

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Russia and the Post-Soviet States



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Module: Russia and Central Asia

Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

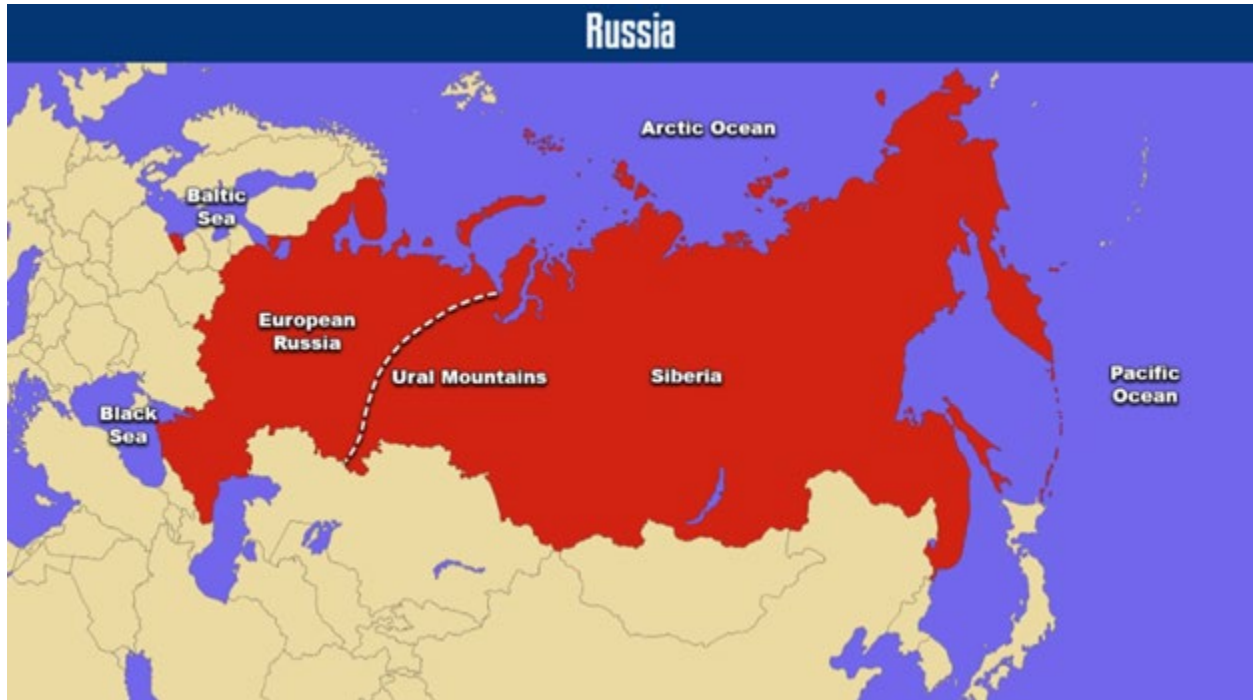
The Soviet Union



Russia was once the core of a larger communist nation called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This name was usually shortened to the USSR or the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was a powerful and influential nation for much of the twentieth century. When the Soviet government collapsed in 1991, the country broke up into fifteen independent nations. These include Russia, five nations in Central Asia, three nations in the Caucasus Mountain region, and six nations in Eastern Europe.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

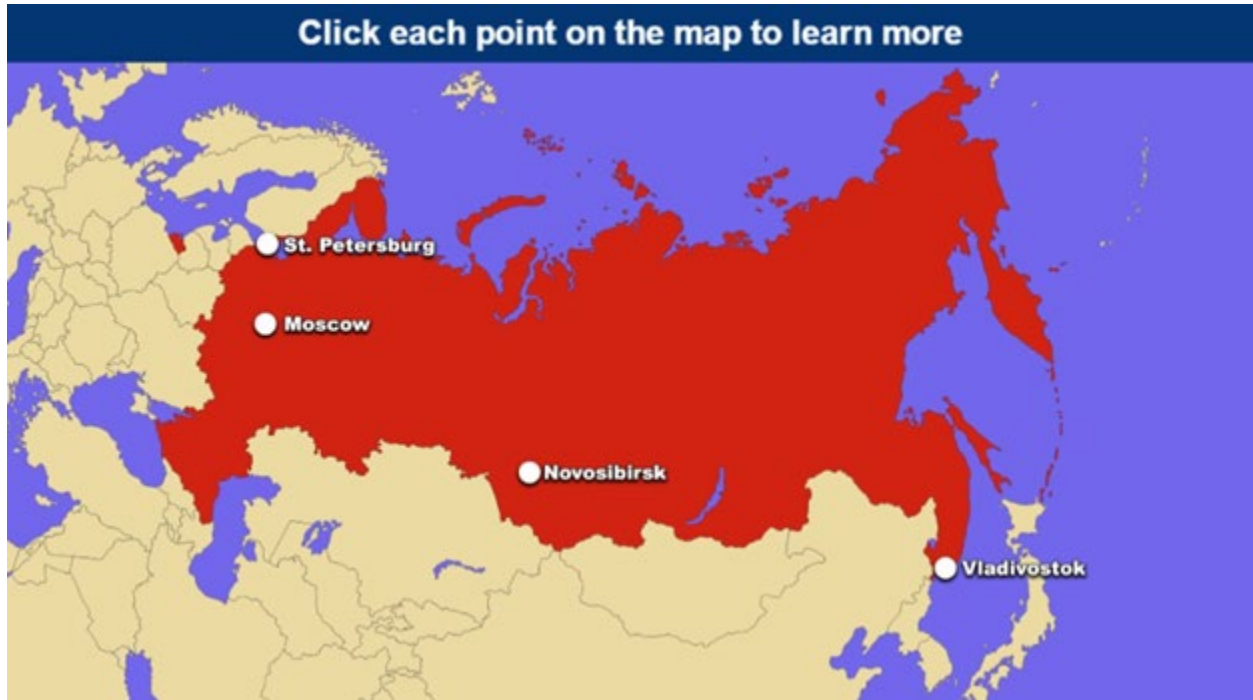
Russia



Russia is a vast country that spans Europe and Asia. In fact, Russia is the largest country in the world. It borders the Arctic Ocean in the north, and extends from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. The Ural Mountains divide the country in two. European Russia is located west of the Ural Mountains. Most of the country's population lives in this region. Asian Russia, also called Siberia, is located east of the Urals. Siberia, which means "the sleeping land," is sparsely populated compared to the west.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

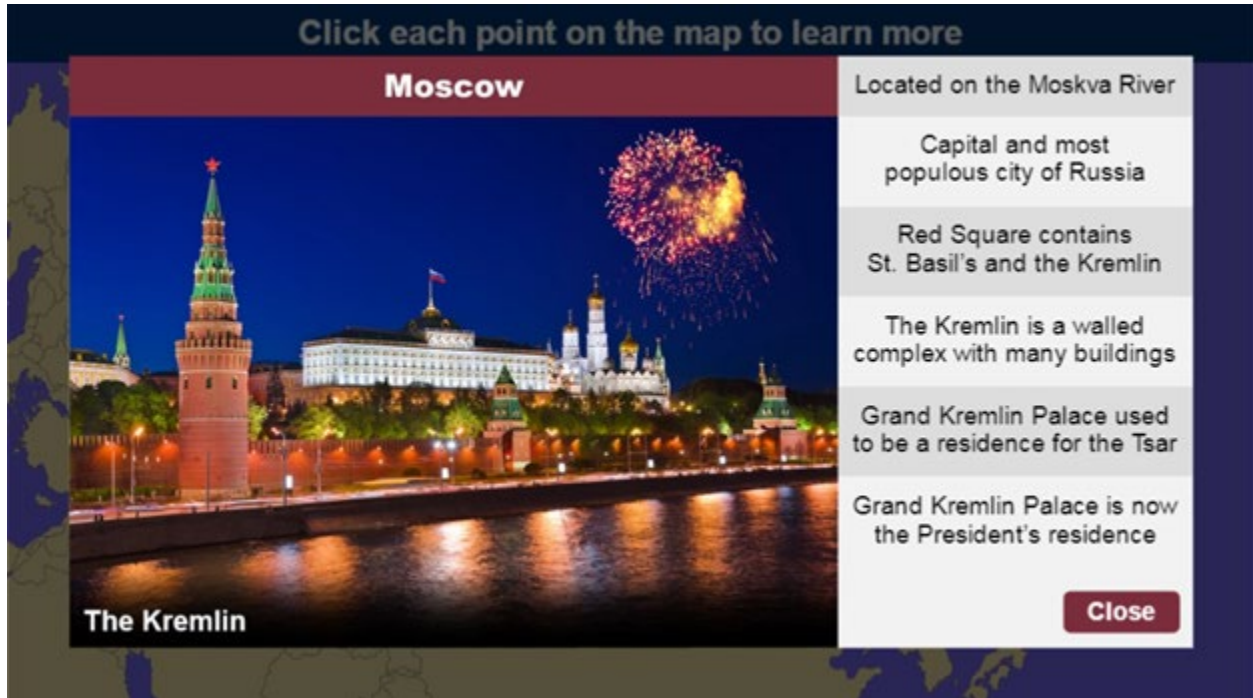
Major Russian Cities



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Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Moscow



Moscow is centrally located on the East European Plain. It is situated along the Moskva River, which is a tributary of the Volga River. Moscow is the capital of Russia and its most populous city. It is also an important center of culture, commerce, technology, and transportation.

Red Square is the heart of Moscow. This city square contains famous landmarks like St. Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin. The Kremlin is a walled complex that contains several buildings, including the Grand Kremlin Palace. The Grand Kremlin Palace was once used as a residence for the Russian Tsar, or emperor. The Tsar was overthrown in 1917 and the Kremlin became the seat of the new communist government. Today, the Grand Kremlin Palace is the official residence of the Russian President.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

St. Petersburg

Click each point on the map to learn more

St. Petersburg



- Located at a harbor site on the Baltic Sea
- Second most populous city in Russia
- Founded by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703
- Capital of Russia until 1918
- Renamed Leningrad during the Soviet era
- Name was changed back to St. Petersburg in 1991

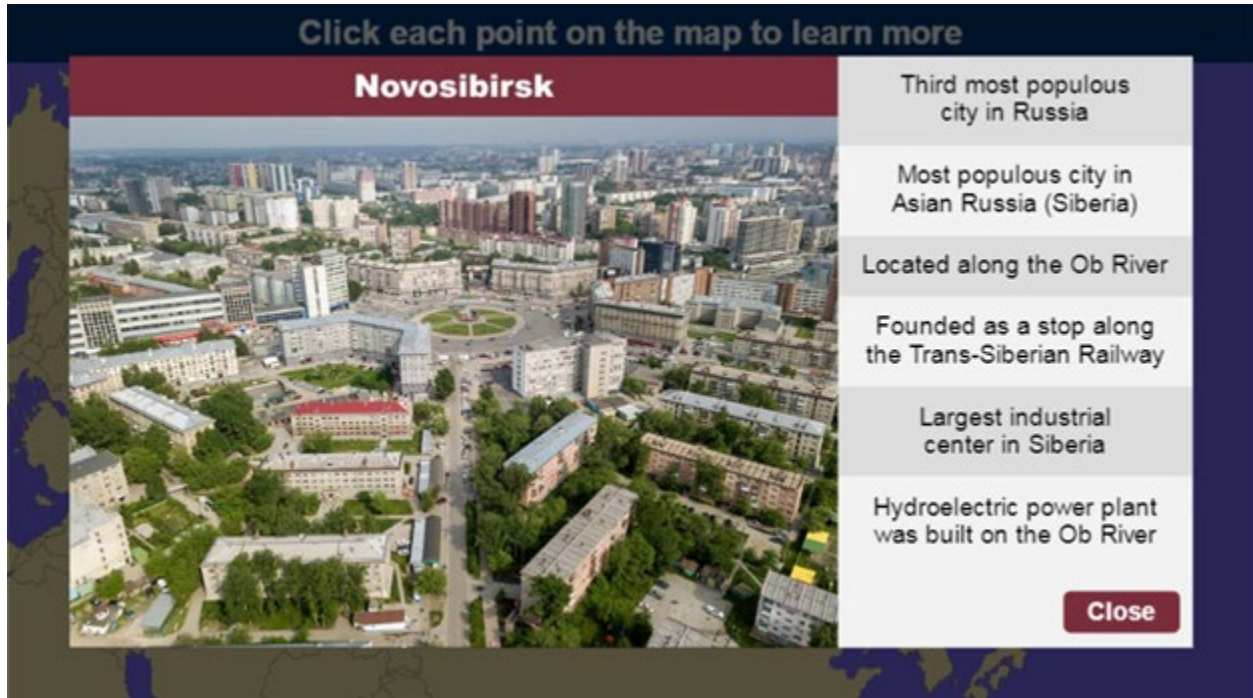
Close

St. Petersburg is located in European Russia, at a harbor site on the Baltic Sea. It is the second most populous city in Russia, after Moscow. Tsar Peter the Great founded St. Petersburg in 1703. The city was the capital of Russia until 1918. After the Russian Revolution, the capital was moved to Moscow because it was more centralized and farther from the border. St. Petersburg was renamed Leningrad in honor of the first leader of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the name was changed back to St. Petersburg. The city continues to be an important center of culture and trade.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Novosibirsk

Click each point on the map to learn more



Novosibirsk

- Third most populous city in Russia
- Most populous city in Asian Russia (Siberia)
- Located along the Ob River
- Founded as a stop along the Trans-Siberian Railway
- Largest industrial center in Siberia
- Hydroelectric power plant was built on the Ob River

Close


Novosibirsk is the third most populous city in Russia, and the most populous city in Asian Russia. It is located in southwestern Siberia along the Ob River. Novosibirsk was founded in 1893 as a stop along Russia's largest railroad, the Trans-Siberian Railway. The railroad brought an influx of people and trade to the city. Novosibirsk grew quickly and became the largest industrial center in Siberia. To support the city's development, a hydroelectric power plant was built along the Ob River in the 1950s. Today, Novosibirsk remains an important center for industry, culture, and education.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Vladivostok

Continue

Vladivostok



- Located at a harbor site on the Sea of Japan
- Russia's largest port in the Pacific Ocean
- Trans-Siberian Railway helped the city grow
- Naval base for Russia's Pacific Fleet
- Closed to foreigners during the Cold War
- Reopened to foreigners and commerce in 1991

Close

Vladivostok is located in the Russian Far East, at a harbor site in the Sea of Japan. It is Russia's largest port in the Pacific Ocean. Vladivostok was originally founded as a small military outpost in 1860. The city expanded after it was connected to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Under Soviet rule, Vladivostok became the naval base for Russia's Pacific Fleet. As an important military base, the city was closed to foreigners during the Cold War. Vladivostok was reopened to foreigners in 1991. The port was also reopened for commerce. Shipping, fishing, and the naval base dominate the city's economy.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Central Asia



Central Asia is a landlocked region located east of the Caspian Sea, south of Russia, west of China, and north of Afghanistan. There are five countries in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Steppe, desert, and mountains make up most of the terrain in this region.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Major Central Asian Countries



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Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Kazakhstan

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Kazakhstan



Yurt

- Biggest landlocked country in the world
- Largest economy in Central Asia
- Abundant natural resources
- Ethnic Kazakhs make up most of the population
- Official languages are Kazakh and Russian
- 40% of the population has a seminomadic lifestyle

Close

Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia. It is also the biggest landlocked country in the world. Although Kazakhstan borders the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, these bodies of water are entirely enclosed by land. Kazakhstan also has the largest economy in Central Asia. Abundant natural resources support the Kazakhstani economy. This includes petroleum, minerals, and arable land.


Ethnic Kazakhs make up most of the population. There's is also a large Russian minority. Kazakh and Russia are both official languages, but Russian is often used in business and government. The people of Kazakhstan lived as nomadic horse riders until the twentieth century. Roughly 40% of the population still maintains a seminomadic lifestyle. These people migrate with the seasons and reside in yurts. A yurt is a circular tent covered in felt or hides. They are warm and comfortable dwellings that can be broken down and moved.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Uzbekistan

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Uzbekistan



Coast of the Aral Sea

- Most populous country in Central Asia
- Ethnic Uzbeks makeup most of the population
- Sunni Islam is the predominant religion
- Decline in cotton production
- Irrigation caused the Aral Sea to shrink
- Main exports are gold and petroleum

Close

Uzbekistan is located south of Kazakhstan and north of Turkmenistan. It is the most populous country in Central Asia. Ethnic Uzbeks make up most of the population, and Sunni Islam is the predominant religion. During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan was a major producer of cotton. However, cotton production has declined due to environmental degradation. Over-farming and overuse of chemical pesticides have polluted much of the country's soil and waterways.

Cotton also requires large amounts of water. Water was provided by diverting two rivers that fed the Aral Sea. This caused the Aral Sea to shrink dramatically. Many areas of the lake have dried up entirely. Although cotton is still an important industry, Uzbekistan's main exports are gold and petroleum. The country also has a growing secondary sector.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Turkmenistan

Continue

Turkmenistan



- Least populated country in Central Asia
- Mostly desert
- Ethnic Turkmen are the majority population
- Sunni Islam is the predominant religion
- Relies on oil and natural gas
- Needs other countries to export its oil
- Pipelines allow competition

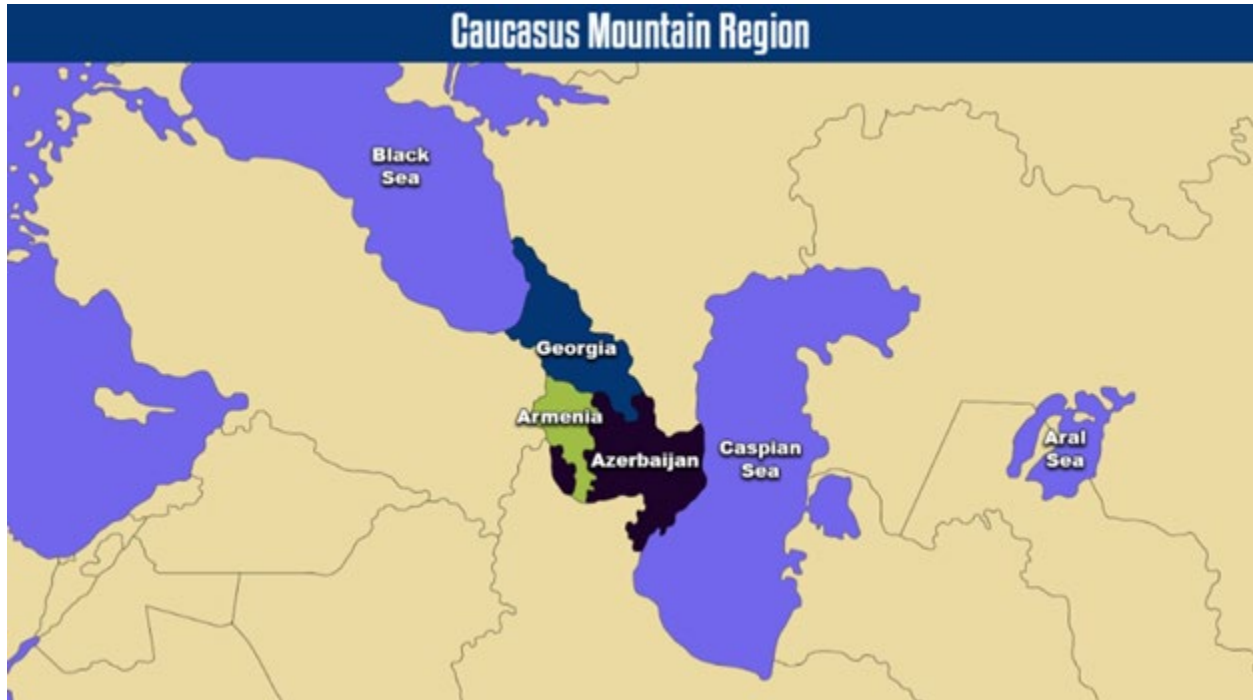
Close

Turkmenistan is located east of the Caspian Sea and south of Uzbekistan. It is the second largest country in Central Asia, but the least populated. The country has an arid climate and the terrain is mostly desert. Oases and irrigation provide the country with water. Ethnic Turkmen are the majority population and Sunni Islam is the predominant religion.

Turkmenistan was once an important stop along the Silk Road, which was a major trade route between Asia and Europe. Today, Turkmenistan relies on oil, natural gas, and other petroleum products. These make up about 90% of the country's exports. Turkmenistan is a landlocked country, so it has no access to the ocean. Therefore, it needs other countries to export its oil. As a former Soviet Republic, Turkmenistan used to be reliant on Russia. However, foreign competition has increased, and pipelines now export Turkmenistan's oil to China and Iran as well.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Caucasus Mountain Region



The Caucasus Mountain region is located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. This mountainous area contains three post-Soviet states: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Territorial disputes and ethnic conflicts have divided this region since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Russia and the Post-Soviet States

Eastern Europe



The region of Eastern Europe is located west of Russia, between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. There are six nations in Eastern Europe that were part of the former Soviet Union: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.