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Celebrate the Season With a Winter Holiday in St. Petersburg

Our picks for a marvelous winter getaway in the northern capital.

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Palace Square in St. Petersburg. **Vladimir Tro / flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)**

Saint Petersburg is ready to celebrate the Christmas and New Year Holidays: the 30-meter fir tree is already on its place and decorated on Palace Square. Lights and festive street decorations have appeared on the Moika river, around central squares and along Nevsky Prospekt. What better time to visit the Venice of the North?

Give yourself a present: "The Nutcracker" at Mariinsky Theater

Treat yourself to an evening of classical ballet at Mariinsky Theatre. The famous "Nutcracker" with choreography by Vasily Vainonen to the music of Pyotr Tchaikovsky will be performed many times at the end of December and beginning of January with internationally acclaimed stars (Maria Khoreva, Alina Somova, Vladimir Shklyarov, British-born Xander Parish) taking

their turns on stage. You might also consider Johann Strauss' festive operetta "Die Fledermaus" (sung in Russian) or Rodion Shchedrin's modern opera "A Christmas Tale" (also in Russian with subtitles) as an added bonus. For more information and tickets, see the site here.

See Albrecht Dürer's prints and engravings at the Hermitage Museum

A grand exhibition dedicated to the 550th anniversary of this great engraver's birth opened at the Hermitage Museum on Dec. 7. The exhibition includes more than 400 works, mostly from the museum's own collection but with pieces on loan from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts and the State Tretyakov Gallery. The exhibition is in the Nicholas Hall where in 1971, 50 years earlier, another exhibition marking 500th anniversary of the artist's birth was held.

All of Dürer's most important prints and series are on display, including his "masterful engravings": "Knight, Death and the Devil," "Saint Jerome" and "Melancholia," as well as "The Rhinoceros," "Adam and Eve," "Apocalypse," "Great Passion" and the "Life of the Virgin" series. There are also drawings and portraits of his teachers and apprentices to put the collection into wider context, as well as some items of decorative and applied art.

You can buy tickets for the visiting routes 1 and 2, which both include the exhibition here. Note that museum is closed on January 1 but has extended working hours on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

For something quite special, you can listen to tracks here by resident MusicAEterna composers Alexei Retinsky and Andreas Moustoukis written specifically for meditative moments in front of particular prints. Theodor Currentzis also promises to organize an educational program around the exhibition; check the MusicAeterna website for more information.

Get stylish with fashion photography

A very trendy show has just opened at General Staff building of the Hermitage Museum. Organized in conjunction with the Still Art Foundation, it presents the history of fashion photography from the second half of the 20th century onwards and features original prints of such photographers as Irving Penn, Guy Bourdin, Horst P. Horst, Erwin Blumenfeld, Richard Avedon, Helmut Newton, and Herb Ritts. Fashion historian Dmitry Ozerkov, the head of the Hermitage's department of contemporary art, curated this exhibition, which is set in an all-white labyrinth appropriately called the White Hall. The photographs range from famous black-and-white prints to less-known recent fashion photos. Warning: It might be full of young bloggers and Instagrammers. Tickets are purchsed at the General Staff Building.

Really get to know Dostoevsky at St Michael's Castle

At St. Michael's Castle, you can visit an exhibition dedicated to the 200th birth anniversary of the writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. The exhibition, which was created by the Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum, connects with Dostoevsky's biography in a very direct geographical sense, since he spent five years within the walls of the Castle as a student of the Engineering School. The concept of this exhibition is to recreate Dostoevsky's ideal museum and the works important for his oeuvre. Many of them, such as Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" and Hans

Holbein’s "Dead Christ," are in European collections, so their reproductions are here. In addition to the art that was meaningful to him, there are items that belonged to Dostoevsky as well as extracts from his reflections on art and pieces of art criticism. If you want to understand the writer’s connection to art and get a new glimpse into his work, this is the place to go. You can buy tickets here, clicking on St. Michael's Castle.

What's Cosmism? Find out at the Russian Museum

This is an unusual exhibition showing visionary works by Russian artists of the late-19th and early-20th century. It displays paintings and drawings by Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Pavel Filonov, Nicholas Roerich as well as lesser-known artists including Lithuanian Mikalojus Čiurlionis, whose works are presented as video projections inside a space ship. Works came from various sources, such as the Museum of Cosmonautics in Moscow. The show lets you immerse yourself in cosmic visions of painters and their models of how life on Earth and other planets will develop in future. There are drawings of the cosmic cities and inter-planterary dwellers, landscapes as well as abstract art related to cosmism.

Many of the painters exhibited here emigrated; the ones who remained in the Soviet Union were persecuted. It seems that fantasies about other planets were constrained by the official canon, and were otherwise not welcome.

Tickets can be bought on the Russian Museum site here; choose the Benois wing. Note: the museum has evening hours on Thursday.

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