

A Short History of Moscow

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Moscow hasn't always been the capital of Russia. When it was first mentioned in historical records around 1147, it was nothing more than a tiny town of little importance. Muscovites today consider Prince Yuri Dolgoruky their city's founding father, but it was only recorded that he dined with friends in the town of "Moskov," named after the local Moscow River. It remains unclear exactly when this town was established, but at the time of Dolgoruky it was governed by a noble called Kuchka, who fell out with the prince over taxes and was sentenced to death.

A small fortress was built on Borovitsky Hill by Dolgoruky's son, Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky; it was the first in a long succession of structures that eventually became the Moscow Kremlin. Moscow remained a small town while the nearby city of Vladimir rose in prominence and overtook Kiev, the old capital, in importance. Moscow's luck would change only later.

Moscow's location on the banks of the Moscow River was an important one, as the river connected both the Oka and Volga rivers. Its important strategic position and rapid population growth resulted in Daniil Alexandrovich becoming the first Moscow prince of the newly founded state of Muscovy. He founded a local dynasty which first ruled the Moscow

princedom and then all of Russia. He was the forefather of all the Moscow grand dukes.

From the early 14th century, Moscow competed with the neighboring city of Tver for power and influence. In 1327, Tver was raided by the Moscow Prince Ivan Kalita and Mongol troops, and the city was unable to recover from that defeat. Kalita also made Moscow a new religious center by luring the metropolitane (the highest religious authority at the time) away from Vladimir. During the reign of Prince Dmitry Donskoy, the Kremlin was rebuilt with white stone and the first victory against the Mongols was won (the Battle of Kulikovo, in 1380).

By the end of the 15th century, under Ivan III (also known as Ivan the Great), the majority of Russian lands were united around Moscow. In the 16th century, Ivan IV, or Ivan the Terrible, proclaimed himself the “tsar” (from the Latin word “caesar”) of Moscow and all Russia. During the so-called “Time of Troubles,” Moscow was occupied by the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the end of the occupation, the Zemsky Sobor (Grand National Assembly) elected a new tsar: Mikhail Romanov. A new dynasty was born.

In 1712–14 Peter the Great moved the capital to the newly established St. Petersburg in the north. However, Moscow was where the Russian emperors continued to be crowned, so the city did not completely lose its capital status. Many Russian aristocrats kept a home in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. It was Moscow that Napoleon attempted (but failed) to capture in 1812, partly because Muscovites burned a large part of the city before leaving it for the French troops.

After the 1917 October Revolution, the Bolsheviks decided to move the capital back to Moscow and in 1918, Moscow became the capital of the Soviet Union. Moscow became a thriving megalopolis during the Soviet era and today is one of the largest cities in Europe. The Moscow metro system was built — one of the most efficient and beautiful underground networks in the world.

During World War II, the city again became a major battleground and a target for invading troops. Most civilians were evacuated from the city as Soviet soldiers fought the Nazis in the Battle of Moscow from October 1941 to January 1942. The defeat of the Nazis in this battle was a major turning point in the war.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Moscow continued to serve as the capital, this time of a new entity, the Russian Federation. Today Moscow is an extremely diverse city, where ancient neighborhoods are interspersed with newly built high-rises, inhabited by people from all over the former Soviet Union.

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