

'Grandmaket' Brings Russia Down to Size

By [Irina Titova](#)

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Kaliningrad as seen by the modelers. The model is on show Sundays and will open fully at the end of the year.

ST. PETERSBURG — The world's biggest country has been reduced to an 800-square-meter model in a unique new exhibition depicting the whole of the Russian Federation — from its most Western point of Kaliningrad to Kamchatka in the east — now on show in St. Petersburg.

The "Grandmaket," or the Grand Model, is a miniature model on a 1:87 scale reminiscent of Denmark's Legoland that opened recently in a test regime, one day a week.

The model faithfully depicts natural elements such as lakes, rivers, mountains and forests, alongside cities and villages, bridges, ports, airports, railways, factories, mines, stadiums and even military bases. The country's nine time zones are shown as one part is lit up as if at night while other regions are in daylight.

Grandmaket aims to "give a recognizable image of Russia," said Denis Mikheyev, the project's executive manager, "though it is not a complete geographical copy."

"It is an attempt to give people the chance to learn more about Russia, to make them proud of their country," he said.

The model is rich with details of the country's sights and everyday life.

A Siberian village features old-fashioned wooden houses at the center of a scene of rural life: A young couple sits on a bench, two women hang washing on a clothesline in the yard, and cabbages and pumpkins grow in the vegetable garden. A group of mowers with scythes make hay for winter.

The picture is accompanied by the sounds of roosters and the whistle of a locomotive on a nearby railway. The train passes by an old water tower, atop which storks have made their nest and among hills crowned by a traditional Soviet sign in which huge, aging letters read "Slava Trudu!" (Glory to Labor!)

The section depicting the Ural Mountains, covered with thick forests that are inhabited by wild goats, attracted children's attention immediately on a recent visit with a raging forest fire. Every 10 minutes a fire starts, and a number of fire engines rush to the scene to extinguish it with a jet of water. The model is not realistic enough to show smog over nearby cities.

In the same section, pressing a button makes an excavator start working at a nearby construction site. The organizers say that when the model is completed, it will have up to 100 buttons to keep children entertained as they look at different aspects of life in Russia.

One of St. Petersburg's iconic symbols, the Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress, is represented not only with a miniature copy, but also by reproductions of the chiming of its bells and the daily midday shot from its cannon.

"There are things that we can never see in life — it's not possible to travel everywhere and to see everything. So this exhibition offers the best chance to see all that," said Irina Beglaryan, 35, a programmer visiting the exhibition with her son.

Natalya Petrova, 29, an accountant, said she particularly liked the fact that "everything in the model works: Cars move, and street lamps are lit up."

Petrova's son Svyatoslav, 5, said he most liked "the big locomotive and space rockets."

Mikheyev said the project's author, Sergei Morozov, came up with the idea for the model to distract his son from spending all his time in front of a computer, and later the project grew to a larger scale.

Work on the model has been in progress for four years. More than 100 artisans, including electronic engineers, modeling specialists and artists, have taken part in its creation. Work is currently underway on the model 24 hours a day in order to prepare the exhibition for its official opening at the end of this year, Mikheyev said.

"Grandmaket" is located at 16 Tsvetochnaya Ulitsa. It is currently open in a test regime on Sundays from 2 p.m. through 5 p.m. Tickets are priced at 350 rubles (\$12.50) for adults,

and 200 rubles (\$7) for children. Tel. (812) 387-5888, www.grandmaket.ru.

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