerl River in this quiet village 4km east of Suzdal, is the oldest in the district. It was built for Yury Dolgoruky, who had a small wooden palace here.

The palace has disappeared; the church has been rebuilt many times. But a few fragments of 12th-century frescoes remain, including two figures on horseback. They probably represent Vladimir's sons, Boris and Gleb, who were the first Russian saints.

### Activities

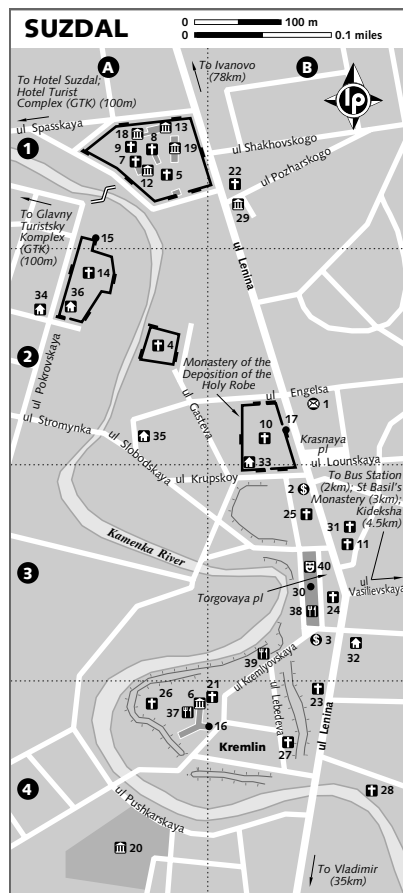
The rolling hills and attractive countryside around Suzdal are ideal for outdoor adventures, including horse riding and mountain biking. The **Hotel Tourist Complex** (GTK; ☎ 23390; ul Korovniki 45; ☎ 10am–6pm) rents bicycles, snowmobiles and skis, as well as offering horse-riding tours.

### Sleeping

**Pokrovskaya Hotel** (☎ 20908; www.suzdaltour.ru; s/d incl breakfast R1820/2400) The cosy wooden cabins on the grounds of the Intercession Convent are rented out by Gostinichny Turistsky Komplex (GTK; Hotel Tourist Complex). Old-fashioned wooden furniture, rag rugs and fluffy quilts provide a welcoming atmosphere. A restaurant is also expected to open in the convent refectory.

**Hotel Falcon** (☎ 20088, 20987; www.hotel-sokol.ru in Russian; Torgovaya pl 2a; s/d incl breakfast from R1300/2200) This attractive new hotel is ideally located opposite the trading arcades. Its 40 rooms are all simply decorated and fully equipped with new wooden furniture and modern bathrooms. The elegant, bilevel restaurant is also recommended. Prices decrease significantly between October and April.

**Kuchkov's Tavern** (☎ 20252; fax 21507; ul Pokrovskaya 35; s/d incl breakfast R1650/2000) On a



INFORMATION	
Post & Telephone Office	
Почтамт и переговорный пункт	1 B2
Sberbank Сбербанк	2 B3
Vneshorgbank Туристическое бюро	3 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Alexandrovsky Convent Александровский монастырь	4 A2
Annunciation Gate-Church Благовещенская надвратная церковь	5 A1
Archbishop's Chambers Архиепископские палаты	6 A4
Assumption Church Успенская церковь	7 A1
Cathedral Bell Tower Соборная колокольня	8 A1
Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour Спасо-Преображенский собор	9 A1
Deposition Cathedral Ризоположенский монастырь	10 B2
Emperor Constantine Church Царьво-константиновская церковь	11 B3
Father Superior's Chambers Камеры Отца-игумена	12 A1
Hospital & St Nicholas' Church Больничные кельи и Никольская церковь	13 A1
Intercession Cathedral Покровский собор	14 A2
Intercession Convent Покровский монастырь	15 A1
Kremlin Bell Tower Звонница	16 B4
Monastery Bell Tower Монастырская колокольня	17 B2
Monastery Prison Тюрьма	18 A1
Monks' Quarters Батский корпус	19 A1
Museum of Wooden Architecture & Peasant Life Музей деревянного зодчества и крестьянского быта	20 A4
Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral Рождественский собор	21 B4
Our Lady of Smolensk Church Смоленская церковь	22 B1
Predtechenskaya Church Предтеченская церковь	23 B4
Resurrection Church Воскресенская церковь	24 B3
St Lazarus' Church Лазаревская церковь	25 B3
St Nicholas' Church (Wooden) Никольская церковь (деревянная)	26 A4
St Nicholas' Church Никольская церковь	27 B4
SS Kosma & Damian Church Церковь Космы и Дамиана	28 B4
Town House Жидкой дом XIII века	29 B1
Trading Arcades Торговые ряды	30 B3
Virgin of All Sorrows Church Скорбященская церковь	31 B3
SLEEPING	
Hotel Falcon Гостиница Сокол	32 B3
Hotel Rizopolozhenskaya Гостиница Ризоположенская	33 B2
Kuchkov's Tavern Трактир Кучкова	34 A2
Likhoninsky Dom Лихонинский Дом	35 A2
Pokrovskaya Hotel Покровская Гостиница	36 A2
EATING	
Emelya Эмеля	(see 38)
Gostiny Dvor Гостинный двор	(see 38)
Kremlin Refectory Трапезная в Кремле	37 A4
Mead-Tasting Hall Дегустационный зал Суздальского медо-варенного завода	38 B3
Slavyansky Bar Славянский бар	39 B3
ENTERTAINMENT	
Club Robinson Клуб Робинзон	40 B3

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Suzdal's most appealing place to stay, **Likhoninsky Dom** (☎ 21901; aksonova-museum@mt.vladimir.ru; ul Slobodskaya 34; s/d incl breakfast R1500/1800), is on a quiet street near the town centre. This 17th-century merchant's house has five charming rooms and a pretty garden. It feels like home, thanks to the kindly ladies who run it.

quiet street opposite the Intercession Convent, this guesthouse has a 'New Russian' ambience that does not fit in old-fashioned Suzdal, but it is not a bad option. Its 17 rooms are comfortable but overdecorated. It also has a nice *banya* (hot bath, a bit like a sauna) and an excellent restaurant.

**Hotel Rizopolozhenskaya Hotel** (☎ 24314; ul Lenina; s/d incl breakfast R620/1000) Housed in the decrepit Monastery of the Deposition, this hotel is Suzdal's cheapest place to stay. Some rooms have been renovated and their quality varies widely, so it's wise to ask for a preview before you commit.

**Hotel Suzdal** (☎ 21530; www.suzdaltour.ru; s/d incl breakfast from R1580/1800; ☎ ☎ ☎) One of three hotels within the GTK. This place is low on charm but high on facilities: the complex includes a fitness centre, a bowling alley, several restaurants, and a cheaper 'motel' (R1120/1340).

### Eating & Drinking

**Kremlin Refectory** (☎ 21763; meals R300-500; ☎ 11am-11pm) The attraction here is the atmospheric location inside the Archbishop's Chambers. This place has been serving tasty, filling Russian favourites for 300 years.

**Slavyansky Bar** (☎ 20062; ul Kremlyovskaya 6; meals R100-200; ☎ 10am-8pm) For a quick refresher, this is a pleasant, convenient stop. The menu is mostly drinks and snacks, but hungrier patrons will also find something to satisfy them.

**Mead-Tasting Hall** (☎ 20803; tasting menu R120-150; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) Hidden at the rear of the trading arcades, this hall is done up like a church interior – floor-to-ceiling frescoes, arched ceilings and stained-glass windows. The menu features different varieties of *medovukha*, a mildly alcoholic honey ale that was drunk by the princes of old.

Other recommendations in the trading arcades:

**Gostiny Dvor** (☎ 21778; meals R200-300; ☎ 11am-midnight) A popular locals' spot for drinking and socialising.

**Emelya** (☎ 21011; ul Lenina 84; meals R200-300; ☎ 11am-midnight) Enjoy the lovely vista from the outside tables, especially at sunset.

### Entertainment

**Club Robinson** (☎ 24319; ul Lenina 63; ☎ noon-4am) Suzdal's only nightlife option offers dancing, karaoke and billiards.

### Getting There & Away

The bus station is 2km east of the centre on Vasilyevskaya ul. Some long-distance buses continue on past the bus station into the centre; otherwise, a *marshrutka* will take you there.

Buses run every half-hour to/from Vladimir (R20, one hour). Otherwise, most of the buses originate elsewhere. Buses from Vladimir go to Yaroslavl (R164, five hours, twice daily) and Kostroma (R142, 4½ hours, daily), but it is often easier to go to Ivanovo (R80, two hours, four daily) and change there. One daily bus goes directly to/from Moscow's Shchyolkovsky bus station (R145, 4½ hours).

### PLYOS ПЛЫСЬ

☎ 49339 / pop 40,000 / ☎ Moscow

Plyos is a tranquil town of wooden houses and hilly streets winding down to the Volga waterfront, halfway between Ivanovo and Kostroma. Though fortified from the 15th century, Plyos' renown stems from its role as a late-19th-century artists' retreat. Isaak Levitan, Russia's most celebrated landscape artist, found inspiration here in the summers of 1888 to 1890. The playwright Anton Chekhov commented that Plyos 'put a smile in Levitan's paintings'. During the three summers in which he lived here, Levitan completed around 200 works, including 23 paintings.

The oldest part of town is along the river, as evidenced by the ramparts of the old fort, which date from 1410. The hill is topped by the simple 1699 **Assumption Cathedral** (Us-pensky sobor), one of Levitan's favourite painting subjects.

The **Levitan House Museum** (Dom-Muzey Levitana; ☎ 43782; ul Lunacharskogo 4; admission R50; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), in the eastern part of the town, across the small Shokhonka River, displays works of Levitan and other artists against the background of the Volga.

Plyos is easy to reach in summer, when hydrofoils ply the Volga from Kostroma and Yaroslavl. Otherwise, buses run regularly from Ivanovo and occasionally from Kostroma (weekends only).

### KOSTROMA КОСТРОМА

☎ 4942 / pop 280,000 / ☎ Moscow

This historic town sits 300km northeast of Moscow (95km north of Ivanovo), where its

namesake river – the Kostroma – converges with the Volga. The delightful historic centre dates back to the 18th century, when the old wooden structures were demolished by fire. But the pride of Kostroma is the 14th-century Monastery of St Ipaty, which poses majestically on the right bank of the Kostroma River.

### History

Founded by Yury Dolgoruky in 1152, Kostroma suffered at the hands of nomadic raiders in 1238. The northern outpost was rebuilt, and served as a refuge for various grand princes throughout the 14th century.

During the Time of Troubles (1605–13), Kostroma was a centre of Russian resistance against the Poles and Cossacks. Young boyar Mikhail Romanov was in exile at the local Monastery of St Ipaty when he was elected tsar.

### Orientation

The town centre lies along the northern bank of the Volga, with the bus and train

stations some 4km east. The Monastery of St Ipaty is west of the centre across the Kostroma River, a Volga tributary. The central square is Susaninskaya pl.

### Information

**Post & telephone office** (cnr uls Sovetskaya & Podlipaeva; ☎ 9am-9pm)

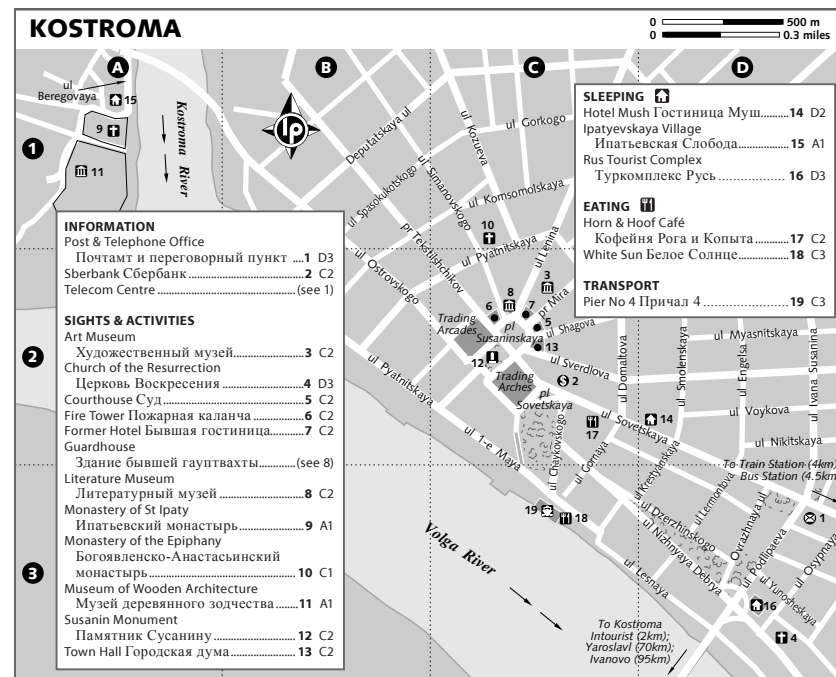
**Sberbank** (ul Sovetskaya 9; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Conveniently located bank with ATM.

**Telecom Centre** (☎ 621 162; cnr uls Sovetskaya & Podlipaeva; per hr R50; ☎ 9am-9pm) Internet access in the same complex as the post office.

### Sights

#### MONASTERY OF ST IPATY

Legend has it that a Tatar prince named Chet (who later founded the house of Godunovs) was returning to Moscow in 1330 and fell ill. At this time he had a vision of the Virgin Mary and the martyr Ipaty of the Ganges, which aided his recovery. When he returned to Moscow he was baptised and founded the **Monastery of St Ipaty** (☎ 312 589; admission R50; ☎ 9am-5pm) to mark the occasion.



In 1590, the Godunovs built the monastery's **Trinity Cathedral** (Troitsky sobor), which contains over 80 old frescoes by a school of 17th-century Kostroma painters, headed by Gury Nikitin (plus some 20th-century additions). The fresco in the southern part of the sanctuary depicts Chet Godunov's baptism by St Ipaty. The **bell tower**, modelled after the Ivan the Great Bell Tower in Moscow, chimes concerts every hour.

The monastery's more recent history is closely tied to the Godunov and Romanov families, fierce rivals in high-level power games before the Romanovs established their dynasty. In 1600 Boris Godunov exiled the head of the Romanov family, Fyodor, and his son Mikhail to this monastery. Mikhail Romanov was here in 1613, when the all-Russia Council came to insist that he accept his position as tsar, thus ending the Time of Troubles. In honour of the event, all successive Romanov rulers came here to visit the monastery's red **Romanov Chambers** (Palaty Romanova), opposite the cathedral.

The monastery is 2.5km west of the town centre. Take bus 14 from the central Susaninskaya pl and get off once you cross the river.

#### MUSEUM OF WOODEN ARCHITECTURE

Behind the monastery is an attractive outdoor **museum** (☎ 577 872; admission R20, photography permit R30; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct) of northern-style wooden buildings, including peasant houses, windmills and churches (one built without nails). Most of the buildings are not open, but the grounds are pleasant for strolling, listening to the chirping of frogs and admiring the handiwork of the artists.

The museum is nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding neighbourhood, which also consists of storybook-like houses, blossoming gardens and pretty churches, including a **domed wooden church** directly north of the monastery.

#### TOWN CENTRE

Picturesque Susaninskaya pl was built after a fire in 1773, as an ensemble under Catherine the Great's patronage. Clockwise around the northern side are: a 19th-century **fire tower** (still in use and under Unesco protection); a former military **guardhouse**, housing a small **literature museum** (☎ 516 027; ul Lenina 1; admission R20; ☎ 9.30am-5pm); an 18th-century **hotel** for members of

the royal family; the **palace** of an 1812 war hero, now a courthouse; and the **town hall**.

In the streets between are many merchants' town houses. The **Art Museum** (☎ 513 829; pr Mira 5 & 7; admission to each bldg R40; ☎ 10am-6pm) comprises two elaborate neo-Russian buildings. No 5 contains 16th- to 19th-century Russian art, as well as appropriately decorated 19th-century rooms such as the White Hall (Bely Zal). No 7, built in 1913 to celebrate 300 years of Romanov rule, houses a portrait gallery and a collection of ancient artwork.

The **monument** in the park between the arcades is to local hero Ivan Susanin, who guided a Polish detachment hunting for Mikhail Romanov into a swamp, and to their deaths. In 1967, the Soviet regime tore down the original Susanin monument and replaced it with this revolutionary figure.

#### CHURCHES

The **Monastery of the Epiphany** (ul Simanovskogo 26) is now the Archbishop of Kostroma's residence. The large **cathedral** in this 14th- to 19th-century complex is the city's main working church. The 13th-century icon of *Our Lady of St Theodore*, on the right-hand side of the iconostasis, is supposedly the source of many miracles.

The 17th-century **Church of the Resurrection** (ul Nizhnaya Debrya 37), near Hotel Volga, has a bright, patterned exterior and was partly financed with a load of gold coins mistakenly shipped from London.

#### Sleeping

**Ipatyevskaya Village** (☎ 577 179; fax 319 444; ul Beregovaya 3a; d R1500-2300) Kostroma's most atmospheric lodging choice is this old-fashioned wooden house, opposite the monastery entrance. The quaint rooms feature modern amenities but old-fashioned style. Highlights include the authentic Russian **banya** and the small beach fronting the Kostroma river.

**Hotel Mush** (☎ 312 400; www.mush.com.ru in Russian; ul Sovetskaya 29; r incl breakfast R1300-2100) This tiny guesthouse has a central location and hospitable atmosphere. Its four rooms are spacious and elegantly furnished. Enter through the courtyard.

**Rus Tourist Complex** (☎ 546 163; russ@kmtm.ru; ul Yunosheskaya 1; s/d incl breakfast from R1000/1500) Kostroma's Soviet-standard hotel overlooks the Volga about 2km southeast of the centre, near the bridge. The facilities, including the

restaurant, are adequate. The highlight of this place is the vista: the Volga is exquisite in the morning light with the Church of the Resurrection in the foreground.

**Kostroma Intourist** (☎ 390 505; hotel-intourist@mail.ru; Magistralnaya ul 40; s/d from R1500/2100) A modern, Western-style motel with two good restaurants. Its location, about 2km south of the Volga bridge on the road to Yaroslavl and Ivanovo, is inconvenient unless you are driving. From ul Podlipaeva in front of Hotel Volga, take bus 10.

The buses that approach Kostroma from Yaroslavl or Ivanovo pass the Intourist and Volga Hotels; ask your driver to drop you off to save yourself the trek back into town from the bus station.

#### Eating

**Horn & Hot Café** (☎ 315 240; ul Sovetskaya 2; meals R150-200; ☎ 9am-midnight) Step off the 18th-century streets into this coffee shop that also harks back to eras past. Wrought-iron furniture and B&W photos set the atmosphere. The menu has a good selection of soups, salads and main dishes, besides pastries and coffee drinks.

**White Sun** (☎ 579 057; ul Lesnaya 2; meals R400-600) The décor evokes the desert at this spicy, Central Asian restaurant. When the season is right, the prime location next to the river station offers outdoor seating with views of the river. Live music nightly.

#### Getting There & Away

##### BOAT

The best way to get between Kostroma and Yaroslavl in summer is by hydrofoil, which runs twice a day in either direction. The hydrofoils depart from the main *prichal* (pier) No 4 to Yaroslavl (1½ hours) and downstream to Plyos (one hour).

Long-distance river boats between Moscow and points down the Volga as far as Astrakhan also call at Kostroma.

##### BUS

The bus station is 4.5km east of Susaninskaya pl on Kineshemskoe sh, the continuation of ul Sovetskaya. There are buses to/from Moscow (R308, 8½ hours, six daily), Yaroslavl (R75, two hours, six daily), and Ivanovo (R104, three hours, 10 daily). Daily trains also go to Vologda (R254, seven hours), Nizhny Novgorod (R325, 9½

hours) and Vladimir (R166, 5½ hours) via Suzdal (R150, 4½ hours).

##### TRAIN

The train station is 4km east of Susaninskaya pl. There are three or four daily suburban trains to/from Yaroslavl (R310, three hours).

#### Getting Around

Buses 1, 2, 9, 9 Expres, 14K, 19 and others run between the bus station and Susaninskaya pl, along the full length of ul Sovetskaya. Trolleybus 2 runs between the train station and Susaninskaya pl.

#### YAROSLAVL ЯРОСЛАВЛЬ

☎ 4852 / pop 680,000 / ☎ Moscow

Yaroslavl, 250km northeast of Moscow, is the urban counterpart to Suzdal. This is the biggest place between Moscow and Arkhangelsk, and it has a more urban feel than anywhere else in the Golden Ring. Its big-city skyline, however, is dotted with onion domes and towering spires, not smoke stacks and skyscrapers. As a result of a trade boom in the 17th century, churches are hidden around every corner. The poet Apollon Grigoryev wrote: 'Yaroslavl is a town of unsurpassed beauty; everywhere is the Volga and everywhere is history.' And everywhere, everywhere, are churches.

#### History

In 1010, the Kyivan prince Yaroslav the Wise took an interest in a trading post called Medvezhy Ugol (Bear Corner). According to legend, Yaroslav subjugated and converted the locals by killing their sacred bear with his axe. So the town was founded, and its coat of arms bears both the beast and the weapon (no pun intended).

Yaroslavl was the centre of an independent principality by the time the Tatars came. Developed in the 16th and 17th centuries as the Volga's first port, it grew fat on trade with the Middle East and Europe and became Russia's second-biggest city of the time. Rich merchants competed to build churches bigger than those of Moscow, with elaborate decoration and bright frescoes on contemporary themes. Though the city's centrepiece is the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, the merchant churches make the city unique.



## Orientation

The city centre lies at the crux of the Volga and Kotorosl Rivers, inside the ring road, Pervomayskaya ul. The centre of the ring is Sovetskaya pl, from which streets radiate out to three squares: Bogoyavlenskaya pl with the landmark Transfiguration monastery; pl Volkova with the classical façade of the Volkov Theatre; and Krasnaya pl near the river station.

## Information

**Alfa-Bank** (☎ 739 177; ul Svobody 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4.30pm Fri) Exchange office and ATM facilities.

**Dom Knigi** (☎ 304 751; ul Kirova 18; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) Has a good selection of maps and books.

**Internet Club** (☎ 726 850; pr Lenina 24; per hr R32; ☎ 9am-11pm) A dark club in the Dom Kultury that has more facilities than the post office.

**Post & telephone office** (Komsomolskaya ul 22; per hr R33; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Also offers Internet services.

**Sberbank** (☎ 729 518; ul Kirova 6; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) Changes money and gives credit card advances.

## Sights & Activities

### MONASTERY & AROUND

Founded in the 12th century, the **Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour** (☎ 303 869; www.yarmp.yar.ru; Bogoyavlenskaya pl 25; grounds R10, exhibits R20-30 each, all-inclusive R50 Mon-Wed, R130 Thu-Sun; ☎ exhibits 10am-5pm Tue-Sun year-round, grounds 8am-8pm daily Oct-May) was one of Russia's richest and best-fortified monasteries by the 16th century. The oldest surviving structures, dating from 1516, are the **Holy Gate** near the main entrance by the river, and the austere **Cathedral of the Transfiguration** (admission R35; ☎ Fri-Tue).

To get a new perspective, climb the **bell tower** (admission R40; ☎ 8am-7pm daily May-Sep). The summit provides a panorama of the city and a close-up view of the spiky gold bulbs that top some of the monastery buildings.

Opposite the kremlin, the vaulted, red-brick **Church of the Epiphany** (Bogoyavlenskaya pl; admission R20) was built by a wealthy 17th-century merchant. Its rich decoration includes bright exterior ceramic tiles (a Yaroslavl speciality), vibrant frescoes and a carved iconostasis. A **statue of Yaroslav the Wise** stands in the centre of the square.

## CHURCH OF ELIJAH THE PROPHET

The exquisite **church** (Sovetskaya pl; admission R60; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Thu-Tue May-Sep) that dominates Sovetskaya pl was built by prominent 17th-century fur dealers. It has some of the Golden Ring's brightest frescoes by the ubiquitous Yury Nikitin of Kostroma and his school, and detailed exterior tiles. The church is closed during wet spells.

## RIVER EMBANKMENTS

The Volga and Kotorosl embankments make for an enjoyable 1.5km walk. A pedestrian promenade runs along the bank of the Volga below the level of the street, Volzhskaya nab.

From the Church of Elijah the Prophet, head towards the river on Narodny per. Here, the **Church of St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker** (Narodny per; admission R20; ☎ 10am-5pm) was the first of Yaroslavl's stone merchant churches, built in 1622. It has a sparkling baroque iconostasis and frescoes showing the life and works of the popular St Nicholas.

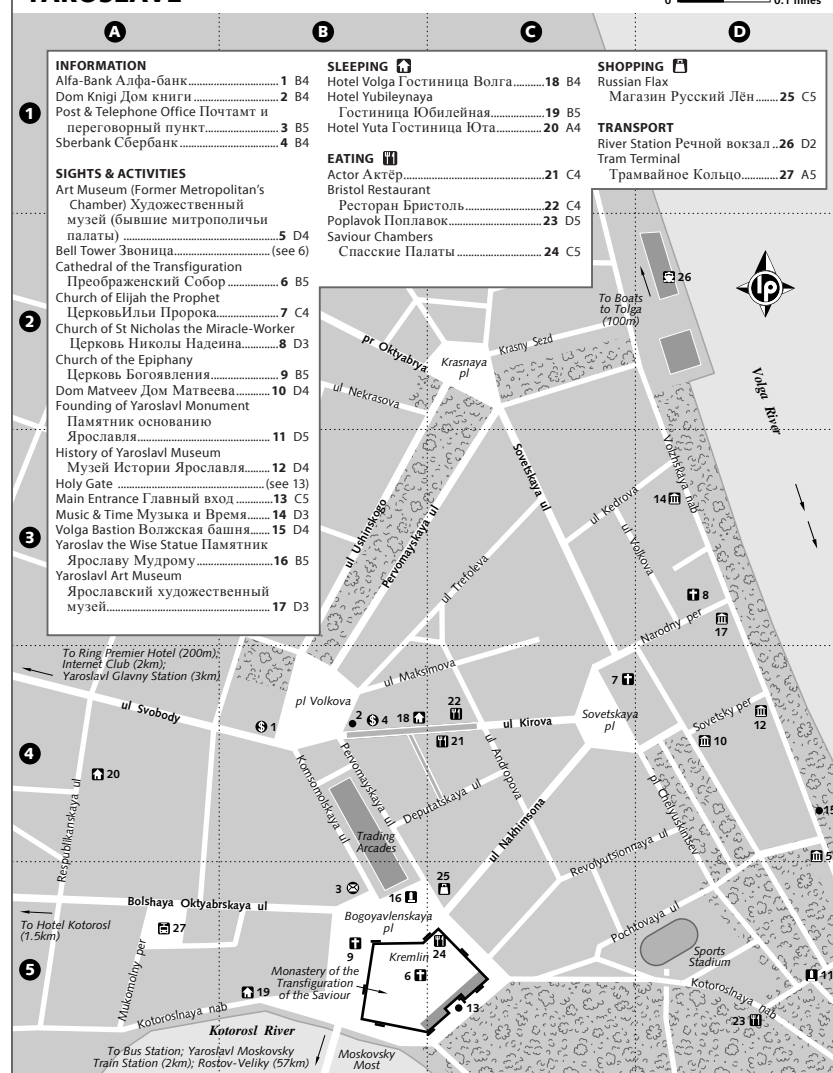
The unique, private collection **Music & Time** (☎ 328 637; Volzhskaya nab 33a; admission R50; ☎ 10am-7pm) is in the little house just north of the church. Here, John Mostoslavsky enthusiastically guides visitors through his fascinating collection of clocks, musical instruments and various other antiques.

South along the embankment is the old Governor's Mansion, which now houses the **Yaroslavl Art Museum** (☎ 303 504; Volzhskaya nab 23; admission R25, special exhibits R10-30; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), with 18th- to 20th-century Russian art. On the next block, the **History of Yaroslavl Museum** (☎ 304 175; Volzhskaya nab 17; admission R15; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) is in a lovely 19th-century merchant's house. A **monument** to victims of war and repression in the 20th century is in the peaceful garden. Other surviving merchants' houses are nearby, such as **Dom Mateev** (nr Volzhskaya nab & Sovetsky per).

A little further along the embankment are the **Volga Bastion**, built as a watchtower in the 1660s, and a fine early-19th-century church. The 17th-century former Metropolitan's Chambers houses the old Yaroslavl art collection of the **Art Museum** (☎ 729 287; Volzhskaya nab 1; admission R30; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu), with icons and other work from the 13th to 19th centuries.

In the leafy park behind the museum is a stone-slab **monument** marking the spot where Yaroslav founded the city in 1010. The park

## YAROSLAVL



stretches right onto the tip of land between the Volga and the Kotorosl Rivers. Above the Kotorosl, the raised embankments indicate the site of Yaroslavl's old kremlin.

The more time you spend, the more churches you will discover, most dating from the 17th century. There are three more along the embankment, and several south

of the Kotorosl River in the settlements of Korovniki and Tolchkovo. Pick up the brochure *Yaroslavl* (available in several languages) at one of the museum gift shops.

## RIVER TRIPS

There are summer services from the river station on the Volga at the northern end



of Pervomayskaya ul, including a range of slow *prigorodnyy* (suburban) boats to local destinations. The best trip is to **Tolga**, one hour from Yaroslavl on the Konstantinovo route. Here, near the river, you'll find a convent with lovely buildings from the 17th century.

## Sleeping

**Ring Premier Hotel** (☎ 581 058; fax 581 158; ul Svobody 55; s/d incl breakfast R4500/5000; ♿) The latest addition to accommodation options in Yaroslavl is this slick new business hotel. The modern six-storey building includes a well-equipped fitness centre, wheelchair-accessible rooms and an Irish pub (a must for any four-star hotel).

**Hotel Yubileynaya** (☎ 309 259; www.yubil.yar.ru; Kotorosl'naya nab 26; s/d incl breakfast from R1800/2600; ♿) More conventional than Hotel Volga, this hotel overlooks the Kotorosl River. It's the usual concrete slab building, but rooms are completely renovated, simply decorated and comfortably furnished. The only drawback is the fluorescent blue light that illuminates the façade (and the rooms) facing the river.

**Hotel Volga** (☎ 731 111; fax 728 276; ul Kirova 10; s without bathroom R600, s/d with bathroom R1500/1800) Located on the central pedestrian street, this historic hotel is a throwback to pre-revolutionary Russia. High ceilings and architectural details give it an air of faded elegance, despite the dark entrance. Size and furnishings vary between rooms, so ask for a preview.

Other recommendations:

**Hotel Kotorosl** (☎ 212 415; fax 216 468; kotorosl@yarslavl.ru; Bolshaya Oktyabrskaya ul 87; s/d R1000/1500) Within walking distance of the train station.

**Hotel Yuta** (☎ 218 793; fax 397 86; utah@yarslavl.ru; Respublikanskaya ul 79; s/d incl breakfast R1200/1800)

## Eating & Drinking

**Bristol Restaurant** (☎ 729 408; ul Kirova 10; meals R200-500; ☎ noon-2am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun-Thu) Downstairs, a sunlit café that's popular for lunch or drinks. Upstairs, a formal dining room with heavy drapes, high ceilings and dark wood floors.

**Poplavok** (☎ 314 343; meals R500-800; ☎ noon-1am) Housed on a boat on the Kotorosl River, Poplavok is Kostroma's only truly waterside dining. Seafood specials are skillfully prepared and artfully presented. Add-

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

At **Actor** (☎ 727 543; ul Kirova 5; beers R60, meals R100-200; ☎ 10am-2am), garden furniture and imitation gas lamps create a tratoria ambience – without the fresh air. The place attracts an artsy clientele who like to smoke. The walls are covered with whimsical frescoes and theatre posters, and the air is filled with sounds of live rock, jazz and blues.

itional perks include live music and alfresco dining when the weather is fine.

**Saviour Chambers** (☎ 304 807; Bogoyavlenskaya pl 25; meals R300-500; ☎ 11am-11pm) This place is popular with tourist groups for its atmospheric location (inside the gates of the monastery) and its tasty Russian fare.

## Shopping

**Russian Flax** (☎ 305 670; ul Pervomayskaya 51; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Sells fine linen tablecloths, napkins and bedclothes at remarkably low prices; you can also have items made to order.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

In summer, boats depart from the river station at the northern end of Pervomayskaya ul. The hydrofoils to downstream destinations will take you to Kostroma (1½ hours) and Plyos (three hours). Tickets go on sale about 30 minutes before departure. From early June to early October, long-distance Volga passenger ships stop in Yaroslavl on their way from Moscow to cities like Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan and Astrakhan.

### BUS

The bus station is on Moskovsky pr, 2km south of the Kotorosl River and near Yaroslavl's Moskovsky vokzal. One or two buses go daily to/from Moscow's Shchyolkovsky station (R236, six hours), plus about five buses stopping in transit. Most of these stop at Pereslavl-Zalessky and Sergiev Posad. Other departures include: Ivanovo (R180, three hours, two daily); Kostroma (R80, two hours, 10 daily); Uglich (R96, three hours, six daily); Pereslavl-Zalessky (R115, three hours, four daily); Rostov-Velikiy (R52, 1½ hours, seven daily); Vladimir (R222, six hours, two

daily) via Suzdal (R190, five hours); and Volgodga (R165, five hours, two daily).

### TRAIN

The main station is Yaroslavl Glavny, on ul Svobody 3km west of the centre. The lesser Yaroslavl Moskovsky vokzal is near the bus station, 2km south of town. Around 20 trains a day run to/from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal (R350, five hours). There's also a daily service to/from St Petersburg (R1120, 12½ hours), as well as Nizhny Novgorod (R900, 9½ hours) en route to Ufa. For closer destinations such as Rostov-Velikiy (R180, two hours) or Kostroma (R310, three hours), it's easiest to take suburban trains.

## Getting Around

From Yaroslavl Glavny vokzal, head 200m to the right for the tram stop on ul Ukhtomskogo. Tram 3 goes along Bolshaya Oktyabrskaya ul to the tram terminal west of Bogoyavlenskaya pl; trolleybus 1 runs along ul Svobody to pl Volkova and Krasnaya pl.

From the bus station and Yaroslavl Moskovsky train station, trolleybus 5 or 9 goes to Bogoyavlenskaya pl.

## UGLICH УГЛИЧ

☎ 48532 / pop 39,000 / ☎ Moscow

Uglich is a quaint but shabby town on the Volga, 90km northwest of Rostov-Velikiy. Here the son of Ivan the Terrible, Dmitry (later to be impersonated by the string of False Dmitrys in the Time of Troubles), was murdered in 1591, probably on the orders of Boris Godunov.

Within the waterside **kremlin** (☎ 53678; each site R34; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm), the 15th-century **Prince's Chambers** (Knyazhyi palaty) house a historical exhibit that tells this sordid tale. The star-spangled **Church of St Dmitry on the Blood** (Tserkov Dmitriia-na-krovi) was built in the 1690s on the spot where the body was found. Its interior is decorated with bright frescoes and the bell that was used to mourn Dmitry's death. (In 1581 the bell was used to call an insurrection on the murder of the tsarevitch. In response, Godunov ordered the 300kg bell to be publicly flogged and its tongue to be ripped out before it was banished for many years to the Siberian town of Tobolsk.) The impressive five-domed **Transfiguration Cathedral**

(Preobrazhensky sobor) and an **Art Museum** are also in the kremlin.

Other recommendations:

**Museum of City Life** (☎ 24414; www.uglich.ru; admission R60; ☎ timed to ferry schedule) An interactive museum with costumes and musical instruments. Reservations recommended.

**Vodka Museum** (☎ 23558; ul Berggolts 9; admission R60; ☎ 10am-5pm) Price of admission includes samples!

If you get stuck in Uglich, you can stay at the **Assumption Hotel** (Uspenskaya Gostinitsa; ☎ 51870; pl Uspenskaya; s/d R500/700), opposite the kremlin. It's a cheery place with comfortable rooms and a small café. Uglich is a regular stop for tour boats plying the Volga. Landlubbers can come by bus from Yaroslavl (R96, three hours, six daily). Buses to Rostov-Velikiy run sporadically, so you may have to travel via Borisoglebsk. Otherwise, taxis wait outside the tiny bus station.

## ROSTOV-VELIKY

### РОСТОВ-ВЕЛИКИЙ

☎ 48536 / pop 40,000 / ☎ Moscow

For a place called Rostov-Velikiy, or 'Rostov the Great', this place gives the impression of a sleepy village. Perhaps for this reason, the magnificent Rostov kremlin catches visitors off guard when its silver domes and white-washed stone walls appear amid the dusty streets. Rostov is among the prettiest of the Golden Ring towns, idyllically sited on shimmering Lake Nero. It is also one of the oldest, first chronicled in 862.

Rostov is about 220km northeast of Moscow. The train and bus stations are together in the drab modern part of Rostov, 1.5km north of the kremlin.

## Sights & Activities

### KREMLIN

Rostov's main attraction is its unashamedly photogenic **kremlin** (☎ 61717; admission grounds R5, exhibits R15-25 each; ☎ 10am-5pm). Though founded in the 12th century, nearly all the buildings here date to the 1670s and 1680s.

With its five magnificent domes, the **Assumption Cathedral** dominates the kremlin, although it is just outside the latter's north wall. Outside service hours, you can get inside the cathedral through the door in the church shop on ul Karla Marksa. The cathedral was here a century before the kremlin, while the belfry was added in

the 1680s. Each of 15 bells in the belfry has its own name; the largest, weighing 32 tonnes, is called Sysoy. The monks play magnificent bell concerts (which can be arranged through the excursions office, in the west gate) for R250.

The west gate (the main entrance) and north gate are straddled by the **Gate-Church of St John the Divine** and the **Gate-Church of the Resurrection**, both of which are richly decorated with 17th-century frescoes. Enter these churches from the monastery walls, which you can access from the stairs next to the north gate. Like several other buildings within the complex, these are open only from May to September. Between the gate-churches, the **Church of Hodigitria** houses an

exhibition of Orthodox Church vestments and paraphernalia.

The Metropolitan's private chapel, the **Church of the Saviour-over-the-Galleries**, has the most beautiful interior of all, covered in colourful frescoes. These rooms are filled with exhibits: the **White Chamber** displays religious antiques, while the **Red Chamber** shows off *finift* (luminous enamelled miniatures), a Rostov artistic speciality.

Although the ticket office is in the west gate, you can also enter the kremlin through the north gate. Don't leave without stopping at the **gift shop** (☎ 61717; ☹ 10am-5pm) behind the Metropolitan's House to shop for *finift* souvenirs and to sample the home-brewed *medovukha*.

## MONASTERIES & OTHER BUILDINGS

The restored **Monastery of St Jacob** is the fairy-tale apparition you'll see as you approach Rostov by road or rail. To get here you can take buses 1 or 2 1.5km to the west of the kremlin, although it's a very pleasant walk alongside Lake Nero to get here. Heading east of the kremlin, bus 1 will also bring you to the dilapidated **Monastery of St Avraam**, with a cathedral dating from 1553.

Named after a pagan sun god, **Khors** (☎ 62483; www.khors.org; ul Podozerka 30; admission free; ☹ 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun) is a private gallery on the lakeshore behind the kremlin. The eclectic collection includes some antique household items, models of wooden churches and some exquisite enamelwork by local artist Mikhail Selishchev. The two small rooms are available for rent to 'artists passing through'. The artist who runs the place also hosts workshops on enamel and Rostov artistry.

## BOAT RIDES

For a different perspective on this panorama, board the ferry **Zarya** (☎ 61717; tickets R250; ☹ 10am, 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm & 4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep) for a float around Lake Nero. The hour-long trip leaves from the pier near the western gate of the kremlin, and cruises past both monasteries.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Pleshanov's Manor** (Usadba Pleshanova; ☎ 76440; www.hotel.v-rostove.ru; ul Pokrovskaya 34; r incl breakfast R1200-1500; ☹ ) This 19th-century manor house, once the residence of a merchant and philanthropist family, is now a welcoming inn with a nice restaurant, cosy library and wood sauna. The charm of the common areas does not extend to the rooms, which are modern and fresh, but bland. Prices decrease between October and April.

**Vault House** (☎ 31244; s/d without bathroom R350/600, d with bathroom R1400-1600) Right inside the kremlin, and near the east gate, this place has clean, wood-panelled rooms that vary somewhat in size and view.

**Refectory Chamber** (☎ 62871; meals R200-400; ☹ 9am-5pm, later in summer) The draw to the refectory is also the atmospheric location inside the kremlin, near the Metropolitan's House. The grand dining room is often crowded with tour groups supping on traditional Russian fare.

**Slavyansky** (☎ 62228; Sovetskaya pl 8) About 100m east of the kremlin, this semiswanky place gets recommendations from locals.

## Getting There & Away

**BUS**  
The most convenient option to get to Yaroslavl vokzal (R52, 1½ hours, seven daily) is by bus, either transit or direct. Transit buses also pass through on the way to Moscow (four to five hours, hourly), Pereslavl-Zalesky (two hours, six daily) and Sergiev Posad (four to five hours, three daily). One lone bus goes to Uglich (three hours).

## TRAIN

The fastest train from Moscow is the express service from Yaroslavl vokzal (R180, three hours). Otherwise, some long-distance trains stop at Rostov-Veliky en route to Yaroslavl. You can also catch a suburban train, but you need to change at Aleksandrov.

## Getting Around

Bus 6 runs between the train station and the town centre.

## PERESLAVL-ZALESKY

☎ 48535 / pop 45,000 / ☹ Moscow  
On the shore of Lake Pleshcheevo, almost halfway between Moscow and Yaroslavl, Pereslavl-Zalesky is a popular dacha destination for Muscovites who enjoy the peaceful village atmosphere. The southern half of the town is characterised by narrow dirt lanes lined with carved *izby* (log houses) and blossoming gardens.

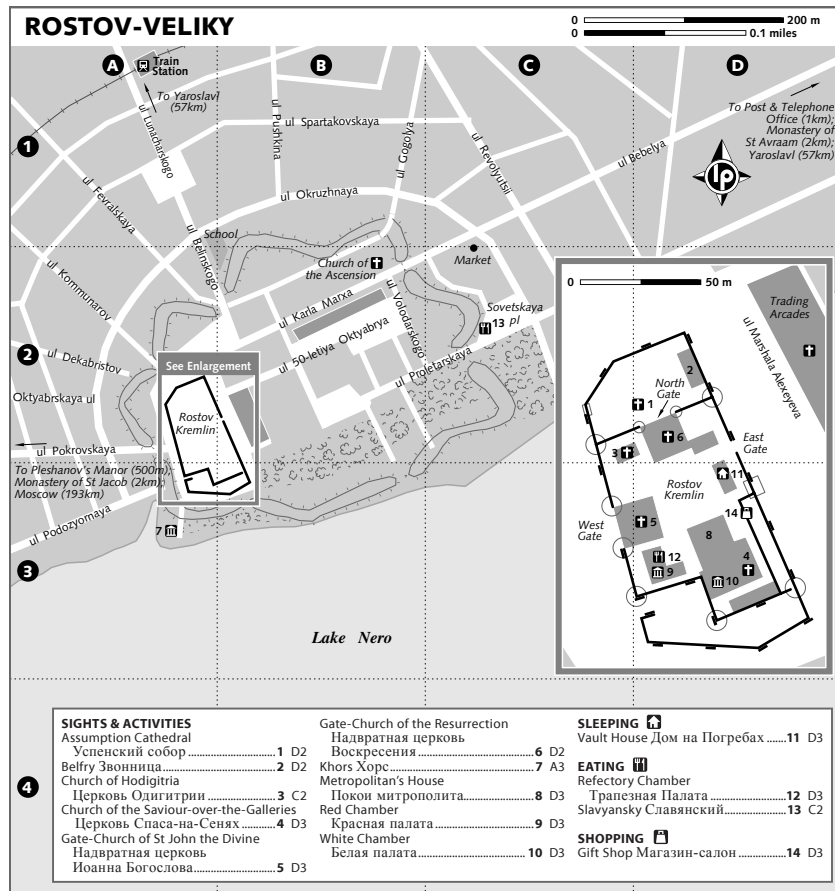
Pereslavl-Zalesky (Pereslavl Beyond the Woods) was founded in 1152 by Yury Dolgoruky. The town's main claim to fame is as the birthplace of Alexander Nevsky. Its earth walls and the little Cathedral of the Transfiguration are as old as the town itself.

## Orientation

Pereslavl-Zalesky is pretty much a one-street town, with the bus station at the southwestern end, 2km from the centre. Apart from the few churches in the kremlin area, most of the historic sights are out of the centre.

## Information

**Sberbank** (Rostovskaya ul 27; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Exchange facility in the lobby of Hotel Pereslavl.



**Yartelekom Service Centre** (☎ 31595; Rostovskaya ul 20; per hr R50) Has Internet and telephone facilities.

## Sights CENTRE

The walls of Yuri Dolgoruky's **kremlin** are now a grassy ring around the central town. Inside is the 1152 **Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour**, one of the oldest buildings in Russia. A bust of Alexander Nevsky stands out in front, while three additional churches across the grassy square make for a picturesque corner. These include the tent-roofed **Church of Peter the Metropolitan**, built in 1585 and renovated in 1957, and the 18th-century twin churches fronting the road.

The **Trubezh River**, winding 2km from the kremlin to the lake, is fringed by trees and narrow lanes. You can follow the northern riverbank most of the way to the lake by a combination of paths and streets. The **Forty Saints' Church** sits picturesquely on the south side of the river mouth.

Southwest of the kremlin, the **Nikolsky Women's Monastery** has undergone a massive renovation. Since its founding in 1350, this

monastery has been on the brink of destruction – whether from Tatars, Poles or Communists – more than seems possible to survive. In 1994 four nuns from the Yaroslavl Tolga Convent came to restore the place, and today it looks marvellous. Rumour has it that the rebuilding is being bankrolled by a wealthy Muscovite businessperson who has benefited from the nuns' blessings.

## SOUTH PERESLAVL-ZALESSKY

The **Goritsky Monastery** (☎ 38100; http://museum.pereslavl.ru in Russian; admission R50; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Apr) was founded in the 14th century, though today the oldest buildings are the 17th-century gates, gate-church and belfry. The centrepiece is the baroque **Assumption Cathedral** (Uspensky sobor; admission R40) with its beautiful carved iconostasis. The other buildings hold art and history exhibits.

The 1785 **Purification Church of Alexander Nevsky** is a working church across the main road from Goritsky. To the east, on a hill overlooking fields and dachas, is the **Danilovsky Monastery**, whose tent-roofed **Trinity Cathedral** (Troitsky sobor) dates back to the

1530s. There's another 16th-century walled monastery, the **Fyodorovsky Monastery**, about 2km south on the Moscow road.

## BOTIK MUSEUM

Besides the birthplace of Alexander Nevsky, Pereslavl also claims to be the birthplace of the Russian Navy: Lake Pleshcheevo is one of the places where Peter the Great developed his obsession with the sea. As a young man, he studied navigation here and built a flotilla of more than 100 little ships by age 20. You can explore some of this history at the small **Botik Museum** (☎ 22788; admission R40; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), situated 4km along the road past the Goritsky Monastery at the southern end of the lake. Its highlight is the sailboat *Fortuna*, one of only two of Peter the Great's boats to survive fire and neglect; the other is in the St Petersburg Naval Museum.

## NIKITSKY MONASTERY

Founded in 1010, the Nikitsky received its current name in the 12th century, after the death of the martyr St Nikita. To punish himself for his sins, Nikita had clasped his limbs in chains and spent the end of his days in an underground cell on the monastery grounds. The handcuffs, which now hang in the main **cathedral**, are said to help cure addictions and other worldly vices. Behind the cathedral, a small chapel is being built around the dank cell where Nikita died.

Nikitsky Monastery is about 3km north of the centre on the west side of the main road. Buses 1, 3 and 4 go most of the distance, or you can catch a taxi from Narodnaya pl.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Pereslavl** (☎ 31788; fax 32687; Rostovskaya ul 27; s/d from R650/1000) Although this hotel is only 20 years old, it is badly in need of the renovation that is ongoing. The cheapest rooms are very drab, but you can upgrade if you are willing to pay the price (R1300/1600).

**Cafe Botik** (☎ 98085; Podgornaya ul; meals R200-300; ☎ 11am-11pm) This waterfront café (shaped like a boat) is in a prime location opposite the Botik museum. Stop here for lake views and lunch before or after your excursion.

**Tavern on the Lake** (☎ 94264; Rostovskaya ul 27; meals R150-300; ☎ 9am-midnight) Gnaw on shashlyk to your heart's desire at this Georgian eatery. Pork, chicken, beef and sturgeon – all are grilled up and served hot and spicy.

## Getting There & Away

Pereslavl is not on the train line, but buses travel frequently to Moscow (2½ hours). Not all of these stop at Sergiev Posad (one hour, three daily). Others travel to Kostroma (four hours, two daily) and Yaroslavl (three hours, two daily) via Rostov-Veliky (1½ hours).

## Getting Around

Bus 1 runs up and down the main street from just south of the bus station; heading out from the centre, you can catch it just north of the river. Taxis wait at Narodnaya pl.

## SERGIEV POSAD СЕРГИЕВ ПОСАД

☎ 254 (from Moscow), ☎ 49654 (from elsewhere) / pop 100,000 / ☎ Moscow

According to old Russian wisdom, 'there is no settlement without a just man; there is no town without a saint'. And so the town of Sergiev Posad tributes St Sergius of Radonezh, founder of the local Trinity Monastery and patron saint of all of Russia. The monastery – today among the most important and active in Russia – exudes Orthodoxy. Bearded priests bustle about; babushkas fill bottles of holy water; crowds of believers light candles to St Sergius, Keeper of Russia. This mystical place is a window into the age-old belief system that has provided Russia with centuries of spiritual sustenance.

Often called by its Soviet name of Zagorsk, Sergiev Posad is 60km from the edge of Moscow on the Yaroslavl road. It is an easy day trip from Moscow – a rewarding option for travellers who don't have time to venture further around the Golden Ring.

## History

St Sergius of Radonezh began his calling as a hermit monk in the forest wilderness. In 1340 he founded a monastery at Sergiev Posad, which soon became the spiritual centre of Russian Orthodoxy. Prince Dmitry Donskoy's improbable victory in battle against the Mongols in 1380 was credited to the blessing of Sergius. Soon after his death at the age of 78, Sergius was named Russia's patron saint. Since the 14th century, pilgrims have been journeying to this place to pay homage to St Sergius.

Although the Bolsheviks closed the monastery, it was reopened after WWII as a museum, residence of the patriarch and a





working monastery. The patriarch and the church's administrative centre moved to the Danilovsky Monastery in Moscow in 1988, but the Trinity Monastery of St Sergius remains one of the most important spiritual sites in Russia. For its concentrated artistry and its unique role in the interrelated histories of the Russian Church and State, it is well worth a day trip from Moscow.

## Orientation

Pr Krasnoy Armii is the main street, running north to south through the town centre. The train and bus stations are on opposite corners of a wide square to the east of pr Krasnoy Armii. The monastery is about 400m north of there.

## Information

**Post & telephone office** (pr Krasnoy Armii 127A)

Outside the southeastern wall of the monastery.

**Sberbank** (pr Krasnoy Armii; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Exchange facilities available, but no ATM.

## Sights

### TRINITY MONASTERY OF ST SERGIUS

The **monastery** (Troitse-Sergieva Lavra; ☎ 45356, 45350; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm) is an active religious centre with a visible population of monks in residence; visitors should refrain from photographing the monks. Female visitors should wear headscarves, and men are required to remove hats before entering the churches. Guided tours cost R600 and photos R150.

Built in the 1420s, the squat, dark **Trinity Cathedral** is the heart of the Trinity Monastery. The tomb of St Sergius stands in the southeastern corner, where a memorial service for St Sergius goes on all day, every day. The icon-festooned interior, lit by oil lamps, is largely the work of the great medieval painter Andrei Rublyov and his students.

The star-spangled **Cathedral of the Assumption** was modelled on the cathedral of the same name in the Moscow Kremlin. It was finished in 1585 with money left by Ivan the Terrible in a fit of remorse for killing his son. It is closed to the general public but included as a part of guided tours. Outside the west door is the **grave** of Boris Godunov, the only tsar not buried in the Moscow Kremlin or St Petersburg's SS Peter & Paul Cathedral.

Nearby, the resplendent **Chapel-at-the-Well** was built over a spring that is said to have appeared during the Polish siege. The five-tier baroque **bell tower** took 30 years to build in the 18th century, and once had 42 bells, the largest of which weighed 65 tonnes.

The **Vestry** (admission R160; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Wed-Sun), behind the Trinity Cathedral, displays the monastery's extraordinarily rich treasury, bulging with 600 years of donations by the rich and powerful – tapestries, jewel-encrusted vestments, solid-gold chalices and more.

The huge block with the 'wallpaper' paint job is the **Refectory Church of St Sergius**, so called because it was once a dining hall for pilgrims. Now it's the Assumption Cathedral's winter counterpart, with morning services in cold weather. It is closed outside of services, except for guided tours. The green building next door is the metropolitan's residence.

The miniature imitation of the Trinity Church is the 15th-century **Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit**. It's used only on special occasions. It contains, among other things, the grave of the first Bishop of Alaska.

## OTHER MUSEUMS

A number of other museums around town showcase the monastery's rich artistic traditions.

**Art Museum** (☎ 45356; pr Krasnoy Armii 144;

☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Two exhibition halls featuring local artists' works.

**Horse Yard** (☎ 45356; ul Udarnoy Armii; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) Exhibits on the ethnological and archaeological history of Sergiev Posad.

**Toy Museum** (☎ 44101; ul Krasnoy Armii 123;

☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat) Toys from throughout history and around the world.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Russian Court hotel** (☎ 75392; www.zolotoe-koltso.ru/hoteldvorik in Russian; ul Mitkina 14/2; s/d incl breakfast weekdays from R1500/1900, weekends from R1700/2100) Some of the rooms at this delightful hotel boast views of the onion domes peeking out above whitewashed walls. The place is quite modern, despite the rustic style. The fanciest room even has a Jacuzzi.

**Russian Court Restaurant** (☎ 45114; pr Krasnoy Armii 134; meals R500-800; ☎ 10am-9pm) Not to be confused with the hotel by the same name, this restaurant is decorated like a Russian dacha. Appropriately enough, it features wait staff in peasant dress and serves hearty country cuisine. The place is popular with tour groups in summer.

**Trapeza na Makovtse** (☎ 41101; pr Krasnoy Armii 131; meals R500-800; ☎ 10am-9pm) Location, location. The highlight of this 'refectory' is alfresco dining in the shadow of the spires and cupolas. Dining is also pleasant inside, where live music plays nightly.

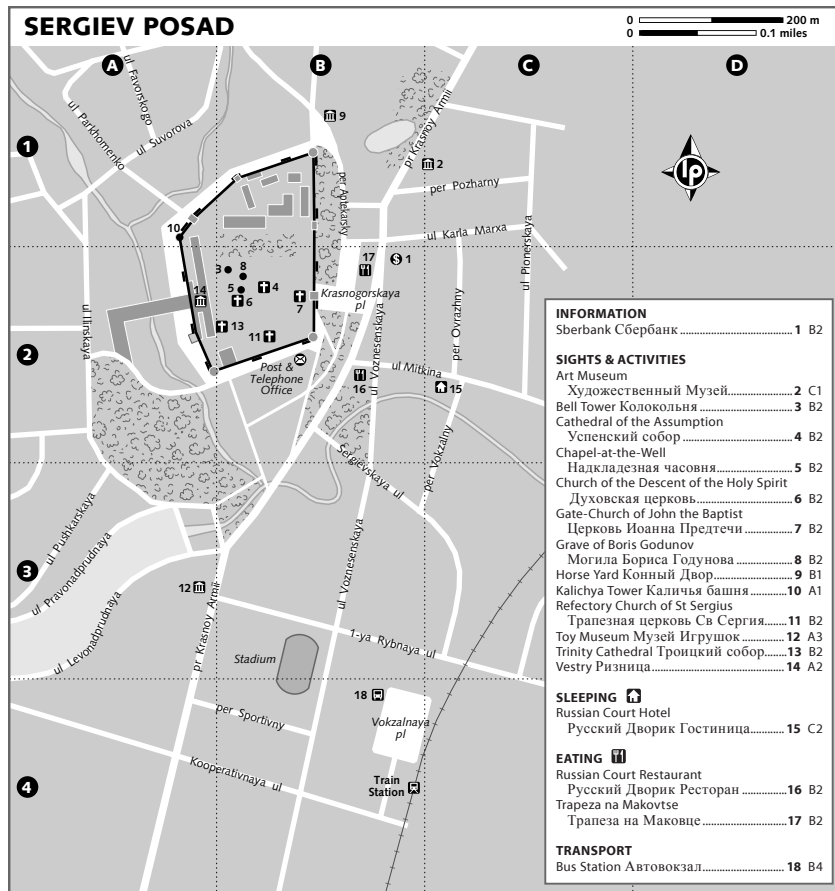
## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Services to Sergiev Posad from Moscow's VDNKh metro station depart every half-hour from 8.30am to 7.30pm (R50, 70 minutes). Three daily buses start at Sergiev Posad and run to Pereslavl-Zalessky (1½ hours). Nine daily buses stop here in transit to Yaroslavl, Kostroma or Rybinsk; all these will take you to Pereslavl-Zalessky, Rostov-Veliky or Yaroslavl if you can get a ticket.

### TRAIN

The fastest transport option is the express train from Moscow's Yaroslavsky vokzal (R195, one hour). Suburban trains also run every half-hour (R55, 1½ hours); take any train bound for Sergiev Posad or Aleksandrov. To go north to Rostov-Veliky (3½ hours) or Yaroslavl (five hours), you may have to change at Aleksandrov.



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