

Russian Culture and Traditions

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Russia is a country that is situated in Northern Eurasia. It covers more than an eighth of the Earth's land mass, making it the largest country in the world. It is also one of the most populous nations in the world, with around 143 million individuals living there. Russia has the largest mineral reserves and energy resources in the world, in addition to being the largest oil producer and natural gas producer globally. It also has the largest forest reserves in the world.

The population of Russia comprises of 160 ethnic groups who speak 27 different languages besides Russian, the official language. In terms of scientific literature, over a quarter of the world's scientific literature is written in Russian. The Russian language is also used as a means of storage and coding of universal knowledge. It is among the six official languages of the United Nations.

Their cuisine includes mainly fish, poultry, mushrooms, honey and berries. A unique food of Russia is black bread, which is more popular in Russia than in any other part of the world. They also have flavourful soups and stews including shchi, borsch, ukha, solyanka and okroshka. One of their social traditions include washing in a banya, a hot steam bath almost like a sauna.

Religions that Russians adhere to include Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. 16-48% of Russia's population are said to be non-believers. The religion that is most dominant in Russia is known as Russian Orthodoxy.

The Russian tourism sector, characterized by a rich cultural heritage and a great natural variety, has placed Russia among the most popular tourist destinations globally. Mostly, tourists visit the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg. These are great cultural centers, having museums as the Tretyakov Gallery and Hermitage, theaters that are famous including the Bolshoi Theater

and Mariinsky Theater. Saint Basil's Cathedral and Saint Isaac's Cathedral are some of the ornate churches featured in the area.

Russia's culture and traditions - which encompasses food, music, literature, art, language, social values, and religion - is seen to be a point of pride for Russians and a major reason for travelers to visit the country.

The Perception of Home in Russian Culture

Russians view their homes in a spiritual aspect; they have the perception and respect for their homes as a sacred dwelling. According to their culture, a home should not be built in regions close to cemeteries, where tragic events have occurred, or marshy places. Following a spiritual decorum, Russians arrange decorations and objects in their homes as symbols; tables are a metaphor of prosperity in the house, should be covered by a white cloth and people should not eat on an uncovered table. Besides metaphysical aspects, they consider home as a place to relax and have bonding time with family (Singleton, 88).

Effects of Western Culture on Russians

After the post-war period in the Soviet Union, isolation of the youth disallowed infiltration of the western way of living in Russia; consequently, western youth culture and their lifestyle rarely seeped in. Under Khrushchev's rule, though, the Russian way of life began to change and the western style of living started to be absorbed by Russian youth. Over the past half century, Russian youth have transformed and have little in common with their past culture. The youth imitated western culture, which lead gradually to the diminishing of traditional Russian culture.

The 'normals' (soviets who had not embraced westernization) used their leisure time the soviet way, but the citizens who had already embraced the western way combined both leisure activities and studying which was not a trend before. The type of music that youth listened to shifted and suggested more of the western way than the soviet way; Russians viewed music as an element of the soul, while the west perceived it as an element of the body (dancing), leading to a difference in the kind of music produced in the country (Pilkington, 7).

Russians and Religion

Russia has been a Christian community since ancient history. Most of the population follow the doctrines of the Christian religion. There are two theories to the origin of Christianity in Russia: one theory suggests that Russia started as a catholic community, and another describes them as an orthodox community. From the time of Apostle Peter and Alexander the Great, there has been a conflict between the catholic community and the orthodox institution, through protest and demonstrations organized by the orthodox brotherhood. This institution and form of religion has dominated most of Russia and has hindered most of the other Christian sects and other religions from establishing themselves in the country (Fagan, 3).

The Influence of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky on Russian Culture

Dostoevsky was supportive of the Russian legacy in Europe and always wanted Russia to maintain its tradition. He was unwaveringly interested in European literature, and as a child he would dream of traveling to countries like Italy and Switzerland. He promoted the importance of Europe to Russia and the other way round, encouraging Russian citizens to ignore western culture. He is quoted saying, "Do you not know how dear this land is to us and the tribes that

constitute it?” He was a patriot to Russia even after his years in prison. He sent letters to others in order for them to take his mother country seriously and to cherish it with a sense of pride.

He influenced Russians to follow and preserve their cultural heritage (Rzhevsky, 131). He found Russians more noble and above other people in the European community. He foresaw a bad end in the west and warned Russia to stay away from the west to prevent it from falling as the rest of the nations did. He supported the knowledge of all cultures even though he still wanted people to live the Russian way; through knowledge about other European cultures, he believed that Russia would be the savior of Europe. He influenced citizens to maintain their families and the original traditions of Russia.

Stereotypes About Russians in the Media

After the fall of the Soviet Union, though Europeans generally believed Russia to be a prominent western nation, the USA did not see it that way. The American government lost its intrigue for Russia soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But as result, US politicians do not have a clear idea of the political, social and cultural development in the country. Some of the stereotypic information being passed around about Russia are: Putin is a former KGB member who is suppressing opposition and accumulating power, that the Russian media is not free and is under state control, that Russians live under Putin’s tyranny, brutality and human rights violations are still are found in Chechnya. That Kremlin supports Hamas and Iran (Barfoot, 67). This is the historical, religious and political status and origin of Russia. Russians, on the whole, are people that respect and love their country. They are still proud of their original traditions and culture – yearning to keep their history intact as long as possible.

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