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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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