

# How to Maximize Your Russian Vacation Time in 2015

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People walk through Red Square with flags and banners during a rally in Moscow on May 1, 2014.

Christmas and New Year's may be over, but don't despair — the next public holiday is only a month away. Here to help is The Moscow Times, with a rundown of Russia's major public holidays and ideas on how to make the most of your vacation time.

## 1. Defender of the Fatherland Day on Monday, Feb. 23

**The History:** The holiday formerly known as Red Army Day was originally established during the Soviet Union as a celebration in honor of army veterans. Now it is known unofficially as "men's day," a rather more low-key analog to Women's Day in March.

**Extend the Holiday:** If you take an extra day off on Friday or Tuesday, you can turn this holiday into a four-day weekend.

## 2. International Women's Day on Monday, March 9

The actual holiday, March 8, falls on a Sunday this year, so the Russian authorities kindly made Monday a public holiday instead.

**The History:** Women's Day, which is meant to commemorate women's struggle for emancipation, is one of Russia's biggest holidays. Giving gifts, flowers and chocolate to wives, girlfriends, female teachers and coworkers is practically mandatory.

**Extend the Holiday:** The public holiday falls on a Monday this year, offering a pleasant three-day weekend that is easily extended by taking Friday or Tuesday off as well.

*Hint: This is the last public holiday before the coveted May holidays. Plane tickets will be cheaper than in May, and the roads less crowded.*

## 3. The May Holidays on May 1, 4, 11 (Friday, Monday and the following Monday)

**The History:** The May holidays comprise the Day of Spring and Labor — Russia's labor day — and Victory Day on Saturday, May 9, which commemorates the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

**Extend the Holiday:** Take the four days off between May 5 and 8, and you will get an impressive 11 days of vacation time. But be sure to claim these days early — your coworkers will be thinking the exact same thing.

## 4. Russia Day on Friday, June 12

**The History:** Russia Day celebrates the day in 1990 when Russia was officially declared a sovereign state within the former Soviet Union. Many Russians have ambivalent feelings towards this moment in history, as it heralded the impending collapse of the Soviet state.

**Extend the Holiday:** Russia Day is, incredibly, the last public holiday until Nov. 4. Be sure to relish it! In fact, taking the four days between June 9 and 12 off is not a bad idea, as it will give you nine days of vacation time right at the beginning of summer.

## 5. National Unity Day on Wednesday, Nov. 4

**The History:** One of Russia's newest holidays, National Unity Day marks the end of Russia's "Time of Troubles," a period of famine, political tumult and Polish-Lithuanian occupation in the early 17th century.

**Extend the Holiday:** National Unity Day is perfectly poised in the middle of the week. Taking the two days on either side of this holiday off will give you a splendid five-day weekend.

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