

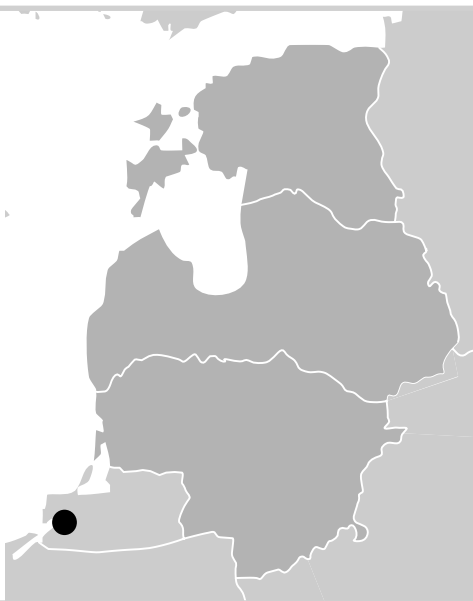
Kaliningrad Excursion

Overlooking the Baltic Sea, the Kaliningrad Region boasts some striking scenery. Among the region's attractions, is a vibrant city with 700 years of Prussian history and the region's main amber producer.

Yet more than its natural wonders, Kaliningrad is known for its history. From the 13th century until 1945, the entire region was German, part of the core territory of the Teutonic knights and their successors, the dukes and kings of Prussia. Its capital, now named Kaliningrad, was the famous German city of Königsberg, capital of East Prussia, where Prussian kings were crowned. After WWI, East Prussia was separated from the rest of Germany when Poland regained statehood. The three-month campaign in which the Red Army took Kaliningrad in 1945 was one of the fiercest of WWII, with hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 15,100 sq km
- **Birthplace of** Emanuel Kant
- **Country** Russia
- **Country code** ☎ 22 within the region, ☎ 0112 from elsewhere
- **Departure tax** none
- **Money** rouble; €1 = R33.84; UK£1 = R49.33; US\$1 = R28.26
- **Population** 955,000
- **Official language** Russian
- **Visa** unless you're flying, to reach the Kaliningrad Region from any of the Baltic countries, you must be in possession of a visa for one of the neighbouring countries. This must be arranged in advance. It can be done at the main **PVU office** (☎ 228 274, 228 282; room 9, Sovetsky pr 13) in Kaliningrad.



KALININGRAD

Old photos attest that until 1945 Königsberg was one of Europe's finest-looking cities: regal, vibrant, cultured and an architectural gem. But WWII, later Soviet destruction of German-era constructions and misguided building projects saw to it that today's Kaliningrad is not exactly eye-candy.

However, there are lovely residential corners of the city that predate the war, a forestlike park and a few large ponds that work as effective antidotes to all the concrete. A number of central areas have been given a recent and friendly face-lift. It's also a vibrant, fun-loving city that feels larger than its population would suggest.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Leninsky prospekt, a broad north-south avenue, is Kaliningrad's main artery, running over 3km from the bus and main train station, Yuzhny Vokzal (South Station), to the suburban Severny Vokzal (North Station). About halfway along it crosses the Pregolya River and passes the cathedral, the city's major landmark. The city's real heart is further north, around the sprawling pl Pobedy.

A free Russian/English guide to the region and city called *Welcome to Kaliningrad* is available in hotel lobbies. **In Your Pocket** (www.inyourpocket.com/russia/kaliningrad/en; available only online) has the latest city listings. **Baltma Tours** (☎ 211 880; www.baltmatours.com; pr Mira 49; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) is the best travel agency in town and by far the best source of regional information.

Change money at **Sberbank** (ul Chernyakhovskogo 38; Leninsky pr 2). To keep in touch, head to **Internet Café** (pr Mira; per hr about R80; ☎ 11am-11pm) or to the **telephone & fax centre** (Teatrnaya ul 13/19; ☎ 24hr) for good value calls.

SIGHTS Cathedral & Around

A Unesco World Heritage site, the red-brick Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 446 868; adult/student R70/35; ☎ 9am-5pm) is an outstanding remnant from the German past. Founded in 1333, it was severely damaged during WWII and since 1992 has been undergoing total reconstruction. On the top floor is an austere room with the death mask of Emanuel

Kant, whose rose-marble **tomb** lies outside on the outer north side. The 18th-century philosopher was born in Königsberg and studied and taught here too.

The fine blue Renaissance-style building, just across the river to the south of the cathedral, is the **Former Stock Exchange** (Leninsky pr 83), built in the 1870s and now a 'Sailors' Culture Palace'.

North of the cathedral is Tsentralnaya ploshchad (Central Square), on which sits one of the dourest, ugliest of Soviet creations, the upright H-shaped **Dom Sovietov** (House of Soviets). On this site stood a magnificent 1255 castle, damaged during WWII but dynamited out of existence by narrow-minded Soviet planners in 1967-8 to rid the city of a flagrant reminder of its Germanic past. Over 10 long years this eyesore was built in its place, but it has never even been used. Money ran out, and it was discovered that the land below it was hollow, with a (now flooded) four-level underground passage connecting to the cathedral.

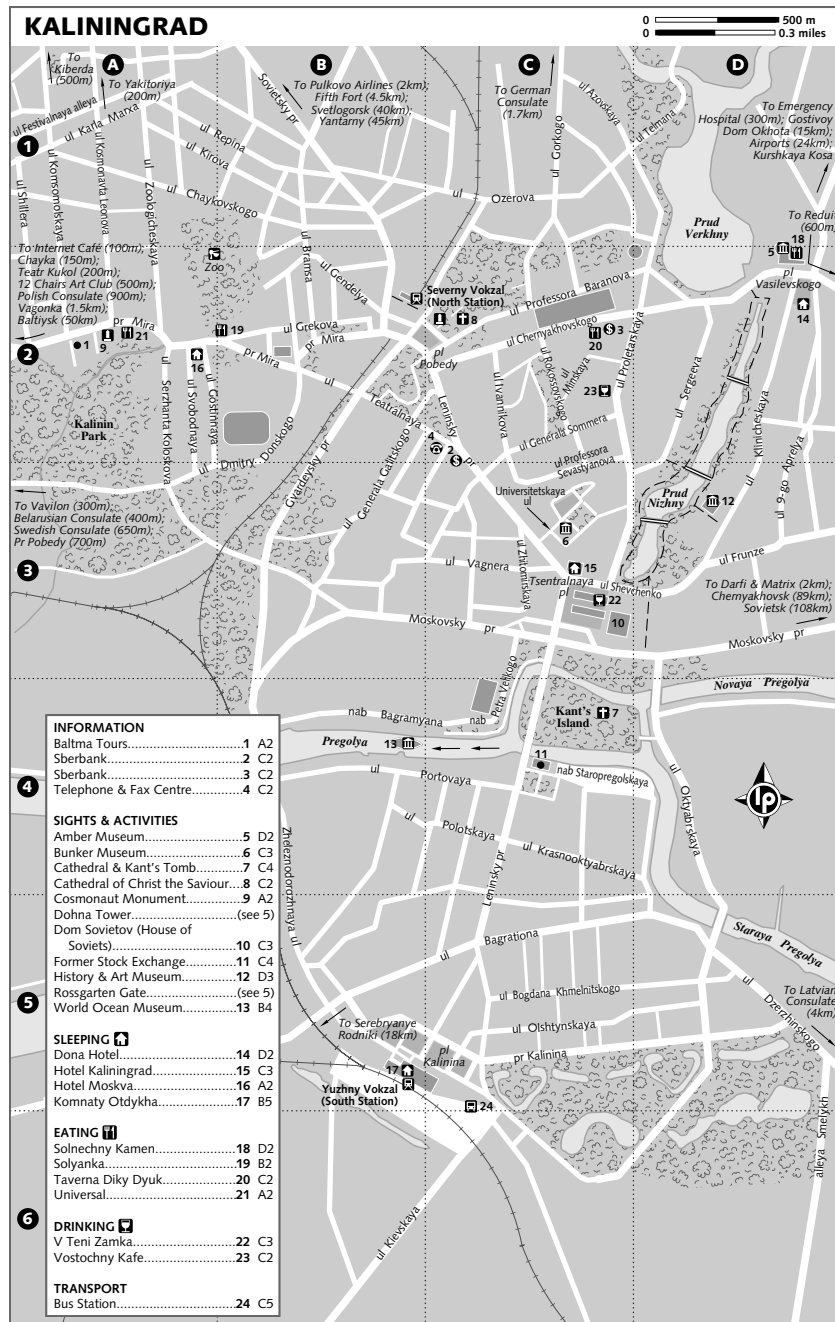
Further north, near the university, is the popular **Bunker Museum** (☎ 536 593; Universitetskaya ul 2; adult/student R40/30; ☎ 10am-6pm), Kaliningrad's German command post in 1945, where the city's last German commander, Otto van Lasch, signed the capitulation to the Soviets.

World Ocean Museum

Another of Kaliningrad's star attractions, this four-section **museum** (☎ 340 244; nab Petra Velikogo 1; each section adult/student R50/25; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar) has some fascinating exhibits hidden among the three ships docked in the river. *Vityaz*, a former expedition vessel, has displays on its past scientific life as well as on other Russian research expeditions. There is also an 'amber cabin', where amber items from around the world are on display. Visits to the *Vityaz* are by guided tour (every 45 minutes or so). There is also a submarine, which you can wander freely through.

Other sights

On the edge of the shimmering Prud Verkey (Upper Pond), the **Amber Museum** (☎ 461 563; pl Vasilevskogo 1; admission R60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has some 6000 examples of amber artworks, the most impressive being from the Soviet period. In addition to enormous pieces of

**THE RUSSIAN AMBER ROAD**

Amber has been transported along amber roads since before the birth of Christ, and there's nowhere finer to feel its subtle magic than in the Kaliningrad Region – source of almost all Baltic amber. Stunning amber-studded jewellery and the world's second-largest hunk of amber add a sparkle to the Kaliningrad **Amber Museum**, while Kaliningrad's **amber cabin** aboard the *Vitiaz* at the World Ocean Museum is an interesting port of call. A tour of the industrial **Yantarny Amber Mine** (☎ 01153 20392; Gagarin str 11; R70) is a must. Yantarny is about 45km northwest of Kaliningrad, reachable by bus from Kaliningrad.

jewellery containing prehistoric insects suspended within, some of the more fascinating works include an amber flute and a four-panelled amber and ivory chalice depicting Columbus and his ships, *Niña*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria*. You can buy amber jewellery in the museum or from the vendors outside. The museum is housed in the attractive **Dohna Tower**, a bastion of the city's old defensive ring sitting at the lower end of a small lake surrounded by parkland. The adjacent **Rossgarten Gate**, one of the old German city gates, contains a decent restaurant.

Kaliningrad's outstanding **History & Art Museum** (☎ 453 844; ul Klinicheskaya 21; adult/student R40/30; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a reconstructed 1912 concert hall by the banks of the pretty Prud Nizhny (Schlossteich, Lower Pond), a favourite recreation spot. The museum displays a fairly open history of the city. Though it mainly focuses on Soviet rule, the German past comes through as the city's spine. There are chilling posters of the castle's destruction.

Prospekt Mira

Ploshchad Pobedy (Pobedy Square) is the current city centre, and is the site of a massive cathedral that should be complete by the time you read this. The gold domes of the **Cathedral of Christ the Saviour** should be visible from many points in the city.

Extending west of the square is pr Mira, a pleasant artery lined with shops and cafés, leading to some of the city's prettiest areas.

Further on is the splendid **Cosmonaut Monument**, a gem of Soviet iconography. This honours the several cosmonauts who hail from the region. Just west, as pl Pobedy branches out from pr Mira, is the entrance to **Kalinin Park**, an amusement centre and a superb, forestlike park on the grounds of an old German cemetery.

SLEEPING

Kaliningrad's hotels are often booked solid by business travellers during the week. To avoid disappointment, call ahead.

Dona Hotel (☎ 351 650; www.dona.kaliningrad.ru; pl Vasilevskogo 2; s/d from R1920/2480) This is Kaliningrad's most stylish hotel, with hand-somely furnished rooms and ultramodern design touches worthy of a Philippe Starck protégé. Top-end rooms offer spacious digs, with globe lighting, huge windows and flat-screen TVs. The hallways, with Miro-esque carpeting, are a tribute to sleek modernism. You'll also find a friendly English-speaking staff, pleasant buffet breakfasts and one of the city's best restaurants – Dolce Vita.

Hotel Moskva (☎ 352 300; pr Mira 19; s/d from R1800/2000) This 171-room hotel has been reborn after extensive renovations and boasts bright spacious rooms, friendly atmosphere and a good location.

Hotel Kaliningrad (☎ 350 500; www.hotel.kaliningrad.ru; Leninsky pr 81; s/d from R1000/1200) The town's principal hotel is conveniently placed and offers many services. The renovated rooms are clean and comfortable, but charmless. Try to avoid rooms facing the city centre; these are noisy due to the traffic.

Gostivoy Dom Okhota (☎ 226 994; Petrovo village; s/d R600/800) For those who don't mind staying out of the city, this wooden chalet is a small slice of paradise. Rooms are modern, bright and clean, and the surroundings peaceful. There's horse riding nearby and meals can be ordered. It's on the main road to Zelenogradsk, 15km north along Sovetsky pr.

Komnaty Otdykha (☎ 586 447; pl Kalinina; s/d R280/560) Inside the South Train Station, the rooms here are surprisingly quiet and clean. The shared bathrooms are OK.

EATING & DRINKING

Universal (☎ 216 931; pr Mira 43; meals R100-350; ☎ 10am-3am) This stylish complex comprises a café, restaurant (mains R100 to R150), cinema and nightclub. The restaurant is

considered one of the city's top three; if you just want a casual meal, the café, with its various rooms of antique furnishings, makes a fine spot for dishes such as French onion soup, vegetable risotto with mushrooms, and chocolate truffle tart. English menu.

Solyanka (☎ 279 203; pr Mira 24; meals R65-90; ☎ 9am-11pm) There may be a doorman here, but this setup is basically cafeteria-style (non-Russian speakers can point to what they like), serving tasty dishes at great prices.

Taverna Diky Dyouk (☎ 465 235; ul Chernyakhovskogo 26; meals R190-500) Generous portions of scrumptious Russian, French and Lithuanian dishes are served at this medieval-themed restaurant.

Solnechny Kamen (☎ 539 106; pl Vasilievskogo 3; meals R150-300) In the old Rossgarten Gate, this atmospheric restaurant specialises in seafood, and Russian dishes. As well as the brick walls, stained glass and Teutonic touches in the main dining room, there's a pleasant outdoor terrace at the back.

V Teni Zamka (Tsentralnaya pl, kiosk No 63; cappuccino R40-56) The city's best espresso, coffee cocktails and ice cream are served in this tiny but charming space, seating only 20, inside the aptly named kiosk village.

Vostochniy Kafe (☎ 147 121; ul Proletarskaya 3a; meals R150-300) The sounds of gurgling water-pipes greet visitors upon entering this basement-level tea salon. Gauzy curtains, strings of Christmas lights and New Age music set the scene for lounging over pipefuls of flavoured tobacco and potfuls of green tea. Waiters are summoned via the red button dangling from the paper lanterns.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

The **bus station** (☎ 443 635; international tickets ☎ 446 261; pl Kalinina) is next to Yuzhny Vokzal. Buses depart from here to every corner of the region. One bus daily goes to Klaipėda (R135) via Sovetsk, and there are two buses daily each to Kaunas (R255) and Vilnius (R360). Daily buses go to Riga (R360), Tallinn (R670) and Warsaw.

Car & Motorcycle

It is possible to enter Kaliningrad at Kybartai on the Lithuanian border or on the Kurshkaya Kosa at Nida. Petrol is widely available.

Train

There are two stations in the city: **Severny Vokzal** (North Station; ☎ 499 991) and the larger **Yuzhny Vokzal** (South Station; ☎ 492 675). All long-distance and many local trains go from Yuzhny Vokzal, passing through but not always stopping at Severny Vokzal. There are four trains a day to Vilnius (R1000, six hours).

GETTING AROUND

At research time, many of the city's streets were being repaired and transit routes were in flux. By the time you read this, routes should be back in operation. Tickets for trams, trolleybuses, buses and minibuses are sold only on board (R10). To get to the domestic airport, take bus 128 from the bus station (R30). Taxis cost at least R400 from the airport, but less to the airport.

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